

**IMPORTANT**

This transcript is copyright of the Association of Jewish Refugees.

Access to this interview and transcript is for private research only. Please refer to the AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

The Association of Jewish Refugees  
2 Dollis Park, London N3 1HF  
Tel. 020 8385 3070

[ajrrefugeevoices.org.uk](http://ajrrefugeevoices.org.uk)

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it. Should you find any errors please inform the AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive.



## Interview Transcript Title Page

<b>Collection title:</b>	Refugee Voices
<b>Ref. no:</b>	RV 261

<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Steiner
<b>Forename:</b>	Ralph
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Male
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	Berlin, Germany
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	23 December 1934

<b>Date of Interview:</b>	20 January 2022
<b>Location of Interview:</b>	London
<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
<b>Total Duration (HH:MM):</b>	2 hours 8 minutes

**REFUGEE VOICES**

**Interview No.** RV261  
**NAME:** Ralph Steiner  
**DATE:** 20 January 2022  
**LOCATION:** London, UK  
**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

*[00:00:06] Today's the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2022. We're conducting an interview with Mr Ralph Steiner. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London. Thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Archive. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background please?*

Starting from where? Where I was born?

*Up to you.*

It's up to me. Oh, I arrived believe it or not 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1934. I'll never forgive my mother for this because she should have thought a little bit earlier because I got everything mixed up with my Christmas presents and birthday presents. And it was in a private clinic, and I arrived she said just after she had her dinner, at exactly nine o'clock in the evening. I then went to my new family home, which was in Fasanenstraße, number sixty, in Berlin. And there was a young lady who was going to be my nanny which I called Dete. And she virtually looked after me right through 'til the time I came to London.

*Okay. Tell us a little bit about your parents and their grandparents, and what milieu they came from.*

My parents. My mother met my father in Noordwijk aan Zee [Netherlands] and he came from Ulm which is very funny because what the heck was a Berlin girl suddenly going out with a gentleman, miles away and not in the society of the Berlin crowd who she was with? Some very interesting people. So, they got engaged and got married in about 1930/31. [00:02:02] My father was born in 1903 and my mother was born in 1910. And then they moved to Fasanenstraße and my mother, her mother had the family company which was in the fur trade at the time in Berlin. A&S Segall, and they were one of the largest importers of raw fur goods at the time.

*That's your mother.*

My mother's side, and my father then learnt the trade. He actually was involved in linen which his father was involved in, but he then switched over and my mother took him into her company which A&S Segall and he learnt the fur trade.

*Just spell the company. Zeigal?*

A [English pronunciation] A [German pronunciation] Segall.

*Segall, hmm-mm.*

And we had a branch in London, and they were due to open a branch in Paris. So, it was Berlin, London, possibly in Paris, but of course the war stopped that happening. However, my mother, who actually gave me life and saved my life, was the brilliant and bright woman in the family. She was over at finishing school in the 1920s in London and stayed with a very nice family for nearly two years in Sussex Gardens. She had about nine or ten other girls from all over the world and the lady that was in charge was the one who gave her the final permission to come into England. Because if I'm not mistaken, when you emigrated to England just before the war you needed a guarantor. It was Mrs Garrett who gave the guarantor for my mother. [00:04:01] So that had already started in the 1920s. So she knew London and England and English fairly well.

*So, tell us, so she finished school in Germany and then was sent to the finishing school to England.*

In London, that's right. To learn English and the English customs a little bit the English literature, and she had a lovely time over here in the late- sort of twenties which was quite an experience. And those contacts she managed to utilise of course later in life.

*Really interesting.*

Yeah.

*And so your father, when they married, did he move straightaway to Berlin?*

Yes. Yeah, and we were living in Fasanenstraße, number 60 I think, Fasanenstraße which was an apartment on the second floor of a very nice old building. Similar to the layout here, but a bit larger. Typical build of the time in Berlin in a very nice area. And down the road of course we had the main synagogue. Yeah, yeah.

*And Ralph, what are your first memories of Berlin? What can you actually remember?*

Very difficult. The zoo. My nanny often took me across the road because we lived opposite the zoo. So, I was taken over to the zoo and I can remember seeing the animals vaguely there. And my room was in the back of the flat. I wasn't in the front at all. That's where my parents lived. And I had a very fortunate time. With all the horror that was due to start, I was the most fortunate and I had a wonderful life due to my mother's foresight and wisdom. Absolutely brilliant, the way that woman thought. At an average of twenty-eight when all the troubles started, she then decided to ship me away with my nanny so that she could then organise the company, her parents, her grandparents, and organise everything in peace and quiet. [00:06:07] And she managed to get containers and put all the furniture and everything away. She was warned that the Nazis were on their way and from that day she started to make a move and get everything organised which she did remarkably well. But shipped me out of the way with my Dete, my nanny. So, I was out, and she could then concentrate on getting the

visas, and whatever paperwork. I can't remember anything of that because I wasn't there. But from what I'd heard from her she then organised – even her own parents got the tickets to go to Harwich and they went to the railway station, and her mother forgot something and went back with her husband and the Gestapo were waiting and took them away. So, she lost her parents that afternoon. She then told her brother, 'Don't come back to Germany at the moment.' He was on a course in Italy learning the fur trade. 'Stay where you are, there are problems. I will clear your flat for you and I will organise everything in your flat.' However –

*Can I just...?*

*Yeah. You said your mother managed to get the visa for her brother. Told the brother not to come back.*

Yes. 'Don't come back, we've got problems. I'll clear your flat out.' He was a bachelor of course studying in Italy the fur trade. And he did come back, and unfortunately his girlfriend gave him away to the Gestapo, the police, and he was arrested and also vanished, and was murdered in Lodz in, must have been 1940, just around 1940 or so, yeah. [00:08:03] Yeah, so there we are. I was well away. What happened was that in the travelling I was told to pack my little bag up and I had a little rucksack, and I was told by my nanny, 'Take a few toys with you.' And I took my toys with me, I took my teddy bear, and I packed my little rucksack up apparently, and my teddy bear was on the top of course otherwise he wouldn't be able to breathe. And I put him on my back, and we went off to the railway station at night. With my nanny, I had no problems at all. My parents took me to the station and as I passed the locomotive, the steam engine, I looked up and the wheels were massive. And of course, he blew the hooter and I nearly jumped out of my skin at the time. And he had a good laugh the engine driver because this was the train that was going to take us to Schaffhausen. So anyway, we got on to the train and just recapping, thinking back, I cannot remember turning round and waving to my mother and father who were on the gate watching us walk away. How did she feel? It's an interesting thought isn't it really? I only discussed that with Barbara the other day. The amount of times, that parents saw their children going away, safe and all that, but they might never see them again. Different line of thought, isn't it? Anyway, I was a very happy little bunny.

*But you were also with your nanny.*

I was with my nanny.

*And you were close to your nanny.*

Oh yeah, but prior to going, prior to going, leaving- it was just after *Kristallnacht* and I remember one thing you asked me, what did I remember? Mama took me into the living-room, we opened up the curtains and I looked out the window. And there was a lot of noise and I said, 'Is it having a street party?' and, 'Look at all the fireworks.' [00:10:04] It was people screaming and shouting, being taken away as prisoners or whatever. And of course, all the sparks and that weren't fireworks, it was the synagogue on fire with all the sparks in the air. But to me, it was all nice, no problem at all. So off we went into the train and my nanny settled down, and all of a sudden, I was taken away by a gentleman in a hat and a shiny coat. The Gestapo took me away from my nanny. My nanny was left in the carriage, I was taken into the restaurant car or somewhere, sat down with my coat on, with my rucksack, with my little teddy bear sticking out the top there, and I was given something to drink. It looked like orange juice, I don't know what it was, and I was told to sit there and wait. I asked my mother after the war what could have happened, and she said they were most probably searching my nanny for papers and documentation and that, and because she was a Christian, because she was Salvation Army, she most probably got me saved in the sense that they didn't take me away with the other girls and boys who they had at the bottom of the train in this carriage. So the Gestapo released me, and I went back into the carriage, and my nanny was getting the carriage ready for the sleep which was very exciting for a little boy again. We went then to Schaffhausen which was a night journey, and arrived in the morning, and we were all told to get out the train. The train had stopped, everybody out, '*Raus, raus, raus!*' And everybody got out without their baggage or anything like that, and we had to go through a little sort of shed where the Germans were still checking our passports and paperwork. [00:12:05] I had no problem. We went through, everyone, all the passengers went through, and then the train moved slightly past the shed and now we're in Switzerland. And that's how we got into Switzerland. And then we could go back on the train. And the rest of the journey



was towards Zurich, and I presume we changed train, and I was taken up to Arosa which was all great fun for a little fella. There was nothing wrong at all. I was the most fortunate one. With all the horrors that you have seen and heard about, I was the fortunate one and had a very good time up there. We got to our accommodation and unpacked everything, and I was shown where I was going to sleep, and I had my toys with me, and then all of a sudden, my nanny said, 'Can I have your teddy bear?' I said, 'No, I want...' – 'No, let me have your teddy bear.' So, I gave nanny my teddy bear and about half-an-hour later she gave him back to me. What she'd done, she opened the back of my teddy bear and my mother apparently had taken all the stuffing out and packed it with German marks and money, and then resewn it up knowing that possibly the Gestapo, if there was a problem, they wouldn't interfere with my teddy bear. And that was the money that we utilised obviously for staying for nearly a year-and-a-half in Arosa.

*I wonder how it was possible for her because you must have had your own papers, and what, what did she tell the Gestapo? You know, she wasn't allowed to work for a Jewish family as such.*

No, that's right.

*Do you see what I mean? So, what did your mother tell you or what did they tell –?*

She didn't tell me. I don't actually know. [00:14:00] She must have had all the paperwork and something, and money, or what, to bribe the Gestapo to release us when we went on the train. I really don't know, and I never asked my mother this because I wasn't interested at the time.

*Or did she pretend that you were her son? Is that possible?*

Maybe. I don't know what the story could have been. Whatever it was, it was well organised, and we got away with it.

*And what was her background, the nanny's background? You said she was –*

She was a professional nanny, and she was employed by my parents full-time, and she looked after me all the way through. And she actually came with us. When we left Arosa, she came with us to England to 33 Belvedere Court, round the corner here, and stayed with us for a very short time and then she was deported. She had no visa or any reason for staying in England. She was German and she had to get out, and that's the last I ever saw her until I was about thirteen or fourteen years old, when she came over to London and paid us a visit, and that was the last time I saw her. But thanks to the wisdom and the thought of this twenty-eight-year-old mum, I wouldn't be sitting here today. Absolutely brilliant what she had organised. Every piece of furniture was in a container, and it all arrived in London, safe and sound, down to the last tablespoon, knife, fork, and glass. Incredible, and at the same time to save your own life and your husband's. So very fortunate and I had a wonderful time. And then I went straight to my kindergarten, not speaking a word of English of course. Learnt English and from there everything went according to plan.

*Before we just talk more about England, you said so you have memories of Kristallnacht which you were three years old. [00:16:02]*

Yes, four, I was just – yes.

*Four, just turned four.*

If it's November, I was born in December, yeah. I was born – yes.

*Any other memory – I mean, do you have any other sort of negative or Nazi – did you – I mean, any sort of negative memories?*

No, no, no. The zoo. We were always stopped and questioned, but of course it meant nothing to me at all. But my mum then told me that the greengrocer who was in the same block of flats as we had our apartment went to the meetings, the Nazi meetings, just to keep in contact with what was going on. And he virtually said to my mother, 'Ilse, it's time you moved. It's time you made a move because there's going to be troubles very, very shortly.' This could

have been what, thirty-six/thirty-seven, who knows? But he got my mother moving. My father of course didn't want to know. The business and all the rest, like all men, and the wisdom of my mum sorted it out and she took charge of everything. What else can I remember? Only the screaming and the shouting in the streets which of course I thought was a party.

*Yeah, and in fact it was the Fasanen- the synagogue was burning.*

Of course, it was the houses being attacked by the Brown Shirts. But lucky as a little boy, no bad memories at all.

*And do you remember – you said so your mother made the decision so did she plan to emigrate before Kristallnacht already or was it –?*

Yes, she must have done. Must have done because it couldn't have just swung into operation that quickly. For me to leave just after *Kristallnacht*, she must have already organised with my cousins in Switzerland to organise the accommodation in Arosa. [00:18:01]

*And why Arosa? What was –?*

'Cos they'd been skiing there as youngsters. Arosa and St. Moritz were their sort of winter holidays. My mum and dad always went there since, well, middle thirties so they knew the area.

*So, was it a Pension [guest house] or where did they put you?*

Yeah, I think it was a form of *Pension* and my mum said again, 'Nanny said it's not good enough, she wants to move,' and they had to go and find another place a little bit better for the standard of my nanny at the time. But I can't remember what it was. My fun was playing on the toboggan, going out in the snow, standing on a few skis, and being looked after. And the odd thing is, I didn't miss my mum and dad because I was with my nanny. It's a different feeling. Totally different feeling. Until they came and then they took us back and we flew

back to London via Croydon. Croydon Aerodrome. And the only bit I can remember of that was the aircraft had basket seats and you could walk up and down, and you could look out of the windows and see the countryside because the weather was clear. And I went over to my mum, had a look out there and saw all the lights of London. Again, I said to her, 'Are they having a party,' because it looked so pretty from the air, but that was only one spasm of thought. And then we went by taxi, my mum had ordered a taxi from Croydon to Hampstead Garden Suburb, to Belvedere Court, where again everything was already organised in the flat.

*And Ralph, where did you fly from? Where did you fly from?*

Good question. Good question. I think it must have been Zurich, but I have no recollections. All I can remember is sitting in this aircraft with the basket chairs and coming into what I was told later was Croydon Airport of course. [00:20:04] It must have been about 1939, mustn't it?

*Yeah, so I'm just going to try to find out the chronology. So November '38 you went to Arosa. Then for how long did you stay there?*

I stayed there right through the winter season until they came and picked me up in about '39. January most probably.

*So, a few months, two/three months?*

Yes, at least. At least, yes.

*So, by the time you came to England what was it, January/February '39?*

Yes.

*Was it sort of a half-a-year before the war broke out?*

Yes, yes.

*Yeah?*

Yes.

*So you arrived in the winter in England? You remember?*

Vaguely. Vaguely. It was already springtime wasn't it, coming into springtime. No, and I was pushed into school and happy little bunny.

*But what's amazing that your nanny was happy to take you first to Switzerland and then to come. Did she want to stay in England?*

That's right. She would have stayed with us had she been allowed. And I believe this happened all before the enemy alien theories came out with Churchill. That's when my father was rearrested. You mustn't forget that my father before *Kristallnacht* was sent to Ulm. My mother said, 'Look, it's a bit dangerous. Leave and go and stay with your sister in Ulm.' And he went down to Ulm, and my mother was left in Berlin. The Gestapo came up the fire escape into her bedroom. They said they want the keys of the business, the chauffeurs and the cars handed over, and apparently – this is what my mother told me – she said, 'On no occasion unless you can get my husband out of Dachau.' [00:22:01] Because when he went to Ulm he was out walking with his sister and as he came back to his sister's house the Gestapo was outside again and said, 'Whose gentleman's coat is in your hallway here? It's somebody new that's turned up.' And she said, 'It's my brother who's come down from Berlin.' And from there he was arrested and taken to Dachau. Now Dachau at that time apparently was a transit camp, so he was starting to help build it, and all the rest of it. It was not an extermination camp at that time. Anyhow, my mother did a bargain with the Gestapo at the time and said, 'I want to get my husband out of Dachau and then I will hand over the company and whatever papers you require.' So, she took a train, and she went down. She actually went and saw my father in Dachau who was healthy at the time and working there. And she tried to promise him at the time that she was going to get him out and get him back to Berlin. She then went back by train. As a nice young lady, she sat there, a gentlemen came into the carriage, and

they started talking like every gentleman would normally do. And she said she went to see her husband who was in Dachau and she's trying to get him out. And he said, 'I think I might be able to help you. Contact me.'

*Yes, please continue.*

So, the gentleman started to talk to my mother, attractive woman, and he said, 'I think I can help you.' Anyway, they made an arrangement that my mum should meet at a certain time at the Kempinski Hotel in Berlin. She went home, she obviously came to the date when she was due to meet this gentleman, and made herself pretty, and moved over to the hotel. [00:24:00] Walked into the hotel, asked the concierge where Mr whatever his name was, I don't know, and the concierge said, 'Yes, he's down on the left-hand side in the lounge there waiting.' And she marched down towards the lounge, turned left, they were all in SS uniform. She did a quick turnround and buzzed off. Apparently, he was a colonel in the SS at the time, and she didn't want to get involved in any form. However, the truth is that she somehow – and I can't give you the details – she managed to get him out through her connections, and he came back to Berlin.

*And how long was he in Dachau for?*

He must have been there for a very short time. Maybe a year or so. Prior to that I wouldn't know. This is only what she told me- whilst we were in London. My father had passed away and I started to get interested. And I went round there every day and had breakfast with her, and kept asking her questions, how she did things and organised it. But of course, I didn't ask all the right questions. I only got the snippets that she was prepared to tell me at the time. But there she actually saved my dad.

*So when they came to Switzerland, did she come by herself, or did she come –?*

No, she came with- she came my father.

*They came together.*

Virtually on holiday. They spent time there as well. Went skiing.

*Oh, you didn't go straight to England.*

They didn't just come and take me away, no. They spent a bit of time there again [both laugh]. Amazing, isn't it? We've got photographs of that.

*In Arosa, in '38?*

Yeah. And then we went back to – came to London. That's all I visually can remember. The rest of it's all stories that my mum managed to tell me at the time.

*So, she had shipped everything to London so when they came, they had a bit of luggage.*

**[00:26:01]**

Everything was here. The whole flat was set up. Unbelievable.

*But when she came to Arosa they just had bits and pieces.*

In Arosa they came as if they were going on holiday.

*But it means she must have also got the visa for Switzerland.*

Yes, but she'd been there quite often, I think. We can see that in the previous passports.

*But still at that point it was probably quite difficult to get into Switzerland I would imagine, in '38.*

Cousins, relations, who knows, I don't know how it worked. Whatever she did she managed to do it, and what I admire, I'm looking at the twenty-eight-year-olds today. I looked at my

daughter and thought, hold on, could she have done this? I'm sure possibly when the pressure's on, you could do this and get this organised. A wonderful woman. What wisdom.

*Yeah.*

And unfortunately, she lost her parents due to stupidity from her grandparents.

*So, they already [both talking at once] –*

Passed away as it goes back.

*But you said they were on their way out and they turned back.*

They were on their way out and she'd already got them to the railway station, got their tickets in their hands –

*She was with them.*

She was with them, and her mum said, 'I forgot something.' And her husband and her went back and that was the end. They were shipped to Auschwitz, then my father lost his elder sister who went to Lodz, and the younger sister was taken to Grafeneck which was gas chambers. It was a very odd story. It's a hospital – she must have been not mentally ill, but she must have been in a depression and my parents – my mum's parents most probably put her into this particular hospital, which was used as an extermination camp, Charlotte.

**[00:28:01]**

*So- euthanasia.*

So, my father had lost his elder sister in Lodz, and the younger sister was gassed in Grafeneck which- was tragic. The middle sister- is the one in Switzerland, and that is- that was my only remaining cousin at the time.



*And how did she get to Switzerland even earlier?*

Marriage, marriage, well before.

*Right.*

Yeah, she married a Swiss gentleman. And-

*And on your mother's side, you said she lost her brother.*

She lost her brother, and they were very close. He would have been a wonderful uncle. He was mad on photography, and he had the old box cameras, and I believe I've got some of his photographs. He would have been a real uncle. I had no uncles, no aunts, nothing. And most of my mother's cousins, at least a dozen of them, all went to America. And that's where their families all are which unfortunately, I haven't met. Some of them I have, but not all of them.

*Okay so their children survived. Some of their children.*

Yes, children. Yeah.

*Coming back to your arrival, you said you remember the lights. Any other memories you have of arriving? Your first impressions of London?*

Croydon Airport from the air [laughs], which was quite an experience. No, not really. The playing fields at Hampstead Gardens Suburb and going to my first school where I couldn't speak a word of English which was Lees Lodge, which was a nursery school. I must have picked up English fairly quickly. And everything was fine. I've had a wonderful life, very, very lucky, very fortunate is the word I think, due to my mother's foresight. [Phone rings].

*What about your nanny leaving? That must have been upsetting for you. [00:30:00]*

That was upsetting, yes, because she was as close if not closer than my mother. I'd seen more of my nanny than I had of my mother for the time.

*Do you remember that?*

Yes. Yes. There was a lot of crying in Belvedere Court when she had to leave, and my mother was very upset, and of course Dete my nanny was very upset to leave me as well. I mean, she actually was with me from the moment I was a small parcel.

*And is this also because your mother was in the business? I mean, your mother was active in the business or not?*

Yes, she wasn't a working girl, no. She was a society girl.

*A-ha.*

She was more having fun and looking after the family as best as she could at the time. Yeah, bright, very bright. But it hurt her to lose her brother. They were so close. So close. Yeah.

*And in your nursery school in Hampstead Garden Suburb, did you meet any other refugee children?*

No. I made friends very quickly, but I wouldn't know whether they were refugees or Jewish or Christian or Catholic. I wouldn't have known. I should imagine most of them would have been Jewish in that area, Hampstead Garden Suburb.

*Did you understand – I mean, you were very, very young but did you have any understanding about Jewish or that the nanny wasn't Jewish? Did the- did your parents explain something to you?*

No, nothing at all. The only thing I knew about Judaism was that my parents joined Norrice Lea Synagogue of which partly was built – the new section wasn't finished, and the other part

was slightly damaged, but we still had our evening classes there which I went to reluctantly in preparation for my bar mitzvah in 1948. [00:32:02] My mother again, rationing, restrictions, no petrol, organised in 1948 to have a party for my bar mitzvah in- I think it was the Hendon Hall Hotel. And she'd organised a small coach or bus and collected all the visitors, so it was a sing-song on the bus before they even arrived. Goodness knows what they had to eat, but she'd organised that, so I had not missed out on anything.

*And how did your parents manage financially when they came here? How did they manage financially in England?*

Well, they had a branch of the company here.

*Okay, so they had opened that branch.*

That branch was working before the war.

*Right.*

Yeah. The name of the company was then Hermann Wolff & Co, Upper Thames Street, in the City of London.

*And that was a furrier? What was it?*

That was a fur trade. Again, organising the trading of furs. Again, don't ask me how they did this, but there was a big business going on there.

*But your mother spoke English?*

No, German.

*No, but you said she, she was in London before, so she had some English.*

Oh yes, very much so. She knew English, yes.

*That's what I mean, so that must have helped her.*

Yes, no problem. No, her English was very good. And my father's English wasn't bad, but he picked it up like we all did. I don't know how, but...

*So, did they then work in the business?*

Oh, yes.

*Both of them?*

Yes. Yeah, my father was working in the company. Mr Wolff whose name was actually the company, was an apprentice in Germany in my mother's fur trade company, [00:34:03] and he came over here and he was the first one to start the company over here in London. So, there was a basis there. But if you ask me how they were trading and what they were doing, I have no idea. I've tried to work it out because it couldn't have been imports so what was going on? I have no idea.

*But they managed.*

Yes. There was no shortage. I presume, my mum's business, they transferred a lot of the funding well before the war into Hermann Wolff & Co which survived throughout the war. All I remember my mum saying that Dad did get involved in sheepskins for flying jackets and they were most probably supplying the military at the time with sheepskins for the bomber boys to put into their flying jackets and that but...

*And how, how did your parents, or did your mother ever talk about being received by English Jews? Did they- what were their circles? Did they have mostly contact with refugees –?*

Very much so.

*Or they were part of let's say...?*

That's right. The whole area, they all stuck together, all the refugees were in about the same area of Hampstead Garden Suburb at the time. The Matternsons, the Simonsens, the Brainins, and I can remember my mother again standing at the window crying when the Black Marias turned up to take away my father because he was an enemy alien.

*Tell us a little bit about that. What happened?*

They took them away apparently – this is again through my mother – and she wanted to get him back again. So, I remember her constantly with people coming into the block of flats, on the telephone, trying to work the ticket to get him back. [00:36:02] He was shipped to Epsom, on the racecourse there, and I believe from there he would have gone to the Isle of Man. My cousin who was a young boy of eighteen, he was also interned, and he was shipped to Australia on a boat, and he landed up in Australia. But my mother managed to get my father- from Epsom before they were shipped over to the Isle of Man – don't ask me how she managed it – and he came back to London and continued working. Then in – this is interesting actually. This is a bit I've been following with Helen Fry. My father was involved with MI9. Now MI9 was an organisation splinter group of military intelligence for avoidance and evasion of being captured on the continent, to help the pilots and people escape back to England. Very interesting history on its own. And one day some gentlemen turned up at my – in Belvedere Court and they discussed with my father all the German connections he had. They took his clothes, some clothes away, they took some of his shoes away, they took his underwear away. Wherever there were labels and indications of how the suits and how the Germans made the shoes. The shoelaces were different. The buttonholes apparently in a German suit were different to a British suit. So, they learnt all that from my father who helped them out, and then he had a German typewriter which they said, 'Can it be used to do false documentations?' [00:38:00] And he was then involved in going to Marylebone Hotel, the grand hotel there, where MI9 was operating and he was making documents with one of his colleagues, false documents, with this German typewriter which I've still got here incidentally.

*You've got that typewriter?*

So, he helped MI9. He was an authority on the railway system because he travelled a lot, so he could actually tell them where the trains were running, what the timetables were, all to help the pilots or people who could escape from Germany to come back into England. So, all that data and information – books, he had some books, he had some old maps, he gave all that to MI9 and worked with them for a very short period so they could copy the shoes, the way the shoes were built, the way the trousers were made, and clothing generally. And pinching all the labels, falsifying the labels to sew them into the vests of the air crews.

*So, they would copy the clothes.*

Correct.

*So that somebody could pass as German.*

Correct.

*Basically, in Germany.*

Correct. If they went – had to make civilian clothes in Germany to be Germans. They had to make the clothes because they were wise people the Germans. They knew whether it was a British shoe, or a German shoe, or whether it was a British-made jacket or a German-made jacket. So, all that information was used in some form, which is interesting. If you talk to Helen Fry –

*Have you spoken to Helen Fry?*

Yes. My father's mentioned in there because of this MI9 assistance. Again, I knew nothing about it. My mother mentioned it and that was the end of –

*Just tell us your father's name for the record.*

That was all after he came from internment.

*Just tell us his name again for the record. [00:40:00]*

Fritz Steiner.

*Fritz Steiner.*

And wherever you see it being written, it's always 'Fritz Steiner, the Jew.' I mean, you know, it is ridiculous because you don't get that in journalism today. You don't get 'Fritz Steiner, the Catholic,' or anything, it's always 'the Jew' which is amazing. But his contribution was quite something at the time.

*Because I wonder maybe also, you know, this SOE unit, you know, the Special Operations –*

No, that's part of it, yes, no.

*That's later.*

MI9 was a splinter group I believe from MI6, and it's a long story. Helen Fry will give it to you. I made my notes on that. It's a fascinating study on its own. So, he contributed to MI9.

*Amazing. And the documents, what sort of documents would they have false – letters? And what would –?*

Documents, paperwork, headed paper.

*Oh.*

Style. Certain newspaper cuttings he had. The style they laid it out. All that information they must have taken with them to make falsification papers, or whatever documents they had to make, I don't know. But it was all contributed for assisting escape from occupied Europe.

*Yeah, whether they were spies or people captured or –*

Correct, correct. We need only go back to some of your wonderful films that you people have made whereby they showed you once incident, whereby I think it was to do with the tunnel escape.

*Yeah.*

They were walking in a station and a gentleman kicked the leg of one of the escapees and the escapee turned round and said, 'What the hell are you doing?' Gave himself straightaway, Gestapo. And the other story that I remember my mother saying, they used to stand on the station and say, 'Good luck,' and the fellow turned round and said, 'Thanks very much.'  
[00:42:00] I mean, natural things you would do. These are wonderful little snippets, aren't they?

*Amazing.*

It was amazing. Amazing. So, he helped out on that side of things. Otherwise, my mum was more –

*And did he talk about that?*

No. My mum spoke to me about it. I never even knew anything about it until I spoke to my mother about it. And then I saw some documents and when I went – when my father died, I went through all the papers of course that I want to keep, and they sort of came to life, and I still kept them because I didn't understand them. They were in German. And all the letters that my father sent to his sister in Switzerland, we've got the envelopes where they were opened on both sides by the British to see there is no messaging or spying, and on the other



side of the envelope was the Swastika that the Germans opened up when my sister wrote to my brother in London. These are all snippets of little information.

*How else did the war affect you in terms of –?*

Me?

*You stayed in the same flat. Was there bombing? Was there –?*

Yes. There was the Blitz of course all the way through of which I was a naughty boy. Because my father used to dress me up in a siren suit which was a one-piece suit, and I was put to bed, and the moment the sirens went he could shovel me up, I was already dressed, and took me downstairs to the air raid shelters where the whole community were. They were enjoying themselves. They were playing cards, they were playing roulette, all the refugees were all together there.

*Where was the shelter there?*

The shelter was in three or four garages converted in Belvedere Court, under there. And I think it must have been about '43/44, I then decided when I woke up to go outside. And I escaped, and I sat on the allotments, and I wanted to see the searchlights. [00:44:02] And I saw the searchlights, and the buffer guns firing from Hampstead, from Kenwood, there were guns up there, and you could see all this. Wonderful for a young boy to see all this. Suddenly they realised that I wasn't in the air raid shelter. Panic broke out. Everybody had to look for me, never thinking I was sitting outside on the allotment, watching what was going on [laughs] in the sky. Young boy, overgrown schoolboy, great.

*But they found you.*

Yes, they found me, they found me. And then of course in 1944 I was already ten years old, and we were collecting shrapnel which – you remember shrapnel? What it was, as the actual shells exploded in trying to shoot the Germans down, the shell broke into thousands of pieces

which did the damage on the engines or on the aircraft. But what didn't hit them fell on the ground and we as young boys used to go out the following day and we used to collect them. And we used to swap them in school. Who had the biggest piece? One piece excitement. And one day I was going home in the playing field because that's the way to go to Belvedere Court, and I saw a green thing sticking out the ground. It was a little, sort of like a fin. I pulled it, pulled it, pulled it out, and it was an unexploded incendiary bomb. About that long. Not dangerous. About that wide. What a trophy! I thought this is marvellous. I put it in the saddlebag on my bike, cycled home, put it into the kitchen, washed it down with my mother's tea-towel, and then wrapped it up in some blanket or something and put it under my bed. What a souvenir, a complete incendiary bomb. [00:46:00] Anyway, I told my father about it and boy, straightaway he took it straight to Temple Fortune Police Station and handed it over. It wasn't dangerous because it hadn't broken. You mustn't forget, an incendiary bomb, the case has got to break and the phosphorus inside did the burning. So, it wasn't an explosive bomb that could have gone off in my hand. I'd have to break the case. But what a find. And I couldn't even show it off to the boys in school which is such a shame [both laugh]. So, there we are. Stupid little boy enjoying what was going on. My father was fire-watching in the City, of which his office was hit directly, and he took me down there and the church was burning. The buildings were still burning, slightly smouldering in the morning, and he went to the office. And the only thing that was standing was the actual cooker with the kettle on it. The rest of the building had all gone. So, it was a grim time for them, but not for me. I was fortunate. I only had the nice things which is something to be said. And coming back to this country about – this is one of the greatest countries in the world as far as I'm concerned. They, with the help of our allies, saved western civilisation. And anybody who knocks this country, I can get tears because it is so important to look up to the country as the nation. I really do. And I've got to take my hat off to the Americans for coming over here. Again, 3000 miles away, to help us. And I remember going up to the soldiers asking them for chewing-gum and bubble-gum. There was no bubble-gum, it was only chewing-gum. 'Any gum, chum?' [00:48:00] And the Americans were all over the place here. And my cousin, he was in the American Army, he stayed with my mother as well, and he used to fly aircraft over the Himalayas during the war. So, it's a thankful time for me. A very fortunate time as against those tragic incidences that you've been interviewing. I had over seventy-five years of wonderful peace and quiet in this country, and that's why we've got to thank this country as a

nation for what it did. And the people. The people, what they went through. Not a patch on Coronavirus or so. When you can come out of the Underground station, after we go into the shelters, and the whole street is gone. Your house and everything's gone. That's horrific. That is horrific.

*But you said in the shelter there was a sort of atmosphere, people – there was a camaraderie.*

Yes, in Belvedere Court there was a mum, parents, all the refugees, what could they do? What could they do? There was food rationing but somehow, they managed to get bits and pieces together, and they were playing cards, and roulette, and whatever. There was music.

*And did you speak German to your parents then or English?*

Yes, they spoke German amongst themselves, but I didn't hear – well, I must have heard it, but I was obviously learning English at the time. No major effect. No big impression.

*But were you bilingual or more English speaking?*

Yes. Still am in a joking way. Being bilingual, I always was the German – I was always the first one at school to be deaded because I deliberately played Hermann the German [both laugh]. They had to put me in that position. But it was all fun at the time.

*You didn't feel –?*

None at all. No. [00:50:01] They never talked about the war. In fact, in 1943, when my brother was born, it was already turning and I remember my mother saying, 'The war, it's turning. The war's virtually going to come to an end.' They'd already started looking forward to peace which came two years later of course.

*So, your brother was eight years younger than you?*

Yes. Yes, and when he was born, there was no bed for him. They put him in a drawer up in Belsize Park. Then we had the V-1 bombs come over, and my father then said, 'No more air raid shelter,' we didn't need them. I slept in their bedroom on the floor on a mattress, and - Belvedere Court, and behind us a V-1 landed. Enormous explosion. All the windows fell in. Apparently, I got up, said, 'I'm wounded, I'm wounded, I'm wounded.' Nothing had happened to me at all. And at the time, my brother was in his cot, and the nanny came into my parents' bedroom and said, 'Come and take your son, he is dead.' Well, of course my mum jumped up like a light and went into the bedroom of my brother, and what had happened was the nanny had planted a basket in front of the window with flowers. You know, the flower basket sort of thing. And apparently, due to the blast of the V-1, the basket flew across the room into his cot, so there was plant and glass and everything. He was fast asleep. Nothing wrong with him at all. Not a scratch on him. That was the V-1. I then went round to the house where the V-1 had landed. [00:52:00] It was completely obliterated, and I was then told later that the family were in a Morrison shelter which was a steel shelter built in the kitchen. It was a table of which the family went underneath. I think it was called a Morrison shelter. And all the bedding and some food and drinks were there. And apparently, they found the family in there, not a mark on them, fully protected. But they'd all suffocated because the whole house had collapsed on top of the shelter, and they couldn't breathe. But the houses next door, were partially damaged. But again, it's one of these things a boy sees. It had no effect on me as such. I didn't know anything about -

*You're not traumatised or -?*

No, a bomb had landed, you know, it's about time something happened around our block of flats.

*Hmm, excitement.*

There were always stragglers.

*Yeah, but what did you say -?*

And then V-2, we had a V-2 land up in East Finchley. I was in the cinema with my friend at the time. Must be 1944/45, and the screen fell down, the lights went on. We were all told to evacuate the cinema, so my friend and I decided to get on our bicycles. Where had this V-2 landed? Only just across the road, and we cycled across the road [laughs], to have a look at the damage and what was involved. Again, only one or two houses were damaged, the rest was blast damage. You know, again, war.

*Yeah, but what did you call it? Your suit that your father put you in?*

A siren suit.

*A siren suit. I've never heard that. Very interesting.*

No, it was called a siren suit. It was like a teddy bear suit. It was all in brown, buttons up the front, right? So, he could take me straight out of bed, pick me up, and take me outside into the air raid shelter.

*Was there –?*

A lot of them slept in these suits. [00:54:01]

*To other children, children?*

Yes, there were other children in the block as well.

*I've never heard that. Interesting.*

No. No, no, that was really only bits and pieces. But again, you see, I was so protected.

*But your parents didn't think about evacuating or going to the countryside, or –?*

Yes. They didn't evacuate but they evacuated me. Again, I think when the V-1s and V-2s came and I was sent to North Wales to a boarding school, holiday school. Again, can you imagine my mother putting me on a train? 'Bye-bye.' And I was sent off with this- all the other kids to North Wales near Barmouth, and it was a girls' school in the term time, and it was for evacuees. And I was there for maybe eight weeks/nine weeks.

*So, your school was evacuated.*

No. My school was evacuated –

*Yeah.*

But I was privately evacuated.

*Uh-huh.*

To this school.

*Right.*

My mother had organised that and then pulled me back within, what, four/five weeks. I wasn't there long.

*And what was it like?*

No, well, it was nearly over. It was V-1s and V-2s. They were worried about that.

*Towards the end of the war.*

No, so, you know, schoolboy stuff again. Very lucky, very fortunate. I mustn't say lucky 'cos it's a forethought. So, nothing terrible happened, not like what you have seen and what we've learnt about, how horrific some of these families went through.

*What about your parents? Were they in touch with – what did they know about what was going on in Germany, I mean, at that point?*

What did they know about? They never communicated anything with me. I would not know. No, I don't think they could be in contact with anybody. [00:56:00] No. MI9 was the only connection that my father got involved in German matters. And I hope he saved some lives, especially with the train timetables. I mean, he was a walking timetable. He knew what train to catch in Frankfurt to go to Hamburg, or Bremen or even Munch [inaudible] or something. I mean, that must have been quite funny to actually talk about, from the memory and a few bits of paper.

*And is there some other source? Has Helen Fry found something on your father? Are there some documents?*

Yes. I don't think they had enormous amounts of documents. I think they left a lot behind. I know he left a lot of books behind, German books, because again you want to be British don't you now? You're not interested in Germany anymore. You want to be British, and they were naturalised.

*When were they naturalised?*

Yeah, '47. 1947. And my mum was mentioned again in some war work. I think she did some Red Cross or something like that. Vague, very vague.

*And was it important for them to be naturalised?*

Yes, I think so. Well, my mother was very much connected with England because of the twenties, and she had quite a few girlfriends over here, of her generation.

*And you said one of them was a guarantor.*

Yes. Gerry Green, yes. She was the guarantor on our behalf. How that worked, I don't know, but I believe it's to do – a bit of finance here or there.

*Yeah.*

Anyway, we got through on that and...

*But in your mother's passport which we're going to look at the end, we also have stamps that she went to the German Embassy here to –*

Yes, possibly. Yes, I haven't gone through her German passport, which you've seen, and my father's got the same. My father's passport is much more interesting 'cos he was still travelling. [00:58:02] So there are lots of stamps in there which would tell his story.

*But you also, looking at the passport, told us that you – in August '39 they went on holidays to France. Tell us about that.*

That's right, yeah.

*What was that about?*

We were in Le Touquet.

*In August '39.*

Yeah, in August, just across the water. And then went straight back. I remember my mum saying, 'We're now going.' We were only there for a week or ten days or so, but fancy being that close. Having done, what she'd done and then still wanted to go on holiday. I mean, it was ridiculous. That's where I got sunburnt. She left me out on the beach. I got sunburnt, all my –

*You remember that?*



Yeah, I remember that was burning. And then we came back. Snippets of information that she gave me. You mustn't forget that I was in a little boy's world, so the surroundings really didn't affect me- as such. The only excitement were the searchlights, the guns going off, and in daytime some of the contrails of the fighter boys up there. Which of course I now understand what was happening, and I still get tears when I think of those nineteen and twenty-year-old boys fighting 20,000 feet up there, and maybe living for twenty minutes, being burnt to death by the fuel that might be leaking on to them, so we could be sitting here today. And if it wouldn't had been for the Battle of Britain which was touch and go [pause] – it's to be remembered and passed on.

*Yeah.*

In some form or another. Because there was only a handful, about 2,900 young men up there. Brilliant. **[01:00:07]**

*Yeah.*

And all I wanted to see were German bombers coming over, and hoping to see them shot down, as a little boy. We had stragglers. Hampstead Garden Suburb, I can point out to you where all the bombs had landed, and where all the air-raid shelters are because on my bike – I had a bike believe it or not- on my birthday. During the war. I don't know where my parents got it from. It was a new bicycle, and I can point out to you where all the air-raid shelters are in Hampstead Garden Suburb, and also where the bomb craters were. And there was one bomb crater right by us in Winnington Road which was perfect for our boats. We could use because it was full of water. An instant pond [laughs].

*Yeah.*

So that was also pretty fascinating on that. So, there we are. I was very fortunate, and my mind is purely nice memories as against the horrific stuff that was going on.

*And what about your parents after the war? Did they go back to Germany?*

No.

*Did they try to look for relatives?*

No, it was all sorted out over here. I have no recollections of them going back to Germany. Switzerland, we went to regularly to my cousin, and we went every winter I think when we could. No, I don't think they had any connections any more.

*And how did they cope with the loss of – I mean, your mother, the loss of her parents?*

How did they cope? Well, as an observer now they must have coped very well because they had hope, they lived in a community that backed each other up, they all helped each other. Most of us had allotments. I'm still waiting for mine. [01:02:00] I still haven't got my allotment. Issued allotments.

*Oh, in Hampstead Garden Suburb?*

Yeah, at the back of the block of flats. And we had numbers on, and unfortunately number thirty-three had nothing growing because my father knew nothing about agriculture or growing things. But what he did do, he grew rhubarb. And it was horrific. There was rhubarb for breakfast, and rhubarb for lunch. It was awful stuff, and I hate it to this day. Rhubarb and custard [both laugh]. Terrible [laughs]. No. And now and again Dad used to go out to Lichfield, somewhere to a farm, and we managed to get a chicken which was like a Sunday special. It wasn't a roast chicken. It was a boil chicken. It was awful stuff. But they survived- and they had it in them to survive, and to build up, and to be good citizens, and to contribute to the nation. I know that they- all wanted to make sure they contributed to the nation after what this country had done for us refugees.

*They felt grateful.*

Very much so.

*Were they happy to be in Britain?*

Yes. Well, my mother especially, she tuned straight in. My father, he was a bit of a Victorian, it was a bit more difficult I think for him, because of the way he was brought up in a very regimental German way. So, to adapt to the British way of life was slightly more difficult for him, I'm sure.

*But you said they were part of a community.*

Yeah, yes.

*And Norrice Lea Synagogue, that was not so important for them.*

Yes.

*Were there many other refugee families in Norrice Lea at the time?*

Yes, there were, six or seven of us all around that area, yes. Yes. I'm trying to think – mainly Hampstead Garden Suburb, that part.

*But they didn't want to join one of the more German – like Belsize Square. [01:04:03]*

No, no, that was another group.

*Or [both talking at once] Synagogue.*

Same sort of thing. Much stronger. No, no. We were on the other side of the hill.

*Right.*

On the other side of Kenwood.

*Yeah.*

No, not on the same sort of area where the Kaufmann's and Belsize Park. I believe Barbara's family were involved in Belsize Park and around there, which was a fantastic piece of organisation. Again, kept the community together.

*And AJR? Were they involved at all? Were there members?*

No.

*No.*

No. No, I can't – you mustn't forget that most of the information I got from my mother after my father had passed away, and I didn't ask all the right questions unfortunately. I have a whole list of them here now. I wish I would have asked her. The bit about the train journey, how did the Gestapo release me on the train journey from Berlin to Schaffhausen? What happened to my nanny at the time? That would have been interesting.

*Yeah.*

Because that I remember the man with the hat and sort of a shiny coat, didn't talk to me but he sat me down there, and the train was going. I remember that.

*Interesting, yeah. Very interesting.*

But no, no bad recollections at all.

*Tell us, so what happened to you? You finished your primary school and then what happened next?*

Yes. From primary school, went to boarding school, straight after bar mitzvah, and I was the first Jew in this Church of England school, and the headmaster who was a rector at the time said, 'Steiner, you will be the first example of a Jewish boy in this school. And the way you behave will be a message for us, whether we take other boys.' Now, that went through my – I mean, it went in one ear and out the other. [01:06:00] What did I know at thirteen years old? But again, had a lovely time at boarding school.

*Why did they choose that particular school, your parents?*

I did.

*You did?*

Yes. I met somebody who said he's going to this school, it's a boarding school, and I mentioned it to my parents out of the blue. And of course, my father never knew anything about boarding schools, nor did my mother. She did the research and they accepted me, and –

*And why did you want to go to boarding school?*

Why did – because I enjoyed, I enjoyed the holiday camp when I was evacuated, I enjoyed living in that sort of world. And I had no other friends, so it was, it was great. It taught me a lot, and from that I went straight into the Air Force. Overgrown schoolboy again. And from that I came out and formed my own company. So, I've never technically been employed, except for the post office when I did the Christmas runs in-between the school holidays in the wintertime. Otherwise –

*So how long were you in the Air Force for?*

In the Air Force?

*Yeah.*

I did an extra year. Two years plus.

*And where were you stationed?*

I was stationed at RAF Watton, which is up in Norfolk, which was an active station. Learnt a lot there. Sworn into the Secrets Act and overgrown schoolboy, played with real aeroplanes. Flew in real aeroplanes. What more can a young boy of eighteen or nineteen want at that time? Learnt a lot.

*So, were you a pilot or –?*

I went for training, navigator, but they made me sign-on for seven years and I didn't want to do that. [01:08:00] Then I did air crew training and again, they offered me seven years and I said, 'No.' I wasn't going to stay in the Air Force. I just enjoyed it. And then I wanted to go into the technical branch, I got technical training there which was excellent, especially for my work after I'd left. Because I built my companies up on the technical training, I got in the Royal Air Force. The discipline, the records, the manuals, the way it was all set up, I set up my companies that way and it worked.

*And did you know when you joined the Air Force what you wanted to do professionally?*

Oh yeah, mechanical.

*You knew what you wanted.*

Oh, yes, straightaway. Motor cars and aeroplanes. Overgrown schoolboy. Haven't grown up since. Still the same [laughs]. Still the same. I'm a trustee of the de Havilland Aircraft Museum. Director and joined that after I'd retired. But no, I can only say I was the fortunate one compared to what you must have been listening to and what you've been filming. I only had a very, very pleasant life with no major regrets.

*That's good.*

I've done everything. I flew my own aircraft. I bought my own military aircraft out of the Air Force. I flew up to the Arctic on my own.

*Did you?*

I've done all those things. Sports cars. Played around at low level. No big money. I did it myself. Earned my own money and enjoyed a very quiet, fun life. And here I am sitting today talking to you which is quite something. Quite something, I must say. No regrets. But enormous follower and believer of this country. And if I ever hear horrible things or – I'm not taking about politics, that's a different thing, but never knock this country. [01:10:02] For what it did and what it did for the rest of civilisation. Great.

*And did you study mechanical engineering?*

Yes.

*So, what happened after you left –?*

I went to Chelsea and studied at the College of Aeronautical and Automobile Engineering, qualified there, and I- set up my own company because I could see that I could do it better than what the people are doing at the moment.

*So, what company?*

It started, it started at my parents' home because in 1943/44 we'd moved to Chalton Drive and my mother bought a house there, and I used my father's or the family garage as my workshop.

*Yeah, and what did you produce or what –?*

I was converting motorcars, better performance, hotting them up, and putting in extra instruments, and tuning them generally, and getting them more exciting. Because they were very basic at that time.

*So, were you interested in speed?*

Yes.

*Yeah, hmm-mm.*

Yeah. Performance [both talking at once].

*And what did your parents think about your profession? What did they – were they supportive?*

My father couldn't believe it. He's a smelly, oily boy with always dirty hands, right? And if he doesn't wash himself properly and clean his hands, he's not sitting on my dinner table. Because for mechanical work you can imagine, all black. He couldn't understand it. He was a merchant.

*Did they want you to take over the business or did they...?*

Not me. My brother, yes, not me, no. My mother- my mother constantly encouraged me and when I went and bought my first car from a scrapyard, my father said, 'What is the boy doing?' And my mother kept saying, 'Leave him alone. He'll sort it out.' [01:12:01] And sure enough, the car broke down before I got it home, and I had to call my father out to tow me back to Chalton Drive [laughs]. Anyway, I rebuilt it and I used that car in the Air Force. Yeah, built it up from scratch. Great fun. And from that, the same with the companies. Hot-rodding, sports cars, performance. It was mechanically very interesting. And most of my staff I had from the moment I started the company in Finchley Central, for thirty years. Inter-marriages, grandchildren were already born, all working in my little company which I'd started literally as I came out of college.



*And what's the company called? What was the company?*

Tungsten Automobile Developments.

*And does it still exist today?*

No, no, no.

*What happened with it?*

What happened was, we virtually liquidated it. After thirty-two years there was a big change, very similar to what I was talking about, your cameraman. From film to digital. And we were going on to digital and computers and that, and that wasn't my era. I was mechanically minded, and we did everything mechanically by hearing and by ears, and fixing things that way. And the next transition would have cost money and I wasn't prepared to go into that. And we'd done thirty odd years. It's long enough I think in one business. And we had another company TAD, t-a-d, which was short for Tungsten Automobile, and that is where we got involved with Volvo. We were one of the first dealers in this country handling Volvos from the main distributors. And to sell those cars, I had a board at the top 'From Sweden With Love, Volvo.' And took it around Finchley, drove it around. People said, 'What sort of car is that?' [01:14:00] And we took a little showroom in Finchley and the next thing I knew we had a brick thrown through the window. And we were told to, 'Take these foreign cars away. We don't want foreign cars in this country.' You know, 'Especially Russian cars.' I said, 'It's not a Volga, this is a Volvo.' Anyway, we did very well with them. Very interesting company to work with.

*So, you were selling.*

That's how we built up. As well as tuning cars, performance, and maintenance. We had some wonderful customers. We had Roger Moore with his *Saint* car. I was looking after that. Peter Sellars with his Mini. We had – oh God, I can't remember the names. Two or three very

famous film actors. Bonham-Carter, we looked after her little Peugeot when she was an up-and-coming actress.

*Helena Bonham-Carter, yes.*

Yes. And – oh, the wonderful actor and his son – can't remember his name. So, we had a very interesting crowd.

*So, you had the niche It was a niche business.*

Yes, yes.

*People came to you to –*

Yes, very much so. And I opened up on Sundays where I served coffee and biscuits, and that's how we sold some of our motorcars and accessories. And that's where girls and boys came together with their sports cars and mingled, and from that we carried out a lot of business. In fact, we were the first company to serve coffee to our customers as they came to pick up their cars. And it got into the newspapers and the next thing I knew, all the shopping girls and women with their shopping baskets came down for the free coffee [both laugh]. It was for my customers only.

*Where was the show – where was the [both talking at once]?*

It was up in Finchley Central, right by Finchley Central Underground station.

*Okay.*

Tungsten Automobile Developments, and it was all person-to-person. [01:16:02] I was there the whole time so that, you know, your problems are my problems, nobody else's.

*You enjoyed it.*

Very much so. Overgrown schoolboy. It was my hobby and it's been my hobby all my life, and it turned into a business. What more can you ask for? And we were left in peace for seventy-odd years. Not bad, hey?

*Tell us a little bit about your private life. So, what happened to you? You met your first wife?*

Private life.

*Yeah.*

Private life, private life. School, private – a very good friend of my mother's, Swedish, said, 'There's a lovely girl here in Sweden. I'd like Ralph to meet her.' She came over to London, I met her. I said to my father, 'I don't want to meet anybody at the moment. I've got a rally on tonight, I've got to go from here to Brighton, I am not staying at home.' And my mother said, 'You are staying at home to meet this young lady.' Well, you can imagine the fuss and bother. I did what I was told. And she came into the front door, we met, and we got on fairly well. And then I went to Sweden, and I was fascinated with Sweden – terribly cold in the winter – and enjoyed her family. Lovely people. Lovely girl, and we got married. Don't ask me when – 1988, I think. Can I look that up? Anyway –

*I think you said '84 before. It doesn't matter. In the eighties.*

I mentioned it, yes, whatever it was. And I pulled her over her, young girl of eighteen, and she had to adjust to a British way of life, which she did very, very well. But unhappy. She wasn't that happy because of the way she was brought up in Sweden. **[01:18:01]** And the way we bring things up here in England, totally different, aren't they? Anyway, we had a very nice house in Arkley which we lived in, and that was our family home of which I built an extension. The garden was too big, so I put a swimming pool into it, with a lovely chalet of which we had great fun there, and all the kids brought their kids and friends. So, the family home was in Arkley [inaudible] which – meanwhile I was still working in Finchley Central day in day out. Thirty-two years. Took my flying licence, bought my first aircraft. My father

went mad. He said to my mother again, 'What is the boy doing?' And my mother said, 'Just calm down, he'll sort it out.' Anyway, he couldn't understand it, so I made him come out to the airfield one day and I said, 'Dad, sit in this aircraft.' Well, this is a single seater sort of thing. And he sat in there and that's the last I ever saw of him with my aeroplane [laughs]. He must have thought I was completely crazy.

*Did he fly with you?*

No. No, no, no.

*And your mother, did she fly with you?*

No. Interesting story. When my mother had her first car or so, if anything happened with her car she said to me, 'You know, my car's not running very well.' I said, 'Mum, don't worry, bring it to the garage.' And she said, 'No, no, no, I'll take it to a proper garage,' [laughs]. She wouldn't take it to her son's garage [both laugh]. Interesting how you react as a parent. Anyway, it all went very well and most enjoyable time, met a lot of interesting people, lovely motorcars, performance vehicles, went flying. [01:20:00] Then I flew to Switzerland on my own and from there I flew up to Sweden, and I went over the dams. You know, the Mohen [Möhne] dam?

*Hmm-mm.*

Where the Dambusters flew. I flew over there to have a look at it and boy, that must have been a terrible journey. A) it's very difficult to find, and I did it in daylight. Let alone these wonderful pilots who flew these aircraft at low level, at that speed, at night, and find the dams. Quite something. And from that I flew over to [inaudible] Sweden, and from there I went up to the Arctic Circle. Just touched it and came back down again. Had a very nice time. Very nice time. We had a lovely family in Sweden. And then my children who were born in the late sixties and seventies went up to Sweden every summertime, and they had a wonderful summer holiday there, all their summer holiday period when they weren't at school. What more can you ask for? Meanwhile, Freddy here was still at work [laughs]. Stayed behind

except for those odd flights. One thing, very interesting which I'm just working on at the moment, I had to go to a flying display in Switzerland in the 1980s and we stood out in front of our aircraft because they were being inspected by the visitor of the day. And the visitor of the day was going to Douglas Bader, the famous British ace pilot. Anyway, he was ill, and somebody had to stand in for him. My turn had come. The car came round. The gentleman who was the honorary guest came towards me, stuck his hand out, and I realise who he was. [01:22:00] It was the ace German pilot Adolf Galland. Well, my father must have turned in his grave. At that split second, I didn't know what to do. Do I take that hand and shake that hand which shook Hitler's hand, which shook Göring's hand, which killed a lot of our young boys, at least eighty of them? Split second decision had to be made. And I thought, well, hold on, officer and a gentleman because he was in the German Air Force before the Nazis took it over. In other words, he was a professional. So, I did take his hand and I did shake his hand. I had goosepimples all over me. It was a weird, weird feeling. And then he started looking at my aeroplane and then he said, 'Can I sit in it?' And I, 'Of course, Herr Meyer, you can sit in it.' So, he sat in it, in my aeroplane, the German ace pilot, Adolf Galland. And he said, 'How do you start it? Do you start it with a cranking handle?' I said, 'No, this is not a Messerschmitt.' Because there they had to wind it. 'This is a simple little petrol engine and all you do is push a button.' I didn't want to tell him where the button was. He said, 'That's all you do,' and then they got out and they went away. And I thought, oh my goodness me. What has just happened? That is odd. And then the people I was with started to explain it to me. It didn't dawn on me at the time that this was Göring's top ace pilot, during the Nazi war of which he must have known what was going on with the Nazi Party. Anyway, in the evening there was a big party in a marquee on the airfield, and they had benches, and we had a large sort of dinner party or so. [01:24:00] It was very nice. It was nicely laid out. Who was sitting next to me? You guessed it. With his girlfriend, Heidi, smoking his cigar. How do you talk to somebody like that? I didn't – I would have loved to have talked to him, thinking about it now, but not at the time.

*Did you talk to him?*

No. Again, that man had killed – not killed, murdered most probably –

*Who was he? What was his name?*

Spitfire and hurricane pilots. Battle of Britain.

*What was his name again please?*

Adolf Galland.

*Galland.*

My...Major. It's a story on its own. Story on its own. He was one of the ace pilots, the ace pilot of Hitler's Nazi Luftwaffe.

*And not imprisoned after the war?*

Not in prison, no. He was even invited by the fighter pilots of the RAF to come over to London at the time. I know. He was an airman. No, he wasn't tried as a Nazi or anything like that, but he told me later or I heard later that he burnt everything. His uniforms and that. But he must have known what was going on. I'm sorry. I know he was fighting for his country, but he must have known what was going on with the Jews, and what was going on, because Göring- as far as I'm concerned- founded the concentration camps. Therefore, he must have known what was going on. But to be that close. I would have preferred to be closer to some of our British ace pilots [laughs], but it didn't happen, it didn't happen. So that was quite an experience. **[01:26:00]**

*Yeah. And Ralph, how do you feel about Germany today?*

I have nothing to do with Germany. My allegiance is with this country.

*Have you ever been back to Berlin?*

No. No interest whatsoever. No. The only thing I did with my cousin Uli in Switzerland, who organised it. He organised a small tour of the graveyards of our ancestors. [Phone rings] He organised this tour of our family graves, and that was the only time I touched Germany with him. But no way, no interest at all. And I certainly won't apply for a German passport [laughs].

*And your children? Are they interested?*

No. I haven't promoted anything to do with Germany on them. I'll leave that to them. I'll leave that to them. And- not being too ignorant, I accept Germany today as a fine country with young people with this in their past, and they must look into the future and create whatever they have to create in their own lives. But without me. I'm the last of the line. When I've gone there's no further hatred of a nation that could do what they did. Having learnt about it recently, or over the last sixty or seventy years.

*Did you talk about your history to your children at all?*

Yes. Yes, I did, yes. And Michelle, my daughter, is now following through these albums which I've got here from my great-grandparents. [01:28:01] So at least she knows what it's all about, and how her family started, and that's it. Whether they want to follow it up, it's up to them. But apparently, she said, 'You've got to prepare it,' and I am doing that now.

*And do you have any grandchildren?*

Two, two, two - two boys. Of which one is beginning to be of interest, but he's only sort of seventeen/eighteen, so he's getting on with his studies. No, I don't mention anything. When they ask, and my step-grandchildren, when they ask, yes, I will give them any information I have, yeah, but otherwise I won't talk about it. Which is a shame because engineering-wise, mechanical, Germany and England were on par. Brilliant engineers. And what they invented and what the British invented is history on its own. Should never have gone to war.

Technically, wonderful people, but not for me, sorry. I can't - I'm not allowed to forgive. I

have not been given permission to forgive, and I will not forget, from what I've heard and learnt, and thank goodness I didn't experience it like my parents.

*And what about your parents? What did they feel about Germany?*

What did they feel? I didn't get any direct communications through them at all. There was no hatred teaching or nothing like that at all.

*They didn't go [both talking at once].*

Nothing at all. No input at all. My mother in actual fact encouraged English, English literature, English language, which was a good way of going ahead.

*Yeah.*

Yeah.

*And Ralph, how do you think has the experience impacted your life? [01:30:00]*

Say again.

*How do you think has your emigration impacted your life?*

Well, as I said right at the beginning, my mother gave me birth and she saved my life and put me here. I have no other experiences. I have no horrific experiences, thank goodness.

*Do you sometimes think how your life would have been if you'd all stayed in Germany? I mean if there was no Hitler.*

Yes. It still would have been engineering.

*Yeah.*



It still would have been mechanical engineering. Would I have joined the Luftwaffe? No, I don't think so. I don't know. But that's in you. You're born that way, and somehow it comes out. And I wasn't academically entrusted in learning these things, I was all fiddling around with mechanical things. Oil, dirty, smelly, motorcars, piston engines, etc., etc. I think it would have been the same. I think it would have been the same- had I had the opportunities. I can't measure that. But the country technically was on par. I mean, they had the jet engine before we did, flying. With dear Frank Whittle and the jet engine here, fine, but the Germans also had their German jet engine flying before the British. Not successfully, but at least they did it, it got off the ground. So that was all on par. No, I wouldn't know. I've got no comparison and I'm not delving into it either. No.

*And do you find as you're getting older –?*

Old? I am old. Eighty-seven in December.

*I don't say old, I said older.*

Oh, older.

*Older. Do you find you're more thinking about the past or your history? [01:32:02]*

I'm developing the past only because of my daughter who said, 'Dig out all the old photographs, dig out all your paperwork, and all the German documents that you've got and please, put it into some order.' And I'm preparing, if you want to call it a book, I'm doing chapters at a time, but I need help because literally [laughs] I'm not very good at essays or putting things together like that. Putting mechanical things together, yes, but certainly not putting essays together and bookwork. So, I've got all the notes, yes, it could be put together and it could be fun. Plenty of photographs 'cos they tell a better story than my writing.

*This interview can help you a little bit.*

Yeah.

*And what I want to ask you, what sort of identity did you want to give to your children when they grew up?*

In what sense?

*You know, being Jewish, being British, being – what –?*

Oh, I see. There was a Jewish in put but definitely not traditional. Very diluted, because it diluted it down the line from my parents because of the war and all that. Yes, we had Shabbos, yes, we had Shabbos candles, yes, we had Shabbos dinner, but not a strong following at all. Yes, we had Passover with the Jewish refugees that were around us. Because I used to be terribly annoyed- because I had to do the Ma Nishtana and I said, ‘Aren’t there any other youngsters coming in?’ I was always the youngster at the time. So that was a community there, but otherwise, no. Jewish input, my daughter, she’s Jewish, that’s about it. [01:34:01] No, they belong to Reform. My boys, grandchildren, I don’t think there’s any major input there. Yes, they were both bar mitzvahed. And then- they go their own way. Any questions to be asked on the Jewish side, Barbara’s the one to answer the questions. She’s my Jewish authority. And of course, Herr Kaufmann, Andrew. Andrew, yes. JS. I wasn’t involved. I am involved now. I get their magazine and I follow up all the people looking for each other which is very interesting.

*The search notices.*

Yes.

*And the AJR Journal.*

That is very interesting. That fits into my schemes at the moment.

*And Ralph, when did you meet Barbara? When did you...?*

I knew Barbara when she was skipping in her gym clothes as a young girl, wearing green knickers. Must have been – you'd have to ask her. She must have been in her school, Harrow. You have to ask her on that.

*Okay.*

That's when I first saw her. Didn't take much notice. And she was actually my brother's friend, and we met through my brother in later life. When my brother got married, Barbara was there and when I got divorced, Barbara was there. But no way was I going to get married again. But we lived together for many years, and she said, 'Why don't you get married? Why can't we get married?' I said, 'What for? We're happy as we are now. Why get married again? I'm enjoying myself. You're enjoying...' She said, 'No, I want to get married.' And then I think it was one day I said, 'Okay.' Bravo! [01:36:00] And she organised [both laugh] the synagogue and the ceremony and everything else, and I've never looked back. Lovely girl. Lovely girl. Caring, smiling, jumping around, colourful. Same sort of age grouping which is mature.

*And how long have you lived here in Edgware?*

We moved from Arkley – God, I have no idea. Nineties? Yeah, nineties, late nineties. Because the house was too big. There was only me and Barbara living there, Barbara and I living there. What's the point of this family house? And we moved to Abbey Court and from there we found this apartment and I said to her, 'Buy it straightaway.' Beautifully laid out. All on one floor, facing south, and just right for two people.

*You're happy here.*

I didn't want too many rooms 'cos I don't want grandchildren staying here and I don't want anybody else staying here [both laugh]. We want to be on our own and enjoy each other's company which we do.

*And Ralph, how do you define yourself today in terms of your own identity?*

Good question. How do I find myself –?

*Define yourself. What would you call yourself today?*

Give me an example of somebody else.

*British, German-born, Jewish, I don't know, whatever.*

Oh, I see. British a hundred percent. Jewish second. That's about it, I think. My allegiance is to this country.

*You feel very British.*

Yes. It is there, but I do recognise being Jewish. You've got to be careful here [coughs] because I remember when I was talking on the Commission Boards in the Air Force, I would have only got that high – [01:38:00] had I stayed in, I would have had to work my way up for a long time, and there would have been a roof being Jewish. Therefore, there was nothing for me. And I remember one thing my father said, 'I didn't educate you to stay in the Royal Air Force. You will go out and work on your own.' And that's about the only wise words I can remember [laughs]. And my mother always used to say, 'Leave the boy alone. He'll sort it out,' which is lovely. No. Identity. Nothing else. Very peaceful, very pleasant. A very big thank you, and boy, weren't we lucky to be living in this period? You imagine being born 1930.

*Yeah.*

Especially a young boy who would have been – in 1940 would have been eighteen or nineteen years old. I wouldn't be here.

*Yeah.*

And a lot of the Jewish boys were not allowed to be in the air crew in the event of meaning [inaudible]. That was a policy of the RAF at the time. There were some air crews, complete Jewish air crews. There was one bomber crew that went up to the Tirpitz. The Tirpitz that crashed in Sweden. They were Jewish, but otherwise not encouraged.

*No.*

Because of obvious reasons.

*And what about – would you call yourself, define yourself, continental? Do you see yourself as at all –?*

Yes, we are totally continental in food, drink, and certain manner. Yes.

*Go on, tell us, what – tell us about the food or the – what do you mean by that?*

What do I mean by that? Difficult one. European food-wise, mainly those sorts of customs. I'm not interested in Indian food or anything like that. **[01:40:00]** [Pause] Difficult to identify. How can I describe it? There's no other form because I was brought up in the British way. I celebrate Christmas. I had a huge Christmas tree for the kids when they were at home. Why should they leave out? They might be Jewish, but meanwhile in school there's Christmas trees. Had no meaning, so I followed all that. *Weihnachten*. Birthdays.

*What about the food, your mother's, or your parents' food?*

Continental.

*What did they make? What did she – what did –?*

Continental.

*Was it different from your friends' parents?*

Well, yes. We had high teas, *kalter Aufschnitt* [cold meats] [01:40:49] where we had the usual continental cucumbers, and sausages, and meats, and cheeses, very nicely laid out, very nicely done. Lunches, no. Dinners mainly. I think they were dinnertime. That's all, but you mustn't forget it was rationed until the fifties.

*And did you and your parents, did they go to the Finchley Road, The Cosmo, and to these places?*

Well, yes. No, they didn't go to Cosmo, my mother, she stopped in Golders Green, in Appenrodt, which was a German delicatessen.

*What was it called?*

Appenrodt.

*Appenrodt, hmm-mm.*

Yeah. That was on the corner in Golders Green, opposite the station there. No, she didn't do Cosmo. That was your Belsize Park grouping again.

*Yes, yes.*

Cosmo was mainly for the Belsize Park people. They weren't sort of Hampstead Garden Suburb, were they?

No, no, [inaudible] grandparents.

Yeah, exactly.

*Or Dorice or Cosmo, yeah.*

Ethel, can you remember when we stayed in – moved in here? About 19 –?

We've been here twenty-seven years. Twenty-seven years ago.

Yeah, 19 –?

'94.

'95.

**[01:42:01]** Yeah.

Five.

'94/95.

Yeah. Fine, there you are.

*Okay.*

She's got all the dates.

*Yeah.*

[Laughs].

And the beauty of her having all the dates and me not remembering them, is ideal for a password number because I'll never remember our anniversary [both laugh]. So that date could be a good pass number, wouldn't it [laughs]?

*Could be, yeah.*

No, no, what else can I tell you?

*Okay Ralph, is there anything I haven't asked you which you'd like to add? Anything that I haven't asked you, you think is important? Anything else comes to mind which you'd like to share?*

No. My schooling was interesting. My housemaster was ex-Army. He taught me a lot in discipline, respect. That was so important in boarding school, and that followed me through my life. When somebody of authority tells you to do something, you do it. You don't stand there and argue like the grandchildren do today. That is very important, and that I have passed on to my grandchildren as well. But he's got to have the respect, and he's got to be known to be of authority as a leader. He was in Arnhem and North Africa Campaign, and that was one teacher that taught me a lot. And my housemaster [pause] he knew, he knew the boys. He knew exactly what we were going to do. He told me before he passed away – and I was leaving school, he said, 'Steiner, you're never going to be employed. You're going to work on your own and do your own thing.' [01:44:00] He died in the railway station seeing us off. Wonderful people. And they stay in your background. And the only message I had that kept my sanity throughout my business life, and let's face it, it all goes up and down, we've got good times and bad times or you're not in business. There was always a roof of mind, nothing can be as bad as the people who were involved in The Holocaust. Nothing can hurt me that the people went through, so I never had any major stress. Had problems, but I used that as my lid, and many times I saw people pulling their hair out and screaming. I said, 'It can't be that bad.' Because invariably it'll wind back to finance. But just think, if you can just think of what those people went through, being put on railway trains and dying the way they did. That is a problem. What we have got cannot be that bad. And that was my lid and that saw me through many, many times. Not in a nasty way, purely as a measurement. I can remember, and we did go through tough times in business like everybody.

*But is that the message? What message would you give to anyone who might watch this interview later?*



A message? I'm the world's worst for messages.

*Well, I thought –*

I can't even write – when I was asked to write a letter home at boarding school to my parents, what could I write? 'I'm aero modelling. My plane's doing well.' It was pathetic [laughs], I really couldn't write- let alone write a letter to a girlfriend. [01:46:02] I mean, I got letters from girlfriends, they were lovely. I couldn't answer them properly. What could I tell them? 'Rugby was good. Football was on. We're playing hockey tomorrow.' I mean, it was impossible. I was impossible when it came to that. Message? Message, message. You've got to live for the day up to a point. But you've got to be observant. Listen, listen. People at the moment are talking on top of each other. [Inaudible] I said, 'You can't do that. You either receive or you transmit.' Again, I learnt that from my housemaster. When you speak, I keep quiet. Please try to listen. And the kids today, it's me, me, me, they're not all listening, and I find that that has to calm down and come back. Listen, and then say your piece by all means, and respect your elders. Respect your elders. That's all I can say. 'Cos I find that even with my own children, it's not happening. The kids want – the grandchildren want to do what they want to do, and the parents are just, 'Go ahead and do it.' It's wrong. You need discipline and respect, otherwise society can't work. And be happy. Make it happy. It's positive. Don't look at the negatives. As I said to Barbara, she said, 'We've been locked up in here...' about Corona, but we had fun. We work out the menus, we discuss what we're going to dine on. It's all very small stuff but we're smiling. And that is something that has got to come out in you if it possibly can. Not the negatives because we're being completely bombarded by negatives. [01:48:02] Whether it's the news, the newspaper, whatever you do it's negative. Let's try to get some of the positives and there are plenty. We've got lovely friends. You can listen to other peoples' experiences which we're doing now of course, and I usually do that at the dinner table. When we have dinner I said, 'Who would you like to invite as an honorary guest?' And it's interesting. Why? And who is he? And then we will listen to the history of that particular woman, dead or alive, doesn't matter. You can have Shakespeare, or you can have- Adolf Galland, it doesn't make any odds. So that's very interesting. And the other thing that will not be allowed on my dinner table or luncheon table is somebody knocking this country. That is out of order because- whatever you've gone through, bad times or good

times- you are sitting at my dinner table today. That's success. With your wife. That is success. That is wealth. And that to me is gold dust. That's all I can say to you. That's all I can say to you. You know, and don't waste valuable time. Don't waste your valuable time 'cos lives are short. I happen to be an old codger, but I'm still enjoying myself because I'm an overgrown schoolboy. The body gets older but boy, the mind's still out there. It's great fun.

*That's good, that's good. Well, thank you Ralph for this really – for this wonderful interview.*

Thank you for coming.

*And for sharing your enthusiasm with us, and message, and story about your parents and yourself coming to England. And we're going to now take a break and then look at your photos and documents. [01:50:05]*

Fine.

*So, thank you so much [long pause].*

Yeah, I'm ready. We've got here my great-grandparents, Isaack? and Rosa, and that is on my father's Steiner family side. Isaak was born in 1828 and he passed away in 1857, and his wife Rosa was born in 1837 and passed away in 1911.

*Thank you.*

No, I didn't say where it was taken.

*Do you know?*

No, hang on, let me get my thing – oh, it's says, it's in Ulm. My father was born there so... On my father's side, the Liebmann side, this is a photograph of my grandparents on their wedding day. Malli is on the left of course and Moritz is on the right. Malli unfortunately was

murdered or gassed by 1942. Moritz was born in 1874 and he passed away in 1932, and Malli was born in 1883 and murdered in 1942. This photograph shows the Liebmann family and it's my grandparents with their two children, my mother with a big bow on her, Ilse, and her brother Alfred.

*Do you know where it was taken?*

This picture is of my grandparents on my mother's side, the Liebmanns and they are in Marienbad having a nice stroll in 1927. This is a picture of my mother's company, A&S Segall and they were situated on the second floor of this building in Berlin.

*And what's on the left?*

On the left-hand side was a presentation knife that was given to a lot of our customers.

*And you kept it.*

Yeah, I managed to find it in my mother's contents box which she put together before she came over to London.

*Thank you.*

This is my younger mother with her dear brother whom she lost to the Gestapo in 1940, and this was in Kissingen, near Frankfurt, in 1925.

*Okay.*

This picture shows my mother on the right-hand side with one of the girls staying with her at the finishing school in 1928 which was at Strathmore Gardens. It was Mrs Garrett's house, and Mrs Garrett had a daughter, Gerry, and this picture depicts Gerry with my mother.

[Pause] Picture of my -Mum and Dad on their engagement in December 1929. [Pause] This is an interesting picture actually. From the right-hand side it's my father's eldest sister, Anna,

my father, Malli which is of course my mother's mother, and her second husband, Mr Tausk with his daughter and sons. And at the very end is Alfred, my mother's brother. Photo must have been around 1934.

*Yes, tell us about this page.*

On this page?

*Yeah.*

It looks like I've arrived, I must have arrived. Anyway, I was born 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1934, and apparently my mother said it was approximately nine o'clock. It was in a private clinic – that was nine o'clock at night – it was in a private clinic in Kaiserallee, number 21.

*And who is on these photos here?*

On the photo is my Dete which is my nanny, and another picture on the right-hand side is my mother, and then I think it's my mother leaning over just to see what she's made.

*Thank you.*

This is the apartment where I first arrived. It's in Fasanenstraße, number 60, and we're on the second floor, apartment on the second floor. [Pause] This is a nice little group with my Mummy and Daddy on the balcony, sometime around 1935. [Pause] This is a smart little photograph of me and my little teddy bear. He played a very important part actually. He came with me all the way to Switzerland.

*And what was hidden in this teddy bear?*

When we got to Switzerland my nanny Dete took away my teddy bear. I said, 'Why are you taking my teddy bear away?' She said, 'I'll give him back to you shortly.' She took him away and apparently cut the back open which was sewn up by my mother who had taken all the

stuffing out and put all the money that she could put into the back of my teddy bear. Knowing damn well that the Gestapo most probably wouldn't take the teddy bear away from me. And that gave us the money and the finance to stay in Switzerland for the length of time until they came and picked me up.

*Thank you.*

This is outside number 60 Fasanenstraße, the block of flats, apartment where we were living.

*Before your departure.*

This was before my departure in about late 1938.

*Thank you. Yes, please.*

This is in Arosa with my father and Dete prior to being collected in 1938 to come over to England. This is a photograph outside 33 Belvedere Court which was our flat which is in the background. With my little brother, eleven months old, and my mum holding him, showing him off no doubt, and it was 1944.

*Thank you.*

Here we've got the family. We've now left Belvedere Court and we were now living in 13 Chalton Drive, Hampstead Garden Suburb. A nice family shot of my little brother, my mum, my dad, and myself. [Pause] My father here is sorting out some of the skins but the gentleman with the hat on is Mr Wolff and he was the founder of Hermann Wolff & Co., the fur company here in London. [Pause] This is Jenny. This was a car I bought for £50 from a scrapyard and rebuilt it whilst I was in the Air Force, which was my transport actually, from Hampstead Garden Suburb back to camp up in Norfolk. Very good little runner. Saw me off well. Sold it, and then I bought the MG after that. Having sold Jenny, my next purchase was an MGTC which I totally had to rebuild and went over all over Europe with it. Great little motorcar. Served me well. [Pause] Finally, having enjoyed the MGTC I thought I'd grow up

and buy myself a little bigger car, and then came the XK120 Jaguar. That came into my life and it's still running today. All fine and looking forward to using it in a decent summer without any Corona virus or anything like that, so I can go somewhere with it. But this was the final big motor vehicle, the XK120 Jaguar. There's a little history here. This is my, what we call the TAD cart. The go kart in the very early days, and it was made for approximately £60, as cheap as possible, so we could actually sell it to the boys to do some miniature racing. It was built up here in Finchley and designed by myself and imported – the only part was the engine. The rest was all made out locally. But there's an interesting story with this. This was a job that we did in the wintertime when we weren't too busy, and I had a gentleman turn up, very smart, came into the garage and said, 'Whose TAD cart or whose cart is that?' I said, 'It's mine, I designed it.' He said, 'Can you make it in any quantity?' I said, 'No, we're only making this in-between the winter season when it's rather bad and it's not something that we're going to concentrate on.' 'Oh,' he said, 'that's a shame because I would have liked a few of them.' I said, 'Well, there we are. I can't do it.' Because they were handmade, hand-built, and the chassis was specially designed for all the local people to utilise and to purchase. Anyway, what I learnt later was it was Billy Butlins' agent wanted to buy them for his camps. You're talking about hundreds. Missed opportunity? Not really. I couldn't have coped with the order anyway. [Pause] Yeah, this was a celebration party having won the – I think it was the UK TAD cart racing in the very early days in its class. Of course, I have to put some talent on my lovely design, and there's the party going on in the background. I think this was sometime in – yeah, springtime and it was held up over in Nottingham. [Pause] Interesting photograph this one actually, there's a long story behind this. This was at an air meeting which I flew into from Great Britain to Switzerland. It was in [inaudible] near Geneva in 1980. There was quite a few other aircraft involved in this of course, and here we have the honorary guest coming towards me. It was supposed to be Douglas Bader, but Douglas was not well and did not attend so they sent in a replacement. And who was this replacement? Adolf Galland, the ace German Luftwaffe pilot during the Second World War. I didn't know what to actually do at the time. He pushed his hand out. Do I shake this man's hand that shook the hand of Göring and Hitler? Do I acknowledge him in any form? And I think my father must have been turning in his grave at the time, but whatever it was I thought no, officer and gentleman, and I had to shake his hand. And we did converse, and after talking about the aircraft and that he actually asked permission to sit in it. Could I have turned it

down? How can I turn it down? He sat in my Chipmunk aircraft, and he then asked me how we started it, do we have a cranking handle? I said, 'No, this is not a Messerschmitt, this is a very basic little petrol engine in here,' which was a training aircraft. Anyhow, it was quite an experience. [Pause] This is a very nice family shot on the occasion of my son James' bar mitzvah.

*And who is in the picture?*

In the picture is my son James, Anita- my wife- my mother, little Michelle, and myself in the background. [02:04:00] [Pause] What a lovely picture. It's with my second wife, little Barbara. After being with me for many, many years she actually persuaded me to marry her which I did very willingly, and we had a wonderful day. This apparently was in July 1999, and we're still together today, which is not bad going is it really, when you think about it. Second time round.

*Thank you, Ralph, thank you.*

These are my parents' original passports from Germany which gives us a fine record of their travelling habits. My father's passport with the red 'J' stamped on it which of course was an indication, Jew. Similar passport, this time it's of my father who's got similar stampings to the one in my mother's except that he did travel a little bit further. So, there's quite a lot of research that can be obtained from it, reading his passport stamps. I believe you'll find on this page is the visa to enter the United Kingdom. I believe you'll find that this has got the stamp on the arrival into the United Kingdom in 1939 by my father's passport. [Pause] This is my mother's passport. Again, it's interesting to see the red 'J' stamped on it. Jewish. [02:06:02] This is my mother's passport which you can see distinctly with the German stamps on it.

*Yes, please.*

Okay. At the time I had no passport of my own so you can actually see that it is mentioned in my mother's passport that it also covers me.

*Yes, please.*

This is the stamp in my father's passport –

*Your mother's passport.*

Oh, in my mother's passport, arriving at Croydon on January 1939.

*Thank you. What are we looking at?*

You're looking at the typewriter, the German typewriter that my father used with MI9 to make false documents for possibly the air crews or anybody in the Second World War.

*Amazing. How did it get into your possession?*

It's my father's.

*So, you inherited it.*

Oh yes, I- sorry. Yeah, it was my father's and I inherited it. In actual fact, I did some of my schoolwork on it [laughs]. Still works today. It's been totally overhauled and very authentic.

*Because the 'z' is in a different place, isn't it?*

Well, they've got all the different *umlauts* and all the typical German characters on it. That's why it was ideal for making false documents.

*But you managed your homework on this as well.*

Yes. I managed to do most of my homework on it, until I bought my own little portable typewriter. [02:08:05]



*And what do you think should happen to this machine now?*

Well, I'll give it to – the kids actually play with it at the moment. My grandchildren have done some documents, and it's been on exhibition. It's here for anybody who wants to have a look at it. No problem at all. It gives a bit of history because of the actual mechanism, the mechanical side of it, as against today's push button computers. And no mistakes. If you make a mistake you've got to start all over again. But then we had Tippex, didn't we? But a really clever secretary could type a complete letter without one mistake. I certainly couldn't do it.

*Well Ralph, thank you so much for sharing your story, your photographs, and also this –*

Piece of equipment.

*This piece of equipment called Erika.*

[Laughs] Yes.

*[Both talking at once] the company.*

Yes, well I don't know, but that's the make or that model.

*Okay, thank you so much again.*

Pleasure.

[End of transcript]