

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Archive
Ref. no:	RV 292
Interviewee Surname:	Zohar
Forename:	Natan
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	28 February 1931
Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

Date of Interview:	21 February and 5 March 2024
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	5 hours 20 minutes



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV 292
NAME: Natan Zohar
DATE: 21 February and 5 March 2024
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00]

Today is the 21st of February 2024 and we're conducting an interview with Mr Nathan Zohar, and my name is Bea Lewkowicz and we're in London. What is your name, please?

Natan Zohar.

And when and where were you born?

I was born in Vienna on the 28th of February 1931.

And what was your name at birth, please?

Otto Sonnenschein.

Natan, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Archive.

It's my pleasure.

Can you tell us a little bit about your family background?

At the moment I can't. My mind is on so many other sad things. You'll have to forgive me.

Tell us a little bit about your parents and your grandparents and Vienna. What comes to your mind when you think about –

When I think about Vienna, the happy times that I can remember because they were difficult times for my parents and me and my brother, was the happy times I spent together with my older brother. I'll give you an instance. He and my father used to take me to the *Prater* and my dream was to be able to ride a bicycle and in the *Prater* you could hire these, so Jackie, my brother, and my father, they hired one of these children's bicycles and I was put on that by brother Jackie and he said, 'Don't worry, Otti, I'm right behind you.' And off we went, to the *Prater*. And I'm cycling faster as I'm going and I'm feeling hilarious, it's wonderful, and I turn my head, there's nobody there, Jackie is gone, he'd let go. [00:02:00] I was now able to be [laughs] – I'd say that's one of the happy – there were many others.

Tell us, what other things do you remember? What's your earliest memories from growing up in Vienna?

Well, the earliest memories was Sundays was a special day when my mother used to dress me in my wonderful refinery and my father used to take me *Spazieren* in the centre of Vienna, which was beautiful and at the same time we had quite wealthy – I assume from memory – relatives and he used to go and show me off to the various *Tanten* and *Onkels* and cousins. And Sunday was always a special occasion and I can't begin to tell you how my mother as a dressmaker used to turn me out. It was always with silk blouses, big *Maschen* [ph] [bow in this case] [laughs] and the thing that used to aggravate me most, there used to be white stockings as the girls did, with a – it was like a harness to keep up the stockings. What do you call it? A –

Well, the rubber thing? The – like –

You know, like a harness so that you could attach the top. I used to hate that. And of course, the shoes were always black polished and the big *Maschen* [ph] and everything, that's how I was an exhibit as a child, being shown off. So, those were happy times 'cos I had cousins, female cousins, who were beautiful and I suppose they must have been in their late teens, and they used to make quite a fuss of me on those outings. Those were happy memories.

And Nathan, where did you live in Vienna with your parents?

I lived in – the address is Hörnesgasse 3. Bezirk. [00:04:00]

And what sort of [foreign dialect], what was it? What do you remember? Were there other – many Jews there?

It was very close to the Danube River, not the actual Danube River but the canal. The Danube Canal used to be about fifteen minutes' walk from there. In fact I – I don't know if I've shown you a photograph where I'm standing there actually with a flag when I was probably six years of age. I must show you this. Other happy memories were seeing Jackie who was a member of Betar. I didn't realise what sort of a movement it was and I used to envy him that the whole uniform was similar to *Hitlerjugend* [Hitler Youth]. And do you know, they used to also walk around Vienna with drums and bugles. To this day I can't – and they were fun, and waving flags. I can't imagine how the Austrians could have taken that in their stride. Betar also were with the *Überschwung*, with the leather things [laughs]. When Jackie during the week went to his school and if the maid wasn't looking, I used to take it out of the wardrobe and I used to put it on myself because I think from an early age I had – I was influenced by military matters because everywhere in our flat there were photographs of my father in uniform in the First World War, with all his *Sternen* [pointing to the collar] and everything. I don't know what rank he was. But that's how I was brought up. Everything seemed very military. Even we went to a toyshop, I always chose masses of, you know, soldiers. So, I think at an early age there was some influence there.

So he served in the First World War?

My father, yes. He survived the First World War. [00:06:00] And when it came to the Anschluss, the *Sturmabteilung*, the Stormtroopers, came for my father and beat him up and dragged him off to Dachau. I shall never forget that. What I – can I continue telling you about this story?

Sure.

My mother who was a very brave, gutsy lady – she was amazing, she heard – and you know where they dragged him off to? To Dachau. She discovered that. She heard that there's somebody at Gestapo headquarters could be bribed to release that person. As I told you, she was a very brave lady and she made it her business to go to that particular Gestapo headquarters and had an interview with him and handed him an envelope with money for the release of my father and he pocketed this. And thinking back, I mean he easily could have just forgotten it and go to hell but some weeks later – this was winter – I shall never forget – this was not a happy memory really – my mother is dragging me on my sledge in the snow and at a distance we see what to me from memory looked like a tramp, a down-and-out. And as we came closer I realised he was my father. And the Gestapo guy had kept his word, which was incredible. And I then, thinking back, I don't know if this is 100% true but I believe when he came home and he managed to relax more, [laughs] also he had left a bundle of cash behind an oven, hidden, and my mother at one time, she turned this oven on, so when he came to find this, it was all ashes. [00:08:09] I'm just giving you the ups and downs. It probably happened many times. Again, I – my parents didn't tell me this even after we met again in future years. They must have decided there and then they have saved themselves so far, they have to save this child, so what my father did, he contacted a business associate of his in London and sent him the photograph of me as a boy and that associate, could he – could they save this child. And what happened then – and this now brings me to my Jewish future foster father – in the tailoring trade in the east of London which were mostly Jewish, Polish, Russian, Lithuanians, who Friday afternoon was a special treat for all of them. They used to meet in a Turkish bath in the East End. Did you know that?

No, you told me about it. I found it very interesting.

Okay. Anyway, this friend went around with a photograph of me with *meine Maschen* and everything, saying would – who will save this child? And my future foster father said, please, give me the photograph. And he went home that – it was a Friday – his mother – his mother – his wife – because they were a *kosher* family and very observant – she was preparing the Sabbath dinner, and he told her, we should try and save this child. And she said, we have five children, we will take another child. And that's how I came. For he then obviously paid the sum to the British thing, £150 was it, for every child? [00:10:02] I've even got receipts on that I think. So that's how I came to the Tober family.

And they were called Tauber?

T-O-B-E-R.

Tober?

Tober. Not Richard Tauber, no, Tober, yes. That's how it is. That –

And where was that café in the East End? What was it called? Where they met, you said the tailors.

In Turkish baths.

Turkish baths.

You know the Turkish baths, steam baths.

Yes. Oh, they went to a Turkish bath, the tailors?

All the tailors used to congregate on a Friday for relaxation and talk about business and it was their recreation ground on Friday. It was a thing they did. Yes. And to my luck, I became a

little part of that. And that's how I came to the Tober family. They organised everything and then my parents told me, we are going to send you to England for your safety, they explained it and [laughs] I didn't speak a word of English but we didn't talk about that even. Their main focus was to get me as quickly as possible out, and they achieved. So, what did my father do? He sends Otto to England, he has to look good, and so he buys me a pair of *Lederhosen*, an Austrian hat with a feather in it [laughs]. That is how I arrived [laughs] and that is how I went to my first school and that is how I went to Somerset, to my future English parents, and they had this Austrian kid [laughs]. It was amazing. And I can tell you, war broke out and I spoke only German and each of the tough guys at school used to challenge me. We used to have to fight and you had to prove yourself. Of course I was beaten up many times. But I had to get rid of this bloody hat and the *Lederhosen*. [00:12:01]

I'm sure that didn't help you [laughs].

And this went on from – in Somerset it continued.

You continued wearing it?

It continued there. I tell you, I have lovely stories with my gentile foster brother who treated me like his blood brother.

Natan, let's – before really talking about this, let's just go back a little bit more to Vienna.

Go ahead.

Tell us a little bit about – your parents were not born in Vienna. So where did they come from? When – how did they manage – how did they get to Vienna?

How did they leave?

Your parents. No, before. They were not born in Vienna.

No, they weren't.

They were born in Poland.

I cannot – I do not know. All I know is that my mother's mother, my grandmother, who was a very elderly lady, and also my mother's sister who survived because she finally came also to Israel, and I used to visit her in her old age – they survived. But how, where they came from, I never did – it was never discussed. I never was old enough even to grasp it I suppose. All I know is my father's family came from a very wealthy background. They – my grandfather was a very observant Jewish person because I've seen photographs of him. But they had a large, large farm in that particular area and he had – I think my father was number twelve or thirteen, so it was mostly boys and one or two girls, and they must have been somewhere in Poland.

So did your parents come by themselves to Vienna, do you think, by themselves?

I don't – I don't know. I think they came with family because the family was quite a large – the Sonnenschein family, large family, because I used to be taken there for Sunday –

Ah, so there must have been other family members.

Oh, yes.

Yeah. And what was your father's business? What did he do?

He, as I said, he had several stores and he also because he studied accountancy he did accountancy work, as far as I know, but mainly he was concerned with his stores. [00:14:13]

What sort of stores? What were they?

I think they were grocery stores. I'm not sure. I never took an interest.

So, he ran them or he owned them or what – or he...

Sorry, I didn't –

Did he run – he owned them? He owned those stores?

Yes, he owned them. He owned them. He had other people managing, I think.

And what language did your parents speak to each other?

German. Or Yiddish I suppose.

Yeah, that's why I'm asking.

I suppose Yiddish, but not much Yiddish. It was German.

And what sort of – I mean you were very young at the time. I mean what sort of friends and circles, what were –

Friends? I didn't have non-Jewish friends of course. By the way, it got to a stage that in my school I was one of few Jewish children I think 'cos I remember they showed us a Nazi film once and I realised that it's them and us at that stage. And they shunned me, *Jude*, you know, I already felt that at that stage, at the Anschluss.

In the elementary school?

In the elementary school. And –

So you noticed there was a – some change?

Not only the change. What happened, we were in the playground and I think I had stepped on a snail, not purposely, and all the children ran to this teacher and reported that the "*Jude hat*

eine Schnecke getötet” [the Jew has killed a snail]. I was brought up in front of them, I was made an example, and I was left alone and I felt so embarrassed, as you can imagine.

[00:16:06] And of course, the Nazis had already come to power and then suddenly I was expelled, so Jackie came, my brother, and brought me home. I was so embarrassed about the whole situation. I took to my bed. I would not get out of bed for weeks. I just retired, as I – for me, I thought, *Was für eine Schande* [shame], what a *Schande* I've brought upon the family. And my brother nursed me back. But I shall never forget that instance. I was expelled from June [ph] [laughs]. I killed a snail, and how many Jews did they kill after that? It's something that stayed –

That stuck with you, yeah.

Yeah.

So what, you were in the playground? You were in the playground?

I was in the playground, yes.

Playing with this snail?

I wasn't playing. I – I think I –

You stepped on it.

Accidentally stepped on a snail and they of course saw this and reported it immediately. That's just that incident in my life which was horrible. And my brother came, Jackie, and used to try and coax me to get out of bed, to not to be afraid that – but I was. I thought, “*was für eine Schande*”, what a shame I've brought upon my family. That's the way I was thinking. How old was I? I was probably seven – six, seven.

And this was in the 3. Bezirk, in the Volksschule?

Volksschule. That's when we lived there. We never lived anywhere else. It was a *Volksschule* in – it was probably about a fifteen, twenty-minute walk from where we lived. I know it was somewhere in the area of the *Prater* because I used to walk to the *Prater* with –

Ah, you were near the Prater.

So I knew that it was...

Yeah. That must have been very upsetting as a seven-year-old.

It was, yes. And I moved – at that stage things obviously were getting in very bad with the Nazis and hunting Jews. That's probably when I joined Maccabi I think, probably because my brother also was in Maccabi, and everything he did, I wanted to do. [00:18:08] And it's –

And your brother was much older than you?

My brother was nine years older.

So that's quite a big age gap.

A big age, yes. He was very mature. He was a wonderful artist. He used to design all my festive clothes. If my mother took me to the main synagogue where years later I took my wife, Ruth, when we were invited. I've forgotten what – and that's right next to Gestapo headquarters. Because Kristallnacht when they set all the synagogues on fire, they did not set fire to that one. It was too close to Gestapo Headquarters, they were afraid it was going to burn as well. But I'm telling you all this because so many years later when I had an invite, I finally succumbed and I accepted it, only because a friend of mine also was – background, his wife was really dying and he said, 'Natan, please would you and Ruth accompany us, 'cos if I don't go this time, I'll never go.' And Ruth and I decided, and we went together. And one of my sightseeing thing was to go to that synagogue with Ruth and I showed her – we're sitting downstairs – I said, do you see the balcony? Every *Chag*, every festive [ph], see all the mothers used to be there. And Jackie used to dress me up, if it was *Hanukah*, if it was any

other – accordingly with my flag and everything. He always looked after me. And there I am, with Ruth, and I'm relating what I had at that time. I said, all those children around me, and all the mothers on the top, looking over their little sweeties, and I had this flag, and suddenly I want to go to the toilet and there's nobody to help me. So, I'm waving to my mother and she waves back and she says, *ja mein gutes Kind* [yes, my dear child], [laughs] and I was waving that flag 'cos [laughs] and I said – Ruth and I are going – sitting there and the – Ruth was a cupola style with lots of stars which at that time we had, and also when we visited.

[00:20:16] So it all brought it all back to me.

This is the Seitenstettengasse temple? Yeah.

That's the one, yes. That must have been – it's the main synagogue.

It was emotional for you to go back there?

It was, yes. It was because I was mature enough to realise what my parents had to go through and I put my mindset in theirs to think what would I have done had I – Jackie had already arrived safely in Palestine, they wanted to save the child and they succeeded. How they managed this so quickly, it was amazing.

So tell me, Jackie, what school? Where was he at the time?

He went to a *Gymnasium*.

Do you know which one or –

No, I have no idea.

So he was in this Gymnasium, he joined Betar, the Zionist movement.

Yes, yes.

And then he did – Youth Aliyah. Was it Youth Aliyah he went on?

No, no, no, no. What he did, he went illegally. He went with his group, Betar. I remember at that stage there being a most – my father was not a Zionist – and of course he had already become very much instilled in Zionism and Betar and, you know, he was all dressed up to this and I envied him. He went off to *Gymnasium*, I used to be with the nanny, I used to take all his thing with *Überschwung* [shoulder strap] and I used to strut about the flat [laughs] because, you know, I wanted to be amongst the boys. That was my – it also I think became my – thinking back, this had an influence, the military things had –

You liked it – you liked this-

Not liked it, but I also – it continued in my – in England and then when I went to Israel, I joined immediately the *Haganah* and I was sent to Safed – I'll tell you separately – and I fought in the War of Independence, in the *Palmach*. [00:22:16] They seconded me, so I am very proud. And that's called the city of Zohar, by the way. And I should also tell you, the commander of the *Haganah*, I worked very closely with when I joined and he wrote a book when he retired, in which I feature. He – because he kept all the orders of the day I supposed and he looked back and he saw – he came to London especially some years later because he was writing another book and he wanted my input on that, what have I felt at the time, which I thought was terrific. But he of course was an [inaudible] – he has passed on. He then passed me on to the commander of the *Palmach* who came to our aid and he said, 'Otto, Natan, he's the guy to be next to you, he knows the whole of Tzfat, whatever you do, what [inaudible], he'll go through hell and fire,' and I did. And again- that's how – one of my proudest times in [inaudible]. And one of the first newspaper people who came after the conquering, and the British of course had left, was from Haaretz and he spoke to my commander and again I appeared in a newspaper, Otto Sonnenschein, this, that and other [laughs]. I'm very proud to say that somebody in the district where my parents lived, Holon, who taught me Hebrew at the time, she came, she said, 'Herr Sonnenschein, have you read today's [inaudible]? Your son is in there.' He says, what? He's been – I forbade him to go [laughs]. I'll tell him [ph] another wonderful story about that, about what my mother did. [00:24:04] In the middle of a

battle, she appeared to take me home. I must give you the whole background. I've told it to Hana and all [inaudible] 'cos it's amazing what this woman did.

But Natan, just because we're now in Israel, we definitely want to talk about it, but let's just go back to Vienna a little bit more. You were telling us about your brother in Betar. So he left illegally. Tell us the story.

Oh, yes. No, well, what happened there, the Betar group obviously decided that they are going to leave as quickly as possible but they lacked funds. There were the most terrible rows between my father and him because he was begging my father to support him. My father was not a Zionist, he didn't want to lose his son, but in the end my father gave in and he supported in every way. And I said goodbye to my big brother, really not knowing what was happening, and he left and I was left alone with my parents. I used to cry for my Jackie, my brother, where is he? And do you know what, three weeks later he came back with his tail between his legs. What had happened, I think – I don't know – but they could not get the seaworthy ship that was supposed to take them to Palestine. It didn't appear. Something went wrong so he came back. So he – he and his group planned to have a second go, which they did, and this time my father helped him financially to – and he left a second time and they made it.

And which ship? Do you know how they managed?

I know no details what –

Because, you know, I wondered, there was a ship going from Budapest which managed to get to Palestine. I wondered whether it's that ship.

It could be. I don't –

I know people from Slovakia, from Austria, they were, you know –

I have no idea. I don't even know the date that he left. [00:26:01]

Right. But after –

All I know is, he – the second time it all worked.

Yeah. But after the Anschluss, after the Anschluss?

Oh, yes, that was after the Anschluss. That was after.

So, your brother was a bit like – almost like a parent to you because I guess he was nine years older.

Oh, yes.

Taking care of you.

Oh, yes, of course. He was my hero.

Yeah. And you said that you had a nanny as well. Tell us a little bit about the nanny and who was she?

Just a minute, I'm getting to – when I spoke about a nanny?

Nanny. You said you had a nanny, somebody to look after you at home in Vienna.

Oh, I had a – yes, a girl was looking after me. That's why we – my parents went out to work, they're doing what they're doing, because they didn't want to leave me alone, so they had – it was like a *Dienstmädchen* or something like that.

Yeah. Who was she? Who was this –

I haven't a clue. She was Austrian, not Jewish. And she used to look after me in the absence of my – and make dinner and lunch and whatever. And I was left with her and the canaries – birds to look after.

You had some birds?

Yes, my – Jackie had his birds [laughs]. All I can tell you, as a child growing up in Vienna, this *Dienstmädchen* [maid] used to prepare – or my mother when she came back from work – my supper for me. And like all Austrian children I think, one night it was *Spinat* [spinach] and the next night it was porridge with – sprinkled with chocolate, none of which – which I could enjoy, I hated it. So in the kitchen we had silhouettes of the maid in green and in chocolate because I used to spit it out. [Laughs] It was – I used to get told off of course. But that's the funny side. [00:28:00] So they stopped feeding me those foods [laughs].

So did your mother – your mother was a dressmaker. So where did she work? Did she have a
–

She worked from home. She worked from home. She did a lot. And that saved their lives – saved their lives in Mauritius and in Israel/Palestine when they came penniless.

She could do something.

She's always – always did. And she did extremely well.

What sort of thing – in Vienna, what did she do? Repairs or –

Dress –

She made – she was a designer?

She could – yes, whatever she – designed and she used to have a Singer sewing machine and she used to prepare it.

By herself or did she have other people working for her?

No, by herself. She did all – always self. It – she – they survived in Mauritius as well. She was always – and when they finally were released by the British to return to Israel and officially permitted, she had – they had no money, they had to start from the beginning. Dressmaking was quite a thing for her, when I met them.

So Nathan, do you remember the Anschluss at all in March '38? Where were you?

I'll tell you exactly. The day of the Anschluss of course the Austrians welcomed the Germans marching in. I always loved flags and everything military and I'd go outside the flat and you see every window has got a German flag and German bunting, all hanging, each window, everybody cheering. And I was dressed in my best Sunday outfit and I don't know where my parents were but the girl – I said I'd like to go outside and watch this and she took me outside. And I'm in the street and I see the German army with the whole band, music, with glockenspiels, everything, marching in, and I was thinking, this is fantastic. [00:30:01] And I'm – as they're marching, I'm walking slowly backwards because I was in – I'm looking at all the flags, it was beautiful. I'm walking backwards and suddenly I disappear. There was a big trench, open trench, in the road and as I walked backwards I fell backwards and the German army band broke up and ran towards me and *schlepped* me out, not knowing that I'm a Jewish boy. Otherwise, they would have bloody well thrown me back I can imagine. Can you imagine? How shall I forget [laughs]. I was only worried about what have I done to my *Anzug* [suit], what will my mother say? But it was amazing. And you know, if the German bands have got these special glockenspiel and all this sort of – that was it because the German army were welcomed by the Austrians with open arms.

So, it was the people who were marching, with their drums and the –

Yeah, yeah. Yes, the military, they broke rank and came and pulled me out and dusted me down and put me on the side and my nanny came and took me home I suppose.

And what was it? Just a hole, or what was it?

It was a big trench, probably full of mud and water. I was a mess. But I thought – my main thought, God, what will my mother say?

But were you aware that it was dangerous to be there for you? [Overtalking].

No, I – no, I didn't.

You were not – just –

No, to me, marching, soldiers, you know –

You liked it. You –

Oh, yes, I, like everybody else, cheering, I was one – welcome. I was only –

So at that point you didn't understand that it's a danger at all for you?

Yeah. I was about six years of age, so –

Yeah, exactly, how should you.

But [laughs] I was lucky. I shall never forget that.

And what did the nanny – what were her political views?

I have no idea. She was Austrian I suppose. I don't know any details.

So you have a strong memory of that day?

Oh, yes.

You remember.

Oh, very much because it was – it was awesome, as they say in English, to see an army marching in to relieve the Austrians with, do you know, they welcomed them with open arms. [00:32:15] They said officially no, but they did. But what was fantastic, you know, every window had a flag with the *Hakenkreuz* [swastikas] and everything, and bunting, a big welcome.

Did you see Hitler there or...?

Sorry?

Hitler? Did you see Hitler or not?

Oh, no, no. Hitler didn't – he was not in – there. He was elsewhere I think, going to the *Bundestag* [parliament] or something, the equivalent. We were just a *Seitengasse* [side street] or something. We were, as I said, close to the Danube Canal. It was a main road there.

So it was in your area, near your area, where you saw this?

Worse. It was right next to our house, they passed, they marched. And I was delighted, you know, welcome [laughs]. Anyway, coming back to Jackie, finally we got the notification that he had arrived safely.

And when was that roughly?

That was, Anschluss.

So, Anschluss was in March.

March. Probably April. Or before the Ansch– I think it may have been before. They saw it coming. They knew it was coming, the Anschluss. Betar decided they'd get their people out as soon – so I think it was before.

And Jackie, what about you? So, you continued going to school then you had this incident with this snail.

No. No, that – at that stage they – my parents had moved me to a Jewish school. Jackie was no longer there and I don't remember if it was my father who took me to the school every day. [00:34:01]

But at what point did you move to the Jewish school from your little elementary school?

Oh, almost immediately.

After the Anschluss?

After the Anschluss.

So that snail incident, you think it was even before the Anschluss?

It was I think before the Anschluss. Yes, because they wanted me to continue going to a school. And that's –

And which Jewish school? Where did they move you?

I haven't a clue. Not a clue. I have got no *Zeugnisse* [school reports], nothing.

And do you remember what did you feel, leaving that school? Were you happy to leave because of the atmosphere?

Oh, yes.

To go to the Jewish school.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I realised this was bad.

Yeah, you – so you knew –

Yes, I already.

You didn't want to go back there.

No, no, no, I didn't want to go back and of course I used to hear my parents talking of – obviously about bad things that were happening and afraid of and losing Jackie, that he would – for them it was a great loss, as it was for me. He did the right thing.

At the time for them, that –

At the time. Yes, and also, he and his group, as soon as war broke out, joined the British Army. So they –

Because it's easy in hindsight, you know, we think, oh, of course this is a good thing. But at the time it wasn't.

No, of course not. But he was illegal, an illegal immigrant in Mandate Palestine. Before that, they used to intercept the boats, as you know, like Exodus, years later. But he and his group managed to jump from the ship, swim ashore and disappeared. That's how they entered Palestine illegally. And of course, the other people from the same group helped them and he worked not on the *kibbutz* but on some farm in Hadera, that part, for the – at the beginning. But he went – he was safe.

Yeah. So what happened after the Anschluss to your parents professionally? [00:36:03] I mean to your father's shops?

It was all taken. Everything was confiscated. When he was in Dachau the Gestapo, all the *Sturmabteilung* came to my mother and chucked us out of the apartment and made us live in another apartment with a Jewish gentleman. That I remember. And somehow my mother managed to get back into that original apartment, that's when the father came.

So Natan, I assume that your father was arrested on Kristallnacht? Or –

Yes.

It's more likely than Anschluss.

Yes. Yes, I – it was Kristallnacht I think. You're right.

Yeah, because that's when they arrested –

They, look, there was a – they had a list of all the Jews and they knew where to find my father. That's the Stormtroopers.

And where were you on that, Kristallnacht?

I was at home.

Do you remember any – did you see anything?

No. No, I didn't. I didn't see anything.

But you saw the arrest of your father?

Yes.

You were there in the flat when they came?

Oh, yes. Yes. That was terrible. That was terrible. And I was more worried for my mother of course. The – my mother was a feisty lady. She had a very strong character. Things she did lately, I will tell you. Came to – during the battle for Safed, came to me to say, I've come to take you home [laughs]. I'll tell you this was hilarious on one side but the guts to do that.

But when they came to arrest your father, you were still in your flat?

Yes. Yes.

At the time. They took him.

They took him by force and –

He didn't want to go obviously, did he? [00:38:05]

No, no, he tried to resist but – and – or maybe he tried to explain that he's a veteran of the First World War and he was – had all the decorations and everything. But they were *Jude*, and that's it, Dachau. He was lucky it was only Dachau. Dachau was not an extermination camp, as you know. Buchenwald was especially for – he had a brother, a younger brother, a doctor. Doctors were sent to Buchenwald where they were worked to death on quarries. All the doctors had special treatment.

But he was arrested probably and first imprisoned, I would assume.

Yes.

And then sent to Dachau.

I imagine so, yes. Yes. That's what happened I think.

But your mother found out where he was.

Yes. Yes.

And then went there.

And then went to Gestapo and bribed. That was amazing. And succeeded.

And how long, do you know, was he in Dachau for?

It could have been only many weeks I think, not months.

Well, long enough that – to change his looks that –

Oh, yes.

That you thought.

Yes, terrible. It was shocking.

And did he talk about it at all, about –

Not to me. On the contrary, he tried to make me feel comfortable I suppose but it was a shock to see what they did at the time I was there.

Did they do something to the flat as well? Did they take things from the flat?

I think they did, yes. Yes. We had a grand piano which Jackie used to play, a grand piano. That was left. It was too heavy [laughs]. But what they made us, my mother and me, vacate the flat and go and live with this elderly, disturbed, Jewish gentleman. [00:40:07]

Where was that?

At the same – Hörnesgasse, it was two floors above us, three floors. This is just a memory. I can't remember any more details. To me it was horrific.

That you had to leave?

To leave, that I didn't know what was happening to my father and also to be with such a person who to me seemed demented. But these are horrible memories.

And school after that, after Kristallnacht, was there any school?

Yes, I went to this Jewish school.

Even after Kristallnacht?

Yes. That was amazing. And that's where I [laughs] – I'm right-hand – I'm left-handed. I was forced to write with my right hand. It's remained to me ever since. I can only draw with my left hand and can only write with my right hand. But, you know, rabbis, they are very insistent. They used to smack me unless I changed.

So you were forced there –

I was forced to write- but, you know, it became difficult but even in the army, to have a rifle to shoot, they're made for right-handed people, not left-handed, but I managed extremely well.

So that was an advantage maybe that you learnt [laughs] how to- yeah. What else do you remember from that school? Any friends you had or –

No.

No? It was probably a short time you went to –

Which school? Because –

The Jewish school.

No, no, no. I haven't a clue. I can't –

And the non-Jewish school? Any friends?

No. I never made any friends. They obviously must have kept their distance amongst Jewish.

No, I was too young then even to make any.

Yes. Well, it's amazing that you have all your memories in this age. Some people can't remember anything.

Really? Yes.

Yeah.

No, that I felt was a disgrace to my family, what I did to my family, I was very upset.

[00:42:04]

About the snail?

Yes, I was so upset, it took Jackie weeks to pacify me because I thought, "*Was für eine Schande*", what a shame I have brought upon – and it's my fault that –

Yeah. But this is very – it's an interesting episode because it shows as a child, you know, you – you can't make sense of it, so you make sense of it in your way, and, you know.

In my way, yes. Yes. Yeah. Anyway –

Yeah. So, your father came back and then they were serious about trying to emigrate, you and them.

Yes. Yeah, what happened in their case, I understand, years later I mean. First of all, whenever I was, and Jackie was in the British Army at that stage, he knew where I was, he knew I was with a Jewish family and I never knew where he was because it was secret. I mean soldiers were not allowed to disclose even the weather when they wrote. I've got lots – I've kept all his letters. In fact, I've kept all the letters, even love letters from Ruth, everything I've kept, friends, I have kept all those for good reasons. Anyway, when Jackie settled with these Betar people and then joined the army, he knew the address of the Jewish family. And when I moved to my Christian family in Somerset later, he also – I sent him that address but I could never write to him really because everything was censored for them. They weren't even allowed to discuss the weather, as you know, so he didn't know where my parents were or whether they were dead or alive, for about a year, two years, we did not know. [00:44:08] And this is where I had a big problem with the Christian family. I must tell you the beginning, how I came to them 'cos that is a fantastic story.

But Natan, let me just – because we are not there yet. We're still a bit further back.

Please take me. Do –

Take you back. I'll take you back and we'll come back to that. I want to go back to the moment your father came back and they now realised they had to do something. So just tell me again, you said your father had a contact in –

He had a contact in London.

How did he have – what contact was that?

Well, by post, it must have been, or phone, I don't know.

Was it somebody he knew personally or –

Yes, he knew him personally it seems. I don't know the details, only what I heard.

Well, do you know his name, that person?

Not a clue, nothing. All I know is the photograph was sent to him.

And was he a tailor himself, that man?

I think so, yes, he must have been. He must have been 'cos what else would he be doing in a Turkish bath and showing this beautiful boy?

[Laughs] I love this image of a Turkish bath with a photograph.

[Laughs] Yes, it was their relaxation every Friday afternoon. It was like a club and –

You know, it's funny because my father was in the textile business and he loved going to the sauna, so maybe I just think I have understood something now [both laugh]. Maybe it's related.

Yes, it is, I'm sure. I'm sure. They used to go *Schwitzbad*, that's it, a sauna or Turkish bath. The important thing, it's a club. And I was lucky.

Amazing. So, he took that photo. So, it means also that probably your Kindertransport wasn't organised through the community, because some Kinder came organised through the Vienna Jewish community, but this is different. [00:46:02]

No, it was –

They looked for private sponsors.

This was it, yes. And my future Jewish foster father, he signed certain documents and gave money, £150, I don't know, to the British government. Why did they – and that was returned years later.

Was it?

Yes.

The money came back –

The money – no, I read in the paper, one of the Jewish papers, that that was refunded by the British government.

Because somebody – I was just – somewhere, somebody asked because actually what happened to the money, it was like a bond, wasn't it? Yes.

Yeah, there was a fund. Do you know why the British asked for this? That if the child did not fit in and they had to send it back, they'd need to cover their trip back.

So the money was paid back to them?

It was paid back to all the people I understand who had laid out for the Kindertransport. That's my understanding.

So that family, you said, so he was a tailor, they had five children.

Yes.

They lived in the East End.

Yes.

They were probably not well-off or –

Well, quite well-off. He was making obviously a very good business because they had this lovely house in one of the nice streets, Harley Grove. It was well-known because a famous politician lived there as well. I remember that well because a few weeks after I arrived, that politician who was known throughout the East End, he lived in a lovely house in the same street but he passed away and my foster father took me to pass respects by going to that house. I finally suddenly remembered that. But that was a famous street and it had a famous synagogue there, which he was one of the leading members.

So the – he was quite well-off then in that place, yes.

He was, yes. Look, they owned this beautiful – I think it was a Regency house and also, he built this big workshop at a big – they had a big garden there, where, by the way, they had a shelter put in to take shelter when the bombing started. [00:48:16] They were in the shelter when the house was hit by a bomb, so it was a good job that we weren't there.

What was his name?

His name was Tober, T-O-B-E-R.

And first name?

And the first name was Chaim.

Chaim Tober.

Tober.

And was he already born in England or had he come –

No, no, no, no, no, he came from Lithuania I think. Yes, he came from Lithuania. I know this for a fact because he – his family were very poor and he as a young boy had to support the whole family with his dressmaking.

And his wife, was she English-born or –

No, no, no, she was Polish. I knew that she and the family fled the pogroms. And I remember as a boy she told me that her brother was captured by the Poles, anti-Semites who buried him alive. I remember as a boy, this stuck in my head, what – and –

And Natan, so take us back. We're back to Vienna, preparing for Kindertransport. What – was there any time – how – what were you told? What do you remember?

I was just told I am going to England to live with a lovely Jewish family, who also have sons and daughters. That, my father explained to me, and that I should behave myself and be not – and not besmirch the name of Sonnenschein [laughs] I was told. And so, he goes out and buys me a pair of *Lederhosen* [leather shorts] and a feather cap, can you imagine? The first day at an English school, the bullies came up to me and challenged me to fights every – I had quite a difficult time. [00:50:02]

And Natan, when your father told you that, how did you feel? I mean you were very young.

How did I feel?

Yeah.

I felt that I was doing the right thing for them. I really felt that they were doing what is for my own good. I was old enough to realise.

You understood that?

Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

You were not resentful of being sent away?

No, I wasn't. I realised – I was already mature enough in a way to realise what was happening, what has happened to my father, what's going to happen, that they are sending me to safety. I realised that. And as I told you, when we all turned up on the day at the *Hauptbahnhof* [main station] and I see all these masses of *Kinder* with the parents all crying their eyes out, and my father takes me aside and gives me the postcards.

So tell us again in detail. So, you left your flat. Did both your parents come to the train station?

Yes. Yes, and they were crying together with all the other parents and kissing me goodbye and urging me to behave myself when I am with this new family and my father also gave me a big toy boat to play with. And then I was introduced to a little boy who was crying and the parents came and asked would I look after him, and I did throughout that train journey.

Was this – do you remember his name?

No, I don't. He was –

You just stayed with him in – on the train.

I stayed – yes, and on the journey also, one of the older girls joined me in trying to calm him down. So Kindertransport children were helping each other.

And it was Hauptbahnhof, not Westbahnhof?

It was a *Hauptbahnhof*, yes.

And so what – the scene was crying parents, crying children.

A mass of parents crying and saying goodbye and kissing goodbyes to their...

What about porters and other people there, do you remember, was there any other memories you have of actually that train station? [00:52:16]

No, I don't remember that. I just remember all the upset parents and children all crying.

Did you know anyone else there?

No, I didn't know anyone. I was just briefly introduced obviously to the parents of that little boy who was crying and begging me, we will look after him.

Was he younger than you?

Oh, yes. I mean I was eight and he was probably five or six. And there was a girl also, who was probably aged ten, who helped me on the train to pacify him. She helped me.

And can you describe a little bit from your memories the train, the compartment? Just tell us a little bit. What did it look like?

A normal compartment, the usual seats arranged, nothing – because I had been on a train before obviously. During summer months my mother used to take me to the countryside or something, so it didn't look unusual. And I suppose people, the officials on the train may have looked like Gestapo, I don't know, from time to time who came through, I'm not sure. But that's – my main objective was I took my toy boat and gave it to this boy to calm him down, to play. He – so it kept him quiet throughout the journey until Harwich I think.

What other – so you had your Lederhosen and your little hat. Other things you took in your suitcase, do you remember?

Yes, my – and he got a whole *Ausstattung* [outfits], all my [laughs] beautiful blouses and trousers and stockings that my parents packed for me obviously. I'll never forget what I had

to wear to be able to – now girls, who had this special harness for keeping their white stockings up. [00:54:10] Do you remember that or not?

Yeah, yeah.

Well, the boys had to do the same because we were given the same stockings.

So did you take that to England?

Well, I had no choice. I always had to.

Under the Lederhosen?

Under the *Hosen*, yeah. That just stuck in my mind [ph]. The first thing in England, [laughs] I got rid of it. But I shall never forget, for me it was the bane of my life [laughs].

Any books or anything?

I had a few books, *Kinder* things I suppose, and not to forget the pen and pencils to keep my calligraphy going.

Because your father was quite keen on –

Oh, very much calligraphy.

Yes, the calligraphy.

It was very important to my father.

To write nicely [ph].

To write the right way and correct, and grammar.

So your father just before you left, gave you – tell us exactly what happened with these. There were postcards he gave you.

He gave me the postcards and explained why he's giving it to me and begged me that at any opportunity where I see a suitable postbox, to just drop it in. He said, my address is on this and my name, it will get to me. I want to know that you are safe. It is important that you will always – and also write what you can because as you saw, I wrote to *meine lieben Eltern* this and that. At the end, *ich küsse Euch*, I kiss you, and this is where I got stuck on grammar. Does *Küsse* have to be with a big – capital letter or small one? And he taught me that everything that you can touch is a noun. And then in German, nouns have to have capital letters. [00:56:02] And you can see on this, my hesitation, a K is there crossed out and [laughs] after all those years it all came back. And he kept this throughout their journey to hell, to Palestine, to Mauritius and back again when the British permitted them to enter Palestine legally at the end of the war. And then when I came to meet up with them, he gave this to me.

Yeah, your postcards?

My postcards.

But of course the postcards, because I was thinking about it, you could only post that in Germany because it had a German stamp.

Yes, of course.

So the minute you crossed, you couldn't use it.

I don't know. I don't know what he told me at the time. Maybe he said what you said. To me that makes total sense what you said.

Because that postcard is sent from Würzburg I think. That's what it said. We're going to look at it.

Yes. Pressburg? What did you say?

Würzburg. I think it's Würzburg, it said that but –

Würzburg – I don't know. I didn't look.

Because then my other question is, what – do you remember the route of the train and when you managed to do these postcards?

Yeah, I don't remember. I don't remember. And all I remember, Hook of Holland. I don't remember even getting out of the train, quite frankly. I just don't – and it's a puzzle.

Because it's extraordinary, you must have written it.

It is. Yes.

And then left the train to put it in somewhere.

Yeah, yeah.

Or given it to somebody.

Yes, yes. I don't know. It's –

And how many were there? How many postcards?

Probably three or four, something like that.

You must have sent it I think from the major stations, you know, of the train.

Hauptbahnhof.

From the Hauptbahnhof because how else could you have sent it?

Yes. Yes, yes, which means I would have had to get out of the train. I don't know if I would have had the guts to do that at the time because I would have been afraid that I'm there and the train moves.

Exactly.

So I really don't – it's a puzzle, you're absolutely right, I couldn't agree more. [00:58:04] It's a –

Maybe you gave it to somebody? But then who else would have been on that train?

[Laughs] I don't know. I really don't know. Gestapo going [ph]. Who knows? No, I really – I really don't know how that – that is amazing that it did –

So those postcards survived. We're going to look at them later. But do you remember what were you were feeling when the train crossed into Holland?

I suppose it must have been that we were told and I realised this is relief. I did, yes. We're – and the boy stopped crying I think. Well, it wasn't my good deed, it was the girl who was really mothering him. But that stuck in my memory. I felt so sorry for him, this little boy.

I mean it's amazing that you as an eight-year-old had to take care of a younger child.

Yeah. Well, yes.

Did you give him that boat or did you lend –

No, no, I got it back because when I arrived in London, Liverpool Street, my Jewish foster father was there to meet me and he brought me home, it was Friday afternoon, his wife was in this house which had – a large house, had a basement, the kitchen was nice [ph], she was preparing for the Friday night meal because the family were coming together. And lo and behold, the eldest daughter came home – she was a secretary at one of the big newspaper printers [ph] – her name was Lilian [ph], she was the eldest daughter – came specially to welcome me. And her mother was sitting there with me, crying her heart out because she was feeling sorry. I mean I was crying as well. So, Lilian [ph] had to try and- and then she saw I had a boat and she said, come, ‘Otto, I’ll help you, we’ll put it in a bowl of water and we’ll sail it.’ [01:00:02] She was trying to help me. It was so lovely. And they were just about to give me something to eat I suppose and Lilian [ph] said to me – and by the way, my only common language would have been German. Now, they don’t spoke German but their Jewish – Yiddish, even the children grew up in the East End speaking it, so I had some form – so Lilian [ph] and the others said to me, Otto, wash your hands. What did she say? Wash your hands. I didn’t know a word of English. And she showed me what she meant. And for days I was walking around saying, wash your hands. Oh, I’m speaking English, this is fantastic. And it didn’t [laughs] get better. I was going around saying, wash your hands. And I must tell you a sequel. Ruth and I about two months ago were in hospital when we had the bug going around and I’m waiting for her to come out of having been to see a doctor. Opposite me is a toilet, and what is above there? A huge sign saying, wash your hands. I thought, my God, all these years [laughs] and I still am [laughs] – it was so funny. Anyway –

So, your first words in English were wash your hands.

Wash your hands. And for days, weeks, I used to – I was- because one of the boys, one of the sons, was teaching me step – I was sharing his bedroom with him when I arrived, he was a member of *Habonim*, one of the senior members. The first thing he did, he gave me a blue shirt. He said, ‘You are now a member of *Habonim*, a Zionist movement, one day you will go to Palestine,’ and that’s how I became a member of *Habonim*. But that only lasted about a year because after that he decided although he was in India serving, he said there’s a better movement and that’s called *Hashomer Hatzair*. You know of that surely?

Yeah.

I became a staunch member of *Hashomer Hatzair*. In fact, I became a *madrich* at the end.
[01:02:01] And that's one of the things that also – we had a member of the *Palmach* came to be with us, an emissary, and that already focused me in what I –

In the '40s, in London?

Oh, yeah. That was in London.

Yeah. But Natan, when you arrived at Liverpool Street – so first of all you arrived, you said Hook of Holland. Then do you remember the boat trip to Harwich?

No. No.

So you can't remember much from the actual journey?

No, I don't, except children crying.

Yeah. And in Harwich itself, then?

Harwich, I can't even remember, quite frankly. I just remember looking out of the window and seeing the motion and everything like that and then moving to another carriage. That's basically it.

And Liverpool Street, you said when you arrived you –

When I arrived, I – we were taken all out of the carriage and there were masses of foster parents waiting and of course each of us had a label at the time, and my future foster father, Chaim Tober came to me and welcomed me and brought me home.

Because he knew your number or –

I can't really – I had a name. It must have been Otto Sonnenschein I imagine. But that's how he came and –

And how did you – you managed to speak to him?

Oh, yes, easily for him because he was fluent Yiddish and that was not a problem.

That was lucky for you in a way with the Yiddish, that you could manage the German and Yiddish.

Yes, it- absolutely.

And what was your first impression of him when you –

Of a very kind, caring gentleman. Yes, yes. And he was. I mean as the weeks passed, he spent so much time with me, especially Friday when he stopped working because he was observant, and Saturday was our special time together. [01:04:05] He had a huge library in English and Yiddish because he was very, very cultured in that respect and he used to spend a lot of time explaining to me his background, what happened, what happened to his wife and not to – pacifying me all the time.

So they really took care of you.

Oh, yeah.

I mean they really were involved.

Yes. Oh, yes, night and day it was they were caring for me. And one of the first things is they took me to the school and entered my name there. That was very important. And also took me to the local synagogue. I became a member of the *heder* there. They decided that that's how I should be brought up.

And Natan, how did you feel – I mean obviously you had a Jewish upbringing. How similar was it to coming into this family? You know, how similar from your own upbringing? What was different?

In a way, yes. What happened – well, the eldest son, Archie, had just graduated as a doctor and he's got his – not doctor, medical doctor, at University College Hospital. He had a room in a – high above the room that Moshe and I had, and I used to visit him 'cos he was still studying and he opened one of the cloakroom doors and there was a skeleton hanging. [Laughs] And it was the first time in my life, I shall never forget. So he took the time to teach me medicine as well. No, he became very close and started teaching me English and how to behave. And the same with my foster sisters. They all grouped around me and kept me –

So, what was most different for you, in terms of the – from what were you used to? The food, the house, what –

Everything. [01:06:00] Everything English, Jewish, because my parents did not keep a strict *kosher* home like they did. And Saturday, *Shabbat* was that, and then I was entered into the Hebrew school there immediately, I used to attend Hebrew classes.

But was it of interest to you or was it – you didn't have any negative – you didn't feel –

No, I didn't.

You didn't want to be there?

No. No, no. I felt comfortable and also, I was so proud that my foster father was one of the chief *machers* of that synagogue and he was an inspector, he used to come and inspect the –

The kashrut?

Not the *kashrut*, but the teaching in the –

Oh, on the –

He was an inspector for that.

What was the name of that synagogue?

It was the United Synagogue. It's no longer a synagogue, it's a mosque. They – it changed years later to a mosque after the war.

Oh. Where? Was it on the main –

It's [overtalking].

On the – East End?

East End.

The main road there, the –

Yes. It was the, um, one of the main synagogues.

Off Brick Lane?

No, much further. We were much further away, in a nice part of the East End. Brick Lane is a market.

Yes, Bow.

Bow, as you know, that's where Moseley used to come and fight, etc. No, no, they were in Harley Street [sic] which was a much, much higher-class area. Bow.

In Bow. And that's where the synagogue was?

The synagogue was in the same street, just a few hundred yards down from where they had bought the house, because they were very observant, or he was, and the sons followed in his footsteps, *kohanim*. But yes, I – and also [laughs] in his – they had a huge garden – he'd built a workshop there where he employed tailors and pressers, ironers, and –

So he worked from home?

He worked from home. But he used to make up costumes and things for the leading retailers in London, the famous names. [01:08:05] He used to come home with the patterns and everything, and everything was cut and –

What was the name? Did he have a business name or just –

Tober. T-O-B-E-R. [Laughs] And on the cards he had mantles and costumes, special [ph]. But all the leading stores that had costumes that were using him, and other tailors from the East End.

And do you know, was their correspondence between your parents and them? Was their contact between them or –

Eventually, yes, because my father could only write to – he did not know a word of English and he – at that stage, they could decipher it because the sons knew – studied German, I think. They were bright.

So the sons were quite – the children were quite well-educated, their children.

Oh, yes. Yes, both. Yes, both got scholarships from well-known schools in the East End where most Jewish boys did get schol – they were bright. And as I said, the eldest son just graduated at University College and became a doctor. War broke out, he immediately joined the army, in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and he spent time in India and other places. In

fact, when I was evacuated to the Christian family in Somerset, he came especially because he was based in Dorset, the next county. I remember – these are memories. He looked after my welfare as well.

So Natan, so you arrived there in July '39, yeah, with the family. Then war broke out.

Yes.

And then you told me that you were evacuated with your sisters – your foster sisters.

It was a disaster.

Tell us about it, please.

Yeah. Well, I won't tell you about it, it's so horrible. **[01:10:01]** And her mother decided finally because they were afraid that they would lose both children in one of the raids but they decided that there's no choice. And my sister was a teenager and she was bright enough to say, Mummy, I'd rather die with you all in the Blitz, I mean this is impossible. Mother came and she saw the situation and she packed our bags and took us back.

Why was it so bad, Natan? What was so bad?

They were just nasty, nasty people. Ignorant. Ignorant people. And also did not feed us properly. But those days there was rationing, they took away our rations, things like that.

And where was it? Where?

This was in Banbury, which is Oxfordshire. Banbury. Well-known. These were no – low, low, low, bottom of – nasty.

To both of you, to you and –

To both of us, yes.

But luckily you were not there by yourself.

Exactly. I wouldn't have coped. But my sister realised this is no way to live and begged her mother to take us home, she'd rather we died together with them in the Blitz. But this is awful. Mother realised and took us.

And how long were there for roughly in – like a month or –

Oh, yes, something like that. A month or two I imagine. And I had to go to school locally as well and so did my sister.

And how did you manage with English, Natan?

Well, that was difficult. That was difficult. Not only English but learning arithmetic in England, which was entirely different. You know, [laughs] talking in pounds, [laughs] ounces and that. I was already conversant with weights and grammar and that, and suddenly it all changed. It was difficult to understand. But I became extremely good at reading English because I was better than the local kids. [01:12:04] Whenever an inspector came, the teacher used to say, Otto, please stand up and I'd like you to read this. She wanted to show off how well I'm becoming educated and I managed that very well and I was very proud of it, both in the London school and also in Somerset.

And do you remember what you were reading, what English books, what you were reading at the time?

They were – I can't. They were a variety of English typical books that young people were given. [Laughs] I used to use the – we used to be given a comic to read at the – every weekend, everybody got a newspaper and I got my comics [laughs]. You know what comics are? Yeah. That was in Somerset.

So when you came back, then how much time passed before you again were evacuated or –

It – probably only a few weeks. Very quickly. It happened very quickly. Can I go on and tell you what happened then?

Yes, please.

Yeah. Again, the Tober family, my Jewish family, decided they – the bombs were falling, people were being killed even in shelters, they felt it responsible that I must be sent to safety, so they put me on another- from the school. In those days when children were evacuated, you were going into the unknown. You didn't know. It came – they didn't call it a bus – a charabanc, you know, one thing, bus. You were given a packet of sandwiches and a gas mask and you went into the unknown. And I thought to myself, I am alone without my sister, what happens if I'm with that sort? I could – I wouldn't be able to. We arrive eventually, going through Somerset in a most beautiful part of England, Somerset, to this picturesque village called Burlescombe. [01:14:04] I don't know how well you know that area but it's between Taunton and Wellington and it was really a lovely village. And what happens? All the evacuees, we were taken to the local school and we were getting out and in the schoolyard waiting, where I see several ladies waiting for us, and these were the *machers*, as you know. There was the Red Cross lady, the Women's Institute, they were responsible for dividing those and billeting all these children. And I see amongst these women – there were about four or five of them, they were getting ready. And if there were couples like brothers and sisters, they would not split them up but they'd say, these two go to Farmer Giles, these – and I thought, my God, to go through this. And what do I see? – and I'll show you a photograph – this beautiful, lovely English lady, dressed so nicely. And I thought, oh, my, I'd love to have her as my foster mother. And she was dishing out as well and she said, okay, these two go to this farm, and I just plucked up courage and I walked up to – oh, yes, before that, before I went up to her, a young boy of about sixteen appears dressed in white. He'd obviously come from playing either cricket or tennis, and it transpired that was her son. So, I walk up to her and I said, please would you have me? And I made her an offer she could not refuse. It was like *Oliver Twist*. And she took me. And it was the happiest days of my life.

So you chose her?

Yes, I did. And that love continued. Her husband, who was a chief inspector of the Great Western Railways before and he used to have – work night duties a lot, and he became my father. [01:16:03] I've come to another thing at the moment. He had said before she left home, he said, don't you dare bring one of those [laughs] evacuees home, do you hear? Of course what did she do? She came home and John, my foster brother, had a bicycle, his father had a bicycle because if you lived in Somerset, the countryside, it's- And do you know what he did? The following day, the father went out and bought himself a new bicycle, gave his bicycle to John, and John's bicycle came to me. And my heavens opened. But it was difficult because to converse with them, they did not speak German. But slowly, John made it his – he – I think he studied some German. He treated me like his own brother all the time we lived together and he was very proud of me. He was very athletic, he was captain of rugby, captain of football, cricket, all those things, which he then taught me. Every day he came back from grammar school, he used to put me against the wall. I had cricket balls and if I cried, he says, here in England, we don't cry, we're not mummy's boy, you are going to be toughened up. And this is how – what he did to me. We – the happiest – and he had his own bicycle then, so then together he was showing me also on these bicycles the countryside and how to behave. And no more *Lederhosen* or that. They thought it was hilarious.

You still had it when you got there?

Yes. Yes.

And tell me about the family. So how many children were there?

Only one son, and he was – he had a scholarship to – oh, to this grammar school in Tiverton – Tiverton Grammar. He was bright. But he was – because war broke out and he joined the cadet force and here I had another Jackie, here. [01:18:06] And he spent all his time when he came back from grammar school, teaching me all what he'd been taught as well, how to behave, English grammar, some arithmetic, and above all, sport. He taught me how to play cricket, he tried to teach me how to play rugby [laughs]. And every match he went to, he took

me with him. Years later when Ruth and I got married and he came to see us, and I introduced him, and Ruth said to him, John, it was amazing, you had this little Jewish Austrian boy and you took him everywhere. You were amazing. He said, Ruth, nobody else had one of those [both laugh]. And the other thing is, the war effort. Can I continue talking?

Yes, please.

The war effort. We at school were urged to try and help our heroes, our troops, the RAF pilots and that, we must give a contribution to the funds they're raising, like the Red Cross and the Benevolent Fund. And John and I used to get at the end of the week from the parents, and the grandmother who lived there, our weekly wages. They gave us a little – small amount of money each. And John said, we have to invest that to help our heroic troops, Otto. We must make some money. And do you know what he decided? And I started at the beginning, giving my money to the Red Cross. And on my bicycle, I used to go around to various farms and I used to leave money for them, as long as they contributed as well. As a Jewish Viennese refugee, I wanted to raise money. And it became known that Otto is collecting for the – and I wanted it to be known in the village. [01:20:03] But John said, we're not making enough, it's – I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll pool all our money and we will buy some traps and we will trap moles. Do you know what moles are? Moles are furry creature that have a very expensive fur. And we bought a set of traps which we used to go out at six o'clock in the morning and put it around where streams are to catch these moles and we started mole-catching, because each pelt that you got was sixpence you got for that. And that was for the war effort. And in Somerset, all the farmers liked the fur for their waistcoats and their jackets and that. So it became a business. And my job was every morning to go – he set the traps in the morning, I had to go and collect [laughs] what we had. And then the worst part of that was we had to remove the fur. That was terrible. That was – it means he used to pull the pelt like that, I had a razorblade and I dug in and they'd exploded in my face and it was- I said it's horrible, I can't do this. He said, yes, you are, you're a crybaby. We will get on, we will make money. And that – you then had to peel off that, tack it on a wooden plank or something, and dry-air it and then we went and sold these to farmers. And we started making quite a lot of money. [Laughs] Years later when he met Ruth as well, she said, John, it was

amazing that you had this Otto and he helped with all this. He said, 'Ruth, we made a lot of money. After all, I had a Jewish partner,' [laughs]. He had a wonderful sense of humour.

But when they took you in, I mean did they realise you were a refugee boy?

Yes, they knew everything. And here I must tell you something there. [01:22:00] This was – the mother was a devoted Christian, and so she brought up her son and every Sunday he used to go to the church. And I – they put me in the local village school and I loved morning assembly also, and hymn singing. That I loved. And every Sunday – oh, yes, what happened that time, I didn't know where my parents were. I didn't know if they were dead or alive. Jackie, my brother, knew where I was because the Jewish family had given him my new address also. He was always able to communicate. I've got all his letters in German to me. And he kept on – and we didn't know, were my parents – are they alive? If so, where are they? We had no – and he used to send me these letters trying to calm me down and he said to me, Otto, I'm doing everything possible to – through my superior officers, we're all trying to find out what became of them. And after many months we discovered what had happened.

But did you know that they'd left Vienna?

I – somehow I must have. No, I didn't. I didn't. Because they may have been sent to a concentration – no, I didn't – we didn't know of their whereabouts and I had to rely on – they themselves, the Jewish family, tried to trace it so and couldn't. Never knew. Now, what happened with my Christian foster mother, she realised how I was upset, not knowing, and in church – and also it seems that I was having nightmares and I used to cry myself to sleep, not knowing where my parents are. And we are – now I'm telling you what a wonderful woman she was. She realised that I was having these terrible, terrible dreams and upsets and crying, that I was crying at night, and it upset her. [01:24:05] And we're sitting in church, John here, I'm here, and I loved the hymn singing. I used to join that. And she turns around to me as they are kneeling and she says, Otto, remain seated. I want you to know one thing, darling, never forget, you are a Jew, your parents are Jewish, and you're growing up to be a Jew. I have no other way of bringing you up, except I want you to know, we pray to the same God but when we kneel, as a Jewish person you don't have to kneel. So darling, you are doing the

right thing, don't worry. That's how it was. I'm sorry, I'm crying [gets upset]. There's more to follow. I have to jump in here. It was during the War of Independence where I was on active duty, the British Mandate had ended, they had moved out of Tzfat and handed over all the strategic positions to the local Arabs and we knew that we would be exterminated if- We didn't have the weapons sufficiently or the ammunition. It was a bad time. And I'm sitting in one of these dugouts together with a very close friend of mine, who like myself, came from Vienna, and also his mother was together with my parents in Mauritius, we discovered later. And the other boys had all come out of the gas chambers, out of Auschwitz and all these [inaudible] and we were by – we were there, *Aliyat HaNoar* had sent us there. And we had already undergone military training and we had not got the arms to defend ourselves. And when the British left, nothing, no convoy came in and out of Safed. [01:26:05] It was terrible. We were running out. In fact, the boys from the concentration camp wanted to commit suicide and they had already arranged a rota which Eric and I said, no way, this is not going to happen. If we don't defend, who's going to look after all the old people and the young? No way, we fight to the end. And they listened and that's what happened. What happened at that particular time, we're sitting there, the British had left, we were being bombarded by a Syrian colonel who'd come all the way from Syria with artillery and was bombarding us. And we thought, Eric and I, this is not going to last long, and suddenly there's a burst of laughter and hilarity. What had happened, a convoy had managed to – a Jewish convoy, Israeli – break through and brought ammunition and arms and other things to help us. Above all, they came with a crate of post which had not been delivered and they quickly disseminated the post and there was a letter for Otto Sonnenschein. And we're sitting there and bullets are hailing over us and everything and I open this and guess who the letter is from? My mother, my Christian mother. And she – I haven't kept that letter. I am sorry, that is the most treasured thing I had, I don't know where, and I can't help weeping when I read from memory. She said, my dear Otto, I realise – we realise, John and I – and John by that time had joined the army as well, the British Army there. She said, 'I realise what your parents must be going through, thinking of you and Jackie. God keep you both.' She thought that we are really there. And then she says, Otto, darling, remember, you used to suffer from quite a weak chest and get bad colds. [01:28:06] I hope you're wrapping up warmly and wearing the scarf I gave you. Can you imagine? [Laughs] What is happening and my

Christian mother is behaving like that, it's – and I showed this to my friend who could read English and he too burst into tears because the way she wrote and the care was hard for him.

This was in '48?

This was '48, yes. And we succeeded in surviving.

So it seems to me at that point you were lucky because you had two families who you – who were –

Close.

Nice to you and you could connect to and took care of you.

Yes. Yes. More than nice. They were special. Yes. But remember, the Christian family. And there's another sequel to this, that John, my foster brother, when I left them – I was bad at communicating, I didn't write to them or I didn't know this – John joined the British Boys' Army. And he was always military-minded and tried to also bring me up the same way. We used to do – he taught me all these things. I did –

How much older was he? Was he older than you?

Yes, he was much older. He was – when I arrived, I was, what, eight, nine. He was fifteen, sixteen. Yeah. And the family were bereft because I had left and he had left as well, so they were –

So tell us, how long did you stay there roughly? For a few years?

Yes. Oh, yes. I stayed there from, um, up to the age of thirteen almost. Twelve. I was twelve when I left. Four – about four or five years.

So from '39 to '42 more or less.

More. Longer. It was about a year before my *bar mitzvah*.

And you left them, it was still the wartime, yes. [01:30:02]

Yes. Oh, yes. It was – it went on for quite a while.

So while you were there, were you in touch with the Jewish family as well?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, they communicated. In fact, my – the eldest foster brother who was a doctor, he was in the army, the Royal Army Medical Corps, he came to see me specially because he was based in the next county, Dorset. So he also came and –

So you kept in touch?

Oh, absolutely.

And Natan, were you ever in touch with any refugee organisations? Did you ever meet any – was any –

I must have. When it came to High Holidays, let's say, *Pesach*, a rabbi from Taunton used to come to the village and talk to the Christian foster parents what one does and that sort of thing. So there was a connection. And also, I was invited by that rabbi to come to stay with him I think in Taunton, one *Rosh Hashanah* or something. So there was a connection in that respect. But of course, the Jewish family made it their business that I should be brought up in the Jewish way and they were in touch with this rabbi to make sure that I was being taught Hebrew lessons and things like that.

So they felt it was their responsibility to make sure?

Yeah. It was.

And then what led to the decision that you had to leave? Tell us a little bit about that.

Yeah. The – I had to leave because my *bar mitzvah* was coming close and they realised that this is the right way and reluctantly they gave in but they felt bereft when I left because also soon later their own son left home, so they were very upset.

And did they want to adopt you, you said?

Yes, yes.

So who did they write to, your –

They – that's – oh, yes. [01:32:02] At one point we discovered where my parents were. They were in Mauritius. How Mauritius? I mean John and I, who used to have albums of foreign stamps – that's the first thing in Mauritius when we looked at a map – it's near Madagascar – what has – we then discovered what had happened. They tried to get into Palestine illegally, were intercepted by His Majesty's navy, and they were dragged in to a detention camp near Haifa, called Atlit. And at that time they decided, the British Mandate, they will send them to the island of Mauritius. Now, the *Haganah*, headed by Ben-Gurion, made it their business to try and find out where they're going to take these, where they're taking that. I'm telling you all this because there's another sequel as far as I'm concerned. Ben-Gurion decided they must find out, that these people are not going to be deported to another island, they – somehow we must – I mean Chaim Weizmann also turned to people here who were in authority and tried to persuade them to allow these people, all to no avail. So, Ben-Gurion decided we have to find out if they're going to deport these by ship, which ship is it, because we want to disable the ship, we will not allow this to leave. So, what did he do? Ben-Gurion turns to the *Haganah* bomb-maker who was a really amazing guy because he had also been working during the war for the Admiralty here. He was designing mines, special mines. He was an inventor. [01:34:00] And the Admiralty here thought so highly of him – his name was Jenka Ratne, that was – I'll come to that – he was my boss later. He was invited to Portsmouth I think. They gave him a department to handle that and he did it brilliantly and he designed special mines. I don't know if you know anything about limpet mines. These are mines with

magnets that the Italians also invented, to put under the hulls of ships, the enemy ships, and sink. Anyway, they decided they would disable the ship so that it would not leave Haifa harbour. So he also pointed to somebody who later I worked with, who became the director of the Ministry of Defence, that they must make it their business to stop by all means this ship leaving Haifa. So, this one guy dressed up as one of the stevedores in the thing, found out what date it was going to leave, Jenka designed the particular bomb that he thought would disable something in the machine room there. Came the day, they exploded that bomb and it blew out a large section of metal and it sank in the harbour of Haifa, with loss of Jewish life and also British. It was a disaster.

People were on that boat already?

Yes, yes, some had already. Terrible disaster.

What was the name of that ship?

I've forgotten. It's well-known. I can't remember. I just remember vividly the person who were involved because they became my superiors.

But that wasn't – it didn't work. I mean they didn't –

No, it was not his – the – he was a top designer, he knew what he was – they offered him a department in the Ministry of Defence there in Israel, British nationality – no, he was – he did – everything he did, he designed perfectly. [01:36:05] What he did not take in consideration that the hulk of this boat was already – all the rivets had corroded, so the slightest touch blew the thing out. What he had invented was something stronger. So it was really not his fault.

But your parents were lucky, they were not on that ship.

They were not there. They had not yet boarded. So they found another ship and they deported all of them to Mauritius, where they spent the duration of the war. But after that the British authorities permitted them to come and live in Palestine legally.

Yeah. And they were in fact interned in Mauritius?

Not only interned, they were imprisoned in a disused Napoleonic – the men were under lock and key in this old, disused Napoleonic prison. The men, husbands, wives separated. My mother, with the other women were given shacks to live in, and mosquito infestations – she became very ill for the rest of her life. It had quite a horrible, horrible thing. But the British at the end permitted them. And at that stage my parents decided that Jackie, coming back to live and that I should join the family and we would be reunited. That was their dream, and it succeeded. And it happened.

After the war.

So I was already earning a living here, as you know, from – I was an engineering design draughtsman. I was making some money to help the livelihood of the family because I was the only male member.

Yeah. But your parents, so they were in Mauritius, was it, roughly from when to when, from –

I can't – it was several years. **[01:38:07]**

Yeah. 1939, '40 – seven years?

Yes. There's a book has been written about this – if you ever want to read it I'll lend it to you of course with pleasure – about how all these people who were deported to Mauritius, one of the Mauritian people, she was a lady who went to study engineering [inaudible] but she always thought, who are all these people in that prison and that. And she made it her business, she investigated and she wrote a book about what happened to them from the moment that actually it was- what's his name, who – the Israelis captured in South America, and then –

Eichmann. Eichmann.

It was Eichmann. My parents and Hana's brother-in-law – he was born in Mauritius, his parents – they all found a Jewish guy who was negotiating. They were financially doing all the financial negotiations and in the end he succumbed and permitted that transport to leave Austria. And of course, they managed to get on a ship that the financier had arranged at the Black Sea and then they made their way to Palestine then and tried to get in illegally. But I'm just telling you all this business.

How long were the men kept in that prison? Throughout the wartime or –

It was throughout the war, yes. More – almost throughout. Three-quarters of the time I suppose. I can't remember but I –

Just, yeah, it's interesting because I know there's a Jewish cemetery in Mauritius.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Of – some people are buried there.

Yes. Well, I don't know if you know, Hana's sister is married to – and they're here in London at the moment. [01:40:05] In fact, I'm going to see them. He was one of the first born on Mauritius island and when they, the parents and he, came to live in Mandate Palestine, no, when it became Israel, he today is the Israeli ambassador to Mauritius because he's Mauritian. I hope you'll meet him.

Oh, today? He is there now?

No, he's in London.

I know, but he is –

He is –

He is the current ambassador.

He's the current – yes, in – he's living in Israel, he's the Mauritian ambassador, Israeli ambassador to Mauritius.

In Mauritius.

Yeah.

And he is –

He was born there. He's Mauritian.

Yeah, so what do you think of that whole episode? I mean to think that your parents were in Atlit and that they were taken from there to Mauritius. I mean that's –

Yes. From there to Haifa and then from there they found another ship and then they were taken, which was a horrible voyage as well. But –

How did your parents – later in life when they talked about it, how did they see it or judge this episode?

Well, I think they looked at it in a way it was better than being sent to an extermination camp or another Buchenwald. They were lucky. You can't compare the two. Because, you know, subsequently what happened in later years when people came out of concentration camps, there were ships that were turned back, the British wouldn't allow them to land and we had quite a lot of people in the *Haganah*. You've ever read the book or seen a film, *Exodus*?

Yeah.

Yeah. The captain of *Exodus* was my youth leader in *Hashomer Hatzair*. [01:42:00] He – I –

What was his name?

Ike.

Ike?

Ike, Ike, Ike. He became a very well-known personality but fell out with Ben-Gurion because at the time when they were supposed to be leaving, he did not follow Ben-Gurion's instructions. It became quite a political thing in Israel. It didn't end well. But he became famous for what he achieved. And he was in the *Palmach* as well. It was called *Palyam*, the sea *Palmach*, and so he was one of my leaders at one point. Everything is sort of interlaced, you know, if you think about it.

Yeah. But just to come back to you, so you found out your parents are – we were – I was talking about why you had to leave your Christian family. So, you re-established contact to your parents in Mauritius and –

Yes. And of course, they were trying to calm me down, and everything is nice, it's a beautiful island, don't worry about us, but you must look after yourself and it's coming up to *bar mitzvah* time and you must behave yourself. They were urging me to lead a good, decent life as though they – they were worried about me and –

And the letter?

And the letter was – they sent – we will – planning with Jackie to go to Palestine and I hope we will be able to be together as a family again. That was their dream. And I hope – yes?

And – but the letter your Christian mother wrote, was it to them? Did she write to them or did she write to the Jewish family in London?

To both. She wrote to my parents in Mauritius when they were found, offering to adopt me.

And what did your parents answer?

Well, they were rather impressed. [01:44:00] My father could not write English, don't forget, but it was – Mauritius was like a university 'cos you had professors, doctors, everything, so he in his lovely writing and everything, write long letters, dear esteemed family Hookway. Of course, everything was translated by somebody who did know English and all these letters came in English because everything was translated for him.

What were they called, Hookway?

They were called Hookway, yes. Family Hookway. Her name was Eileen, he was George, and my foster brother was John. John, as I told you, from the time he was a youngster, war effort, his aim was – and he was urging me on as well, we will go into the Cadet Force, we will become Spitfire pilots and we – that was our aim. But unfortunately, the war didn't last long enough, so we then had to- but we used to play cowboys and Indians and all those things that youngsters used to- and he taught [laughs] – his father became a member of the Home Guard. I don't know if that means anything to you.

Yes, yeah.

And his mother – they were both – all *machers*, they were always for the effort. And his father used to – he was – my Christian father [ph] used to spend a lot of time also teaching me things – on gardening. At the end of that huge garden in Somerset he had built himself a shack with his workshop and all types of equipment for mechanical engineering. And I think that was the beginning of being influenced. He spent every day when he came home, teaching me things, and it stuck. And that had quite an influence and I was very proud of that. But John, he decided military, he's going into the army, and they lost their son at home, you know, for them it became an empty life. [01:46:01] So –

But what did your parents answer in – to that letter?

I don't know. I – somehow, they explained it in some tactful way that, you know, we're Jewish and it is part of- and they accepted it all, yeah. And it all was done nicely and –

So, did your parents want you to go back to the other family?

Yes, yes. They wanted me to have a *bar mitzvah*, that was the thing.

And how – again, you were then taken away again. How did you feel about it, then?

I felt okay. I felt that it – I realised it had to be done, it had to be my parents' wish.

So you trusted their decision in some way.

Yes. Oh, yes, completely. And I realised that it has to be – I am a Jew and this is part of my – and my brother is doing his best fighting as a Jewish soldier in the British Army. I was so proud of him. But no, I realised. And als, there was the Zionist influence from the family, my younger foster brother in the Jewish family, who by the way, finally he succeeded in building one of the best *kibbutz* in Israel, Kfar HaNassi. Does that mean anything to you?

Yeah.

He's a founder member and I used to – when I was in the army whenever I had a chance at the weekend, I had some leave, I used to go to the canteen where you buy all the chocolates and all those things, like the American NAAFI here, I – my haversack full of that and I didn't have a car or a jeep or anything in those days, I used to go and hitchhike to the *kibbutz*. And it's near Rosh Pina, if you know. And as I on a Friday afternoon approach the wall surrounding the *kibbutz*, I see a little dots sitting on top of the wall. That was the whole kindergarten waiting for Uncle Natan to come 'cos they knew that I'm coming with sweets. [Laughs] And I always remember this, it was my job. [01:48:01] But I'm glad you went to Kfar HaNassi. He was – he founded the cowherd and everything and I used to help come milking at weekends sometimes.

Later, yeah.

Yes.

But when did you then return – so you returned before you had your bar mitzvah, back to London?

Yeah – no, no. What happened, I had my *bar mitzvah*, yeah, but at that stage my foster sisters, all of them, decided they do not wish to live in Manchester any more, it didn't give them the scope they wanted for working.

Ah, so you didn't tell us. In the meantime, the family had moved to Manchester? Your – the Jewish family.

The Jewish family, where the father died, I told you and I –

No, just tell us. You told me before. So what happened? They decided to go to Manchester from London?

Yes, because he was – he decided, I didn't know why at that time, but he thought because everything had been destroyed, the house, the workshop, everything had been completely –

They had a hit?

Hit, yeah, a direct hit, obliterated. I don't know the details but he obviously had an offer or found out that he could at least resume his tailoring business in Manchester and that's when I returned to them because it was coming up to *bar mitzvah* time. But as I told you, I was in synagogue with him and he had a heart attack. And he died but – and I had a problem with the *chevra kadisha*, the burial, and I decided I would never go into a synagogue again because of that. But out of courtesy to my foster mother, I would go through with the *bar mitzvah* but after that I don't want to go into a synagogue. And that's happened to me many years until I joined the synagogue here and that was also brought about because Ruth's

mother died and I had a big problem because we were not members of the synagogue, but I managed, I had a great help. [01:50:07] So that's my story as far as my Jewish upbringing is concerned.

You were – so they didn't want to bury him because he just moved to Manchester?

No, because he – they had moved to Manchester, had no burial rights, so they were being, you know, bastards. What do you mean, you don't bury a Jewish person just because you – there's bombing in – there's no communication. He's been a staunch member of the same type of synagogue in London and fully, but in those days, no telex, no phones, those –

So it must have been quite a shock to you when he died.

It was terrible. Of course. For me, it was terrible, to this day. To this day. But I saw it through. And both – remember, both his sons were in the forces, they – nobody was able to help me.

Yeah. So, you were there –

I was there, I was –

Sisters.

I was the only male member. Anyway –

So then you said they decided to move back to London.

Well, the girls decided that we should move back, there's more opportunity for them. And we moved to London and of course they had nowhere to live but we found – or they found a flat in Chelsea opposite the Royal Hospital. That's where we lived and that's where I decided I must contribute to the family and I found a job, as I told you, and through a – that must have been through the agency. And I worked for an engineering company in Victoria Street and

continued education at a local technical college there, evening and one day release. But – so that went on and until that time I – I only worked for I think six months because at that stage I'm – my parents were in Palestine and my brother had also been demobbed and I then worked on going to join them, to reunite the family. [01:52:18] That's where I got the – oh, sorry, the Austrian passport here.

But you had your bar mitzvah in Manchester?

Yes, I went through with that. I –

So tell us a little bit. What do you remember from that bar mitzvah?

The bar mitzvah, there were no – this was at a – at the same synagogue where my foster father had his heart attack. I had been prepared for that *bar mitzvah* by a most wonderful rabbi who taught me my *bar mitzvah* 'cos they knew my plight and everything and I used to go to him almost every day to rehearse everything. There were no male members available, except one. My middle sister, she was married to a male [laughs] of course, who was an officer in the British Army, had been at the D-Day landings. And another – another interesting about him, that dreaded telegram came to the family, missing in action. He disappeared. We thought he'd been killed. And a few months later, he appeared on the scene. He somehow survived amongst all those people and he was the only member who – male member at my *bar mitzvah*. He acted as my male – so that –

And who was the rabbi? What was his name?

He was not a rabbi, he was a *chazzan*. I can't remember his name but he spent a lot of time with me. Hello, Mary. [01:54:00]

[Break in recording]

Natan, we were talking about your bar mitzvah but I was going to ask you, did your parents manage to send you something for your bar mitzvah or –

I'm sure they did. They were very limited with what they were permitted. Oh, they went out of their way. Yes, they did. I'm just trying to think what it was and where it is. There were a few things they sent me and it all had to be authorised by a commandant –

In Mauritius?

In Mauritius.

And parallel to the bar mitzvah, so when you came back to the Jewish family, so you started going to school in Manchester?

Yes. Well, that's when I got a scholarship to this Radcliffe Technical College.

And how was that for you?

Excellent. That started me off and I fell in love with engineering, design and draughtsmanship. That set me off. I really enjoyed it and I admired the lecturers, the teachers who were teaching me this. And it became my livelihood. It got to a stage even when we came to London, back to London, Ruth and I, we were married and I decided, well, I must – I can't just go from day to day. She was studying at Saint Martin's School of Art. She used to design the clothes for The Avengers series, if you remember. That was her first job.

Ruth?

Ruth, yes. You know, she had tremendous dress sense and a lot of ideas and it also – they – from that series it also became a commercial thing and they used to go to Paris and take her with her to meet other famous designers, so for her it was quite an exciting time. **[01:56:09]** And at that stage I realised I couldn't continue with my studies, I had to get a job, I had to get – and I did, I got several jobs and then in the end I was headhunted by a company because I spoke German as well and they had – and I worked I can't remember how many years, many years, and they had licensing agreements with German companies, so I used to speak almost

on a daily basis. It wasn't just my technical side but I became a senior engineering business person.

What was the company called?

Rosin Engineering, but it doesn't exist anymore. It's been taken over by other – Scandinavians. We were – did extremely well. And I travelled on – you know, I used to do a lot of business with India, with China, with Israel, so I found it very interesting and I –

And what do you think? Did it set you off, this interest in engineering and draughtsmanship? What do you think?

What is it you –

What motivated you? At the beginning, what drew you to it?

I'll tell you what it was, engineering and it goes back to my Christian foster parents. I think I told you my foster father was one of these people who could make do and mend anything. He had built – he had a huge garden, a vegetable garden, and taught me also how to grow vegetables. The front part of the house was the most beautiful lawn with all the flowerbeds you could imagine. And this is beautiful Somerset, Britain, and I grew up with that. I loved it. But at the bottom of the garden, he had this big shed in which he had all the various types of equipment, engineering- lathes and drilling machines and all that. **[01:58:03]** And I used to watch him, whatever he was making, he was talking me into what he was doing and teaching me from drawings. And I think without knowing at the time, this really influenced me. He didn't have the time to do it with his own son, John, who wasn't really interested. He was interested in military matters, which was my great teacher at the time. He taught me a lot. I must tell you a funny story – I'm maybe repeating – that it was wartime and his father's generation who'd served in the First World War, they joined the Home Guard. You know what the Home Guard here was? You probably saw the series. Anyway, we used to go with his father to the weekly training sessions. Because he could go with his father, I went. And I used to watch them all practising with various weapons, how to use them and everything.

And some of these weapons, they permitted the father to bring home. John and I used to come home, take them apart, put them together, learn how – I got training. Other part of the week, Mother. She was a volunteer, Red Cross, because people were going to get hurt, killed, how to deal with cases, how to bandage them, how the – I used to sit in as well. And I was learning. Years later, come to Israel, I join the underground *Haganah*, first thing they send me on, a course, military weapons. Ha! What, how to throw a hand grenade? I can teach you that, I've done it all. Good, 'cos every night you had – we were also at a technical college then, in Safed, Tzfat. I could teach others, I didn't need to do it. And the other thing is first aid, because I was sent on missions through the heaviest bombardment. [02:00:02] I was – because of the Blitz and that, I was fearless and they saw that in me and they used it. And I was teaching others in fact. I didn't have to train. I had lots –

So it prepared you.

I was very well-prepared, without knowing [laughs]. And do you know, I didn't come to this. A few years later after I left the Christian family and John, my foster brother, had left home and joined the young army of Britain and he was sent to a course where he came out as the top cadet and as such, they send you to officers' training. Officer training, again he came out top cadet and you are given a sword of honour. And if you receive in the British Army a sword of honour, you can choose whichever regiment in the British Army you want to join. John, being a high flyer, decides which one? The Black Watch, which is the Scottish regiment of which the Bowes-Lyon family – that's the Queen Mother – her brothers were his brother officers. And where do you think they were sent during the time that in Palestine, the *Irgun Zvai Leumi* were killing British soldiers. Do you remember that?

Yeah.

And that's – so what –

So he was sent to Palestine?

Yes. He passed out as a top officer, in this, the top Scottish regiment. Do you know who served in that Scottish regiment? Chaim Herzog, the father of the present president. He was a senior officer in the – he was born in Ireland – I don't know if you know his background – his father was the chief rabbi of Ireland. They moved to Tel Aviv. And so [laughs] you know what they used to say about Herzog? **[02:02:00]** That he's the only Jewish Irishman serving in the British Army in a Scottish regiment. That's what they used to say.

So your foster – your brother was in that regiment?

He was in – yes, he was there. And he, where was he sent during the troubles in Palestine?

To Palestine?

To Palestine. He was responsible for an armoured unit on parade, patrolling between Stella Maris – does that mean anything to you?

Yeah.

And halfway to Tel Aviv. Halfway to Tel Aviv, the Irgun Zvai Leumi were in ambush. He – some of his boys were killed. And what was in his – back of his mind? He had lost contact with me and my brother and he was fearing the day that maybe he doesn't know I am and what I am doing, and when he finally years later met Ruth, he burst into tears. He said, Ruth, what would I have done if I would have been confronted by Otto? You know what I would have done? I would have taken my arms and I would put them down. He was looking for Sonnenschein family and he never crossed because by the time I arrived, he had been moved to Egypt. But it – he was so upset, what could have happened and –

Was – that's something I guess where we come – next time we talk about your time in Palestine and Israel, whether that was a conflict for you, you know, having come from England, fighting for –

Yes. It was a very big conflict because one of my orders in the *Haganah* was to fraternise with the British, to find out when is the Mandate going to end and they are evacuating. Above all, find out which were the main firing posts of the local Arabs who were going to attack us. And I managed that. I became very friendly with a British soldier who did a lot of work for me. [02:04:02] Can you imagine? Because we were cut off from the rest, we were totally encircled and I had to get some of the senior members of *Haganah* to Haifa. And this soldier promised me in his command [inaudible] he would get – he offered that. Can you imagine? Because I spoke to him in his language. He came from Lancashire. So, I did my job. But it didn't come to fruition because the day that ended, I just about let him pass when he went like this, meaning my officer with me won't let – I can't. So, I never saw him again. And that's when all the fighting started.

Okay, well, we'll discuss that in more detail then but what happened? Also, your brother you said joined the Jewish Brigade.

Yes.

Tell us a little bit about that, please.

Well, you know, they were in the British Army in the Transport Corps at the time and the group of them, the Israelis, wanted to become a unit in the British Army. And when, you know, Ben-Gurion, Chaim Weizmann, were doing their utmost to persuade the British High Command to allow that. But they did not want to do it or agree to it. Moshe Chertok Sharett was also involved in trying to persuade the British because they thought the day will come that we are teaching them how to use these arms and it will come against us. That was in their mind. It never came about. Finally, they succumbed and they permitted the Jewish Brigade to be, and you can imagine the joy. And they fought in Italy.

So did your brother fight in Italy?

Yes, he was –

So he was sent?

He was – well, by then – then after that he came and visited – he – the first opportunity he had to have leave, he came to England and he visited me when I was working in Victoria Street already as a design draughtsman, living in Chelsea and he came and stayed with us in Chelsea. [02:06:10]

And what was it like to see him again after –

Wonderful. It was more than I liked because my pride after what I'd been through, all of us, to have a British soldier having Jewish Brigade, I took him to the synagogue at Smith Street, that was my synagogue at the time. They all went mad. They were kissing it like a *mezuzah*. I took him to the East End of London, Petticoat Lane. We were mobbed. And wherever we went, where there were Jewish people, they couldn't believe it because at that time also the film started showing us what had happened in the concentration camps and suddenly you see a British Jewish soldier, that was, you know, amazing.

But your brother was not involved in the liberation of camps or was he on the Continent at all, your brother?

Only on the Continent.

Did he go to Germany and –

He did not go to Germany, no. No. But what happened, I should – you may know this, you may have seen it even on film. When the war ended and the Jewish Brigade was disbanded – or no, they were still – no, no. They were waiting to be returned to England. This was in Italy, in Florence. They divided themselves into two separate groups. One was the Avenger group. You know about all this?

Go on. Go on, please.

And the other one was to work – actually Mossad, to get all the survivors to Palestine illegally. Now, I was speaking to his nephew the other day. I say, I – he never told me this but I guessed that Jackie was never one of the Avengers. Because what they used to do, they used to get – hunt these Nazis down, they used to really torture them to death and then throw them over mountains, just to get their own back. [02:08:08] The others, I said I'm sure Jackie was involved in illegal immigration. He used to go to the camps and load the trucks with the survivors and take them to the nearest port where an Israeli boat was waiting to take them illegally to Palestine. And he dealt in that I realised. Never talked to me about it, I guessed – which brings me my own little escapade. When I was – I went with *Aliyat HaNoar* to Palestine in those days. It was with Al – the *Sochnut* paid for me.

This is in 1946?

Yes. And I –

When did you find out that your parents managed to go to Palestine?

Oh, probably a year or more before that at least. And that's –

It took a year to organise it?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, because –

And just – sorry to interrupt you, Natan. Where did you find this out? At the end of the war, where were you?

The end of the war, I was in London.

And do you remember that day at all?

Yes.

VE Day?

Yes. Yes. When the war ended and everybody was celebrating, of course. I lived in Chelsea, not far from Buckingham Palace I suppose.

Tell us, what do you remember from that day?

Well, there was a happier day, I don't know what it was, was in Manchester even, I – from – from the place where we lived outside the centre, we walked all the way with my young friends to celebrate what was happening, that we'd conquered. That was there. But when I came to London, we celebrated the Victory in Europe Day. That was big. But my main aim – and all my correspondence which I have been reading myself – is writing to my parents and writing to Jackie, we are going to be reunited. [02:10:06] And they said they were very worried – my parents are writing letters to my foster parents which I've got – they were worried about me, how I was growing up, was I studying, was I behaving myself, was I behaving – they were worried about my upbringing and they had to – my foster parents wrote to them, beautiful letters, there's nothing to worry about.

And in your mind was it clear that you wanted to join them in Palestine or –

Oh, yes. That was my main focus always, from [overtalking] –

So what did – because first of all you wanted to see your parents but because of your own Zionist – I mean because of the –

I grew up on a –

Hashomer Hatzair.

Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

So you wanted to go to Israel in any case.

Oh, yes. Also, there was strong influence from my Jewish foster brother who – founder member of Kfar HaNassi.

When did he emigrate or where did he [overtalking]?

Yes. No, no, he emigrated before I did. He and his group entered Palestine at that stage illegally as well. But the *Sochnut* had allowed – somehow got them into Palestine. Then they had a big problem because they were – needed looking for land to build a *kibbutz*. And at that time, I had arrived, I was trying to help them by visiting them because they lived in Hadera under harsh conditions. The first children were babies that had just been born and I used to come with nutritious food to help them. They were really in poverty. But they were waiting for the *Sochnut* to allocate – finally they got the *kibbutz* ground which was on the Syrian border with Rosh Pina, if you know that, and it was all rocks when we went there. And this was after they conquered Safed, so I had survived and I came to help them. And my foster brother, Moshe, built up the first cowherd, so whenever I had time I used to come and help him milk. [02:12:05]

But when you went, did you go by yourself or with the Garin, with the corps of other people?

My – *levad*, alone.

Alone. And also, was it a problem that post-war probably you didn't have – what was your nationality status post-war?

Oh, I – post-war I was Austrian. I went on my Austrian passport to Israel. You'll see.

So you had to get an Austrian passport?

Yes, which I've got, yes, to show you, I've got it there. That was issued here in London.

So you were not stateless, post – after the war?

No, no, no. To enable me to go to Palestine I had to get special permission from the British authorities, all the things stamped, and the *Sochnut* organised all that for me. Also, helped me with the money side and everything.

Because you were still a minor at that point.

Yes.

You were not eighteen yet.

No. No, I was still a teen [ph].

So what was it like to go to the Austrian embassy? Or how did you manage to get this – the passport?

The *Sochnut* must have managed all this for me at the time. They were very helpful.

In your mind at all was there any idea of going back to Austria or –

On the contrary, I wanted to wipe it out of my – because I, as I told you, subsequent years when I came back to normality and I was already in the Israeli army, in the Science Corps which was, by the way – I'll tell you about that as well – it was Ben-Gurion's brainchild. My one concern – yes, there was no two ways about it. My focus was completely reunite with the family, that's what Jackie and I had decided, and make our family – my parents – come back to normality 'cos they'd gone through hell. And that's what we succeeded and they – and Jackie had children and grandchildren and brought joy into hell [ph], until I met Ruth.

[02:14:07] And do you know – I don't want to hold you up or anything but – wherever I went, I have always had the luck of meeting the top people, the nicest people, the closest people, especially in my army career. I was amongst the *crème de la crème* of scientists. I'll tell you what happened. After the War of Independence, Israel, there were – nobody would sell us weapons or ammunition or anything, so Ben-Gurion thought to himself, okay,

nobody's going to help us – the IDF had not yet been formed. And I wasn't allowed to join up because I was under – I was still underage when I finished my own battles. Can you imagine, I was – you had to be eighteen. I- till I was seventeen, I was underage. So what did they do? They made me go into military industries and I became a technical engineering mechanical designer of weapons.

But Natan, just before – and how did you physically get to Palestine?

I came – the *Sochnut* arranged for me to go to Marseille and wait for a Israeli ship called the *Kedma* and it was late in arriving and I was running out of funds. I remember running out in Champ de Mars in Marseille with – I didn't – I wouldn't call it a nanny, a British soldier, Jewish, who'd also been demobbed from the army and sometime earlier had married an Israeli girl – he was Jewish – and the *Sochnut* decided he should be my guardian. So we two of us were waiting for this boat and it was – as usual Israeli boats or anything arrives late – the *Kedma*. [02:16:02] And we were both of us – we were – run out of money and I'm walking through the side streets of Marseille, cobbled, when suddenly I see Moshe who – member of *Hashomer Hatzair*, one of the senior people. I yelled and he started running away, and I ran faster and I caught up with him. I said, 'What the hell are you doing here?' He said, 'Shh, you've not seen me. I'm not here, do you understand?' I said, 'Okay. Listen, I've run out of money, have you got some cash?' He said, 'Yes, how much do you want?' [Laughs] I said, just enough for me to get onto the boat when it comes. So he lent me some cash and I said I won't forget, I will pay – we will meet again. And after some time, during one of the battles in Israel, in his unit, we were fighting side by side. He was a specialist on communications. He was in the Communication Corps at that stage. And I come up to him, Sir, I owe you some money, and I paid it back to him [laughs]. I mean this is life, you know. I shall never forget that. What happened –

So the ship came?

What – yes, it came a few days later.

One sec. So, you waited for the ship in Marseille and –

Yes, we had no choice.

And then?

And then we made straight for Haifa and –

What sort of ship was it?

It was part of the Shoham line I think, *Kedma*. I think it was –

Was it a cargo ship or was it passenger?

No, no, it was a passenger ship actually, although the other people who boarded it were from the concentration camps also, so amongst the people that were boarding, I suddenly came across people who'd gone through hell.

And did they talk?

Yes.

Did you talk to them?

Yeah, I did very –

And what were your impressions?

Well, I was horrified. I can tell the horrification continued through my life in Israel. I'll give you an example. I was on night duty once during the time that the British were still there. **[02:18:03]** Next to me was a young boy. In *Aliyat HaNoar* they put me and others like me together with concentration camp survivors because they were not human, they were like – they behaved liked animals. Breakfast, they used to fight just for a morsel of bread. It was

terrible. So, I've got – I shall never forget it. I'm going to burst into tears any minute. He's talking to me. I said, 'Tell me, where did you come from? What happened?' He said, 'Natan, I must tell you, they set – the Nazis set me to work in the gas chambers and then my job was to take corpses and put them into the incinerator. And I was handed this corpse and you won't believe this. This was my mother,' [gets upset]. That I'll never forget. Very difficult to get these boys back to normal. And I felt the shame that I had led a normal life. They were all the same, they'd all gone through absolute hell. And I think I may have told you, when the British decided to move, the local senior officer – I think he was a brigadier general – wanted to have a meeting with the men who – sorry – with the leader of the *Haganah* in Safed and I was present at that meeting. And he said to him, I strongly advise you to evacuate immediately all the elderly and the young. And what did Meir Meiburg [ph], who was the commander of Tzfat in the area – he said, we've gone through hell, where are we going to go? [02:20:03] I know what you're saying. We will have to defend. And that's how it ended. Arthur Koestler was – you know Arthur Koestler, the – he probably lived in your area I think, Arthur Koestler. He wrote a book, *Thieves in the Night*, if you remember. Anyway, he said, we are not evacuating anywhere. Here we fight to the end and here we stay. And that's what we did.

*So you said on the ship you – it was the – was it the first time you saw – met survivors?
Holocaust survivors.*

Exactly. It was the very first –

And which countries did they come from?

From various countries.

The ones you met?

Yeah. They came from other – Poland or other people – places like that. I can't remember the countries but mainly I would say from Poland, Romania.

And did you speak some Yiddish at that point?

Yes, yes.

I was thinking, because of your family – of the foster family.

Oh, yes. Yeah. Distorted German.

Yeah, so you spoke in Yiddish or –

Oh, yes, and they already spoke – they were there before me, they were already learning – speaking Hebrew. That was – they had already been approached I think in the camps by Zionist people who came to help.

Yeah, they came from DP camps, didn't they?

Yeah.

They came from DP –

Yes. Yeah.

I mean that's a whole interesting story, isn't it, how Israel treated the survivors, the Holocaust survivors in this early phase.

Yes.

Did you see – you said you felt guilty.

Yes.

Explain it a little bit.

What, to feel guilty, what I had to go through and what they did, and what the – when they told me their stories then I was just blessed with the most good, wonderful luck that I didn't have to go through that. It could have happened. [02:22:00] And of course they were difficult youth to deal with and they put us together on purpose so that people like myself had some influence to try – them to get back to some normality. As I told you, sometimes they behaved not like human beings. They couldn't.

And what helped them? What – did you think you managed to – or what helped those young people?

I'll tell you what helped them. There was a common enemy and we knew that together, we fight together, we fall, we have to cooperate, we have to do it. And this happened night after night, we had to – training sessions going on, guard duty together.

Because, you know, it makes me think that today when we speak of Holocaust survivors we mean also Kindertransportees, you know, we mean everyone. But of course, at that point it was a very different story.

Very different.

And I don't know, how do you feel? Do you see yourself as a survivor? Today, how would you – do you know what I mean?

Oh, yes, I know exactly, and no, I don't think of myself as a survivor ever. I've never got to that stage. I just consider myself extremely blessed and lucky wherever I've been.

And a refugee? Do you consider yourself a refugee?

No. I never did, although people consider me – you know, when I was growing up, I had to go to a police station to report as well, that's when I felt like a refugee.

We didn't talk about that. Internment or – you were too young to be interned I assume.

Yes, yes.

But you went to the tribunal?

I never went to a tribunal, no. No, I had to –

Police, you had to –

The police station, they insisted that I report every X months.

And that made you feel like a refugee?

That made me feel like a refugee, yes. I suppose it did, yes. But I had a lot of support at that stage. My Jewish foster family, my Christian – they were all – they taught me so much of life. [02:24:05]

So do you think today that, let's say, the refugees or the Kindertransport refugees, should they be considered Holocaust survivors, in your opinion? What do you think?

The refugees, no. I think of the Holocaust survivor as purely much more serious than people who came out of the extermination camps. A big difference, as we know.

Yeah.

One of my – I made a friendship with another Austrian boy who was older than myself by a few years, Erich [ph], and when I came to Tzfat, he was already at this place. He came also with *Aliyat HaNoar*. And he at that stage, he was probably two, three years older than me, he was really self-taught. He loved German, he spoke and wrote German fluently – he was Austrian – and what transpired was, we discovered, his mother was together with my parents in Mauritius. So, she was on the same transport. So the two of us, we really saved our – we kept our sanity because being amongst the extermination boys wasn't easy for us because

they fought amongst themselves. At least we were two similar people and we were purposely put together to try and influence them to come back to normality of course, which we did try. We consolidated, we had a common enemy, you had to consolidate, they realised.

Well, you sort of – you also had a trauma but a different kind of trauma.

My trauma was –

You had a separation, you experienced separation. [02:26:04]

Yes, my trauma was the loss of life of comrades who were killed next to me, whose bodies we found, things like that. I still have those at night. It's post-traumatic stress. Ruth suffered much because I used to suddenly lash out in the night, bad dreams. I think I told you one of my greatest personal losses was a most lovely young chap in the *Haganah*. He was a junior commander. His name was Moshe Zaharoni. I told you this before. And the day after he was killed by a sniper, I decided Zaharoni, I'm changing my name to Zohar from Sonnenschein. And it was easily done because in the army you do it just by – and I did that. That –

And did you change from – when did you change from Otto to Natan?

I was born Natan, actually. You know that Jewish families, the boy always have – get – as well as Otto, a Hebrew name, and I was christened Natan. And I decided when I came to Israel, Otto, no, I'm going to be Natan Sonnenschein.

Okay, so you were Natan Sonnenschein and then Natan Zohar?

Zohar overnight because this friend who today I really think about him. He was such a handsome, wonderful, helpful – and I carry his name in my heart. And it was a terrible ending for his parents. He lived in Tiberias and he said, 'I've got a lovely sister I'd like you to meet. So, think of that then.' I said, 'Fine, but how am I getting you to Tiberias?' He said, 'Natan, you've got British connections, can't you smuggle me out in a command – I'll do my best.'
[02:28:00] And I did. And the day came when I'm supposed to – smuggling him out and the

driver who had become my pal – he came from Lancashire – sitting next to me is a senior British officer and as he's coming up near me, he does this with his eyes, [demonstrates], he says, I can't, and that was the end of it. And that's when all hell broke loose. The British evacuated and they played a dirty trick on us. They handed over all the strategic positions – if you know Tzfat, it's overlooked by a mountain called Har Kanaan. On Har Kanaan, these – one of these typical British police stations, [inaudible]. Before they moved out, they allowed a large unit of Iraqi troops to take over. Can you imagine? And they were with full, heavy artillery, everything, and it's just overlooking Tzfat. They used to bombard us night and day. Local police station, they handed over to the local [inaudible], including, we discovered during the fighting, there were some German SS people they had brought from Germany to help them. They were all on the roof trying to escape. That was during the *Palmach* time. And I was so proud to be part of that unit, I can tell you.

Natan, we'll talk about this in detail next time but now I just want to come back to the reunion with your parents. Tell us, how did that happen? When did it happen?

It happened when I arrived at Haifa harbour in the ship and my mother came to meet me. And the cousin of mine who survived the war, who lived in Haifa. Her husband was a doctor, so they survived. And it was a meeting with my mum, with my mother. That was fantastic. And what did she say? 'I've come to take you home.' [02:30:00] They lived in Holon, which is the outskirts of Tel Aviv. And Jackie had by that time also arrived in Palestine, he had married in the meantime a Belgian Jewish girl. And when I arrived it was the first grandchild that was born, my eldest nephew, called Amos, and he lives one mile down the road with his wife from what's happening in Gaza. From Gaza, one mile down the road. He was the eldest grandchild when I arrived, that was the gift, a family was coming together. And they lived – my brother and his family lived at – in a house next to where my parents were, where lots of the survivors of Mauritius also congregated. It was Holon, if you know it.

Holon, yes. But tell me, you hadn't seen your mother for now '39 –

That's right.

Seven years.

Yes.

Seven years.

Exactly.

You were eight and now you were sixteen.

Yes. It was rather strange meeting.

What was it like? Was it like a stranger for you? What – did you know it was your mum?

No, no, it was – yes, definitely, immediately. And do you know what this mum did? I – maybe I should keep it for the next session. I have to tell you briefly. During the heaviest fighting in Safed when the Arabs of the whole surrounding [inaudible] attacked. And in those days, it wasn't just happening in Tzfat. In Jerusalem, all the way to Jerusalem, all the Israeli convoys used to be, you know, attacked. We had the same thing. I've got my British Army friend who illegally has come to me with his Bren gun which I just learnt to use as well, because all hell had broken loose. He said, 'I've been ordered to come here – 'this was on the hill overlooking Safed. So we're both looking and he's telling me exactly where they're emplacements were. [02:32:01] And in those days, all the intercity buses like Egged were armour-plated in a crude way. I think you may have known. They used to take plates of – iron plates and weld them together to make it armoured. And we see one of these coming up, and you know the roads on this going winding, and at the edge of each road is a very deep canyon, *wadi*. And we're looking and all hell – they're shooting from all sides at this bus and I thought, my God, this is terrible. And he's – the British soldier – is telling me, go to the left and aim this, aim there, there. And I'm looking and this poor bus is getting too near [inaudible] and I thought, God, how can anybody come alive? They didn't stop it. Finally, I see it approaching Safed, the centre, and as they come towards – said I – I said goodbye to my friend and I ran all the way down to the centre where this bus was going to stop. It

stopped and the door – and some of my colleagues came to help me, the door opens and blood is coming from the floor, pouring out. I thought, oh, my God, what's happened to the people? And they were crawling on the floor. And I was helping this lady out, and it was *Mutti*. My mother was one of them. I said, 'What on earth are you doing here? *Mutti*, what are you doing?' She said, 'Your father sent me to fetch you home.' [laughs]. Can you imagine?

But she was not hurt? She was not hurt?

Yeah, it was – it was my mother. She says, I've come to take you home. I said, [laughs] I hope nobody listening is – the first thing, Mummy, I'm taking you somewhere safe. I take her straight back to headquarters where I say to my, you know, the commander, I said, this is my mother, it's the middle of a battle, she's come to fetch me. [02:34:00] First convoy that leaves, there, she'll – going to put her – and she's going home, and I stay, you understand? And he and his family owned hotels there. He put her up at a hotel. And three days later the convoy left and I said goodbye, Mummy. But why did my father send – 'cos he wasn't well. So, she – the guts – came. And that was hilarious. I mean Hana to this day laughs her head off, and the children, when I tell this story. She's come, do you know, in the middle of a battle, she says, come, I've come to fetch you home [laughs].

What about your father? When did you see him again?

I saw him the first time of course when my mother came to meet me at Haifa and brought me home. That's when I met him.

And how was it with your father?

It was difficult. Difficult 'cos he was quite a broken man at that stage and it was difficult. He had gone through hell. And his one object then was to make a living because they, all those people on Mauritius, they were, you know, professors, doctors, and there was no work for them. So what work did they – were given? Making roads, repairing roads, digging up roads. That was the only thing that they worked, and they worked in the sun, you know, the heat. It

was not easy. A lot of them were sick. And that area where they lived, Holon, that was also where they all congregated together.

So he had a heart attack also in Mauritius he probably – because you said he was imprisoned.

Yes, he had a very –

Compared to your mother.

Yes, yes, it was difficult because they used to lock them up night, day, all that. However, he continued with his calligraphy and everything and that had to be just so [laughs]. And by that time I'd also learnt how to tell you what time it is [laughs]. **[02:36:01]** They only – my – bringing up, my parents was in my childhood, so –

Yeah. And did you speak German to them?

Yes. It was – you can imagine what my German was like.

Did you speak fluent – did you still have some German?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I had to because I was working with Germany.

No, but I meant at that point when you were sixteen, you probably hadn't used it.

At that point, it was in the [inaudible], it was there, what I'd been speaking up to then came back.

You didn't forget it.

No. No, I didn't. I could read of course. That was easy.

And what about your parents' parents and other family members? Did they lose – were –

There were all exterminated. They had a – he was one of twelve children, I think. He was number eleven. And number twelve was a doctor, a younger chap, who – all doctors were sent not to Dachau but Buchenwald – Buchenwald, where all the medical people were worked to death in a quarry, and that's what happened to his younger brother. The rest of the family, most of them had not managed to escape. One cousin, yes, came to England with her husband who was a doctor, who used to practise near Manchester and I – during my vacations from college I used to visit them and stay with them.

On your father's side?

On my father's side.

And on your mother's side?

Mother's side, just a sister survived. Her son was killed by the Germans. Finally she managed to get to Israel and she was put in an old-age home in Haifa where I used to visit her, because I lived in Haifa. During my military days when I joined the Science Corps, where I didn't have to go through the normal routine of being a soldier, we were doing design work, working in offices. [02:38:07] I used to visit her regularly.

Yeah, just to say, so your – about your father. So, for him was it more difficult to adapt also to Israel, or Palestine?

For him it was difficult and my brother of course did everything possible to help them as well. And he lived just opposite them so – and there was a grandchild had been born, which was the centre of our attention at the time.

A new life.

Yes.

And what about your mother? Did she continue her dressmaking?

Yes. And that was – that brought in enough for them to live happily. She was amazing. She had a lot of customers and highly thought of. It was her gift. She was very, very, very talented. But my father had disturbing nights – 'cos I used to stay with them and sleep over and that – nightmares. It was horrible. He'd gone through hell, but survived, thank God, not like the many others you think of. 'Cos a lot of the people – I call them Mauritaner – Mauritians, like of my parents, they never got back to normal.

They didn't?

No. Some of them were quite demented, I must say. When I first them in that area, it was –

Yeah, why? What – disturbed? Or what –

Disturbed, yes. And if they didn't have offspring to help them or family, it was more difficult for them.

Because I would think anyway that time in Israel was not an easy time.

No, it was also *tsena*, these –

It was the szena.

Yes, yes.

It was the – tsena is the – what is it, um –

Austerity. [02:40:00]

Yeah.

That's – we had it in England during the war.

But then they also had a difficult time during the war, so I think it must have been –

Doubly –

Doubly hard in a way.

Yes. I mean when – after Tzfat, for instance, I had to get back to continue things. There were – we couldn't just put down our arms, we had to prepare for further offences, so I got leave of absence and I came and stayed with them and tried to help them in lots of ways.

And towards the end of their lives? I mean they had – they died in older age or –

They died in old age in Holon, near – close to my brother and my sister-in-law and their offspring, like this Erez who's coming, who's fant – I wish you'd meet him. He's the most wonderful guy. I'm so proud of him. The thing is, I never saw him in his growing-up days and now suddenly he appears with these two gorgeous, gorgeous daughters and a wonderful wife.

And that's his – that's your brother's grandson?

My – their grandson, yes. And he –

So how many children did –

Two daughters. The ones you've seen on that picture. I'd like you to look into that album when you have the time. You'll see the happy times that Ruth and I have had. But he is – he's coming specially to see me, to help me in every way. He's fantastic. And all our friends who meet him, they all say, where have you kept him all this time? He's one – he's – I say, he's a Sonnenschein [laughs].

He's a Sonnenschein because your brother kept his name, Sonnenschein?

He did, yes. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. And did you – because also your brother, what was it like – you hadn't seen him for such a long time.

Well, I –

Could you pick up where you left off, in a way?

Well, yes, because don't forget, I didn't meet – I met him beforehand because as soon as he was getting demobbed from the duty, he came to visit me here after not having seen me since I was a young kid. And he came illegally with Betar. **[02:42:03]** He came to London and he stayed with the family, the Jewish family, and I took him all around London.

What did your – the Jewish family, what did they say when you went to Palestine?

Oh, they were all – because their own son had just left –

So they were supportive?

Oh, most supportive. They – that was their aim of that for me on my part and gave me every support. Of course.

Yeah. And at that point, were you still in touch with the Christian family or –

I was but not sufficiently. And my failure was that when I came to Palestine, I didn't communicate with them. And I think I told you the stories about John, my foster brother, who was based in Palestine and what he was fearing.

Yes. But you met him later, then?

Oh, yes, years – yes, much later. I met him in 1956 when I had leave of absence from the army to go to Europe and one of my first ports of call was to visit the Christian family and –

It was important for you?

Very important because of what they had been through and what had been disconnected between us and what my foster mother had feared, that her son would be killed by the *Irgun*, because in those days it was terrible what the *Irgun*, Menachem Begin and others – I wanted – and Jackie, my brother, we wanted nothing – although he was in Betar in Vienna, nothing more to do with the *Irgun*. Although they tried – they – people from the *Irgun* approached me, especially girls, to try and persuade me to join them at that time, especially in Tzfat. I refused.

Nathan, we're going to talk about that chapter in great detail next time.

Okay. Whenever you –

Is there anything you'd like to add just, you know, from the wartime, pre-war, just coming to Israel, to your coming to Israel in '46? [02:44:05] I mean we covered quite a lot. Anything we haven't discussed that you think –

Yes, you have not discussed when I was posted to join a newly – unit formed at the request of Ben-Gurion, which is the Science Corps. I can show you a book which has been written about us. And what happened with the Science Corps, it was his brainchild. What Ben-Gurion said in '48, he said, we have run – we have no weapons to defend ourselves, no ammunition, nobody will sell us anymore, and Czechoslovakia stopped – he said, but we've got the brainpower. So there were two universities at the time, the Technion in Haifa, and the Hebrew University. Technion were producing the top mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, so – and all these chemical engineers, all these, the Technion were producing. And he turned to them and the professors at the Hebrew University, who were producing

mathematicians and physicists. He said, but we've got the brainpower, so I want to form a science unit, a Science Corps, in the Israeli army. Professors, please give me a list of all your brightest students, which they did immediately, and they were ticked off and that's how HEMED [Haganah's Science Corps, acronym in Hebrew is HEMED] and Science Corps was formed. At that stage because I was considered underage to join the IDF that had been formed – you had to be eighteen years of age – they refused me and they said, right, you will – in the meantime, until you become of age, you will go into the military industries. You've got engineering design there, you're going to do that until you become of age to join the army. Well, I was furious, but in the meantime, HEMED was formed and as soon as I could join, I was drafted and I was – suddenly found myself amongst the *crème de la crème* of brain. [02:46:13]

Okay, Natan, we're going to discuss it in much more detail, the – all your Israeli time in the next part.

Okay, yes. I'm just preparing you. Yes.

Okay. I can do some more research in the meantime on this part. So in the meantime I'll say thank you so much for sharing your story with us and we will pick it up next time.

That's fine. But you see, life is in circles. I told you what happened when Ben-Gurion decided to sabotage the boats going to Mauritius. I told you about the brainy person who designed the bomb. What happens when I joined the Science Corps? He was the head of my department. I worked closely with him all those years. He was an inventor. He was a – I'll tell you some funny stories.

Okay, okay. Great.

How are –

How it links, how it gets linked together.

That's amazing. And not only he. I was really, really so – I was amongst the crème de la crème of scientists who later, all of them, the army sent to do their PhDs abroad, in the States and that. And they've written books and I feature there because we worked closely night and day. In fact, [laughs] we didn't have to go to an army camp. We were given special privileges. We were given a certain amount of funds to hire flats or something. I lived on Mount Carmel, which was subsidised by the Ministry of Defence.

Okay, Natan. We look forward to talking in much more detail and about your Israeli time, next time.

Of course. I'm sorry if I'm talking too much.

No, you're excellent. Absolutely excellent.

Now you see what Ruth had to suffer and what Hana has to suffer and all my friends have to suffer? [02:48:03] [Both laugh] But Hana said, I don't care, I want you to talk to all my children and grandchildren. They have to know what you've done. Because the stories I've been telling you, they've heard and they're sick and tired of.

So now we're here, it's digitised and lots more people can hear this story, yeah. Thank you.

[Break in recording]

Today is the 5th of March 2024 and we're here with Natan Zohar to conduct the second part of the interview. Thank you, Natan, again for agreeing to be interviewed for AJR Refugee Voices.

It's my pleasure. I can tell you, I have so much to offload. I'm very, very lucky to have led such a charmed and interesting life because I always managed to find the most wonderful people in bad or good times, who became very close.

Okay, Nathan. So we managed last time – we got sort of to Palestine/Israel 1946 but maybe – because we're starting afresh, kind of take us back to – how did you get to Palestine? And maybe start from there, your journey.

Yes. I came to Mandate Palestine, something that my family had planned for a long time, since my older brother, Jackie, had served in the British Army, in the Jewish Brigade, and he had already left – had finished his service and he had come back to Palestine. And my parents, who managed to get out of Austria in time to try and enter Palestine at the time, in '46, illegally, were intercepted by His Majesty's navy, interned at – near Haifa's – an internment camp, Atlit, and eventually they were all shipped out to Mauritius where they spent the rest of the war. [02:50:17] And then the British authorities permitted them to enter Palestine legally, so it was already planned by my parents and my brother, the family should come together again. That of course was my dream also and that's when I joined my parents and my brother, Jackie, who at that stage had already married and had a little boy, a baby boy, the first one in our family of that generation. So my first home was in Holon, which is in the outskirts of Tel Aviv. But then I was given a further place at an engineering college up in Safed by the Kindertransport – not Kindertransport. I get it mixed up.

The Youth Aliyah?

Youth Aliyah, I should have said. I came with Youth Aliyah.

So Youth Aliyah arranged your emigration?

For me to go to this institute in Safed where I was put together with a whole group of youngsters who had come from the extermination camps and they were a wild lot. And they put me there I think on purpose. They wanted people like me to try and bring these back to some normality.

Yes, we talked about it last time.

Did I tell you?

Yes and it's very interesting but – and I think I asked you already but I will ask you again, since you hadn't seen your parents for a long time, you had two foster families in between.

Yes. [02:52:01]

Who you were close to.

Very.

What was it like to see your parents? And was there any – was it a problem for you? I mean it was – how many years have you not seen them?

Yes.

From '39 to '46, so a good seven years.

Yes, yes.

What was that like for you?

It was – no, there was no problem. I was just relieved to see that they were still pretty fit and well, although had both suffered a lot in Mauritius, each of them, 'cos men and women were segregated. Mauritius has one – an old Napoleonic prison in which they put all the male people under lock and key. The women were separate and unfortunately my mother became very ill with mosquitoes and all those things and she had a serious kidney problem, so she suffered a lot. But when they came back to – not came back but she came to Palestine, of course my brother had already been demobbed, so he was able to help them a lot. But for them it was extremely difficult. As you probably know, all the people, all the highly qualified professors, doctor – there was no work for them. My father together with them, they worked digging up roads. That's how it started. But it was an achievement.

Yeah. Because why I asked you is that often some of the Kinder, you know, who re-met their parents, that was sometimes quite difficult.

I know, I know.

Because you hadn't seen each other and you grew up and – but you didn't find that?

No, no.

And what do you think helped you in that process, or...

First of all, I was expecting it because my brother in the meantime just some months before he was being demobbed, I was living in London, in Chelsea, and his first port of call was to come to see me, not having seen each other since he left Vienna, so this little boy had grown up into a young man. [02:54:11] And we spent a most wonderful week together here in London where I was so proud to have a brother in the British uniform with the flash here saying Jewish Brigade, with a large flag on the *Magen David*. I took him – the first port of call was a synagogue, the smallest one in London, Smith Street. You know it I think. Everybody came to him. They were kissing him as though he was a *mezuzah*. They went mad in seeing this.

Yeah. So, do you think that maybe it helped you that also the Jewish – your Jewish foster family was also quite Zionist, so in a way you could relate to it? Because I was thinking if you in the seven years, you know, if you hadn't heard about Palestine or Zionism or anything –

No, I –

It would have been quite difficult. But you did.

I do because my Jewish foster brother who was one of the pioneers of Kfar HaNassi was in touch with me although he was in the Air Force, it was – he was giving me advice or talking about his aim to go there, so to me it was natural.

Yes, so I'm saying in a way, your foster brother and your brother shared something as well.

Oh, yes.

So in a way, that must have made it easier for you. It wasn't a conflict, going to Palestine for you and for the foster family neither.

For me there was no problem. It was –

No, and the foster family –

It was my dream come true. It was difficult for the foster parents, both the Christian and the Jewish.

It was?

Yes. I don't know if I mentioned this previously. My Christian foster parents, I told you my mother – my foster mother used to find – probably I used to be crying at night, weeping, not knowing whether my parents were dead or alive. [02:56:09] She calmed me down and said that they would do everything possible to find my parents and when finally, they were found, they corresponded. My father [laughs] used to write the most fantastic letters in English, not knowing a word of English. I realised he used to write a letter in German, have it translated by one of his friends.

In Mauritius?

Yes, in Mauritius.

He had some people, yeah.

And the Christian family wrote to them and put them into an embarrassing situation because they requested could they adopt me. But the Jewish foster parents said no, I'm coming up to *bar mitzvah* age, I must come and join them in Manchester. So there was this uneasy feeling amongst the parents. I felt a bit unwell about that because I loved each of them.

Yes. But in hindsight now, looking back, you think it was the right decision for you?

Absolutely, 100%. I mean the focus was to be reunited with my family. That was it. And both the Christian and Jewish family knew that and supported it.

Because why I'm asking you, Natan, is also I mentioned Arie Handler before, and Arie Handler is somebody we interviewed but he was also involved in helping young people to come out of Germany. And for him it was the failure of the Kindertransport movement that they didn't keep the children together or in Jewish families, that they were given to, you know, many non-Jewish families. For him, he thinks that was the biggest failure of the Kindertransport.

I didn't agree there.

You don't agree with that?

No, because of my experience. I mean who could – I must have told you that during the battle for Safed, a convoy broke through the lines and brought post. [02:58:04] Did I tell you about a letter?

You did, you did.

I wish I could have it here. I'd like to show it to the world. My Christian mother, [gets upset] my darling Otto, I pray for you every night because I realise what must be happening to you and Jackie and how much your parents are worrying. Now, darling, remember you used to have a weak chest and I gave you a scarf. I hope you're wearing it [laughs]. There were bullets and things and can you imagine? But it was hilarious. It was really tear-jerking.

Yeah. So, you think it didn't matter whether it's a Christian family or Jewish family?

Not at all.

It's the human –

It's a human – yes. And my Christian parents were so human, when I think back what they did, and their son. I told you, when finally years later he met Ruth, this tough guy who was a senior officer in one of the best British Scottish regiments [laughs] been their officer, and had lost some of his boys in – he broke down in tears. His greatest fear was that maybe I had joined the *Irgun* and my brother as well, and we came face to face. You know, these things go through people's minds. But luckily our paths never crossed because when I arrived, he'd already been posted to Egypt. But years later we got together and we managed to catch up – not years later because one of the first vacations I had from the Ministry of Defence, *misrad ha hagana*, which I had quite a number of days of leave, I made straight for Somerset, to visit my Christian foster parents and sit down and we talked and what had happened since I had left them. [03:00:00]

So you felt very close to them?

Oh, yes, to the end [gets upset].

And are you in touch? Is there any surviving family from that side?

Neither family. They've all passed away.

Any descendants or –

No, no, not that I'm in touch with.

Okay, Natan, so let's talk about – so you ended up in Tzfat, in this college. And then what happened next to you?

Well, [laughs] the first thing [laughs] when the British moved out, during the night, Arabs sneaked in and they blew up the whole school. That went smithereens. There was no more school, there was no more studying. We all were twenty-four hours *Haganah*, preparing for the next onslaught, night and day.

So, tell us a little bit. Somebody who might watch it might not understand. So, what was the date of that? When did the British leave Tzfat?

'4 – well, when the Mandate ended, which –

So '48.

Yes. The moment the – when the Mandate ended, the British troops moved out. I'd become friendly with a British soldier who did tell me the date that they were going to do that. We needed to know this from a defensive point of view. They moved out but they played a very dirty trick – I think I told you – they handed over the strategic – you know the HaKanaan? Mount Kanaan on top, there – and the police stations the British built during their tenure there, they're on Mount Kanaan, there's a big, big police station which they handed over to Iraqi troops who had heavy weapons, all the thing, and we had run out of ammunition. And this is when my *Haganah* commander requested that a group of *Palmach* should join us to help us fight and that when they arrived, I was the go-between. [03:02:10]

So just explain to us, what is Haganah and what is Palmach?

Well, it's the same fighting forces fighting for the defence of Israel but *Palmach* were specially trained, they were the special commando unit of the *Haganah*.

So it was the precursor to the Israeli army, let's say?

Both. Both were [overtalking]. Now, I'll tell you some other thing that happened to me then. As soon as the state of Israel was announced the IDF was formed and everybody who was of age had to fill out forms and if you were eligible, you were – you had to join the IDF, and I was looking forward for that. At that stage I was seventeen years of age and what they decided in spite of all that I had gone through and been capable of doing, I was underage. So, most of my pals, they were older than me, they were inducted into the IDF and I was not allowed to join up, I was underage. So what did they do? [Laughs] I got marching orders to go to Tel Aviv, to report to *Beit ha mehandes*, that's engineering house, and there was some secret thing there. They discovered that I was already very experienced in engineering draughtsmanship because I'd already worked for a British company before I'd left. And they were just looking for that type of person who would join that special secret unit which was military industries at that time and I was sent to Tel Aviv and I became part of that group. [03:04:11] But I had – I was only seventeen at the time. I was waiting for age eighteen to come, where I had to go into the army, so they already reserved a space for me in the Science Corps which was a new corps, the brainchild of Ben-Gurion. Did I tell you this before?

Go on.

Ben-Gurion at that time when the British left and we were without many – well, arms or ammunition, nobody would sell anything to us at the time. He said, but we have got the brainpower. So he – at the time there were just two universities, you know. There was a Technion producing engineers, physicists, and the Hebrew University's mathematicians, physicists and chemists. And he said to the professors, please give me a list of your brightest students and two lists were given to Ben-Gurion and he decided these brightest people would then form the nucleus of the newly-formed Science Corps. I can show you a book, if you like, about this.

And you were in it?

I was not yet in it. But what they needed – I mean my closest superiors at that time were the leading engineers, the brightest, the brilliant people who I had the honour of serving under 'cos they taught me then from then on. But they did not produce draughtsmen who had the

experience I had, and that was just – I came at the right moment, the right time, and this is how I joined the Science Corps. This was Ben-Gurion's brainchild. [03:06:02] And I served under the top, top people, and there's another story I can tell you in brief. Did I tell you that when my parents came illegally to Israel and the British put them into an internment camp and then sent – decided they were sending them to Mauritius?

Yeah.

You know the story there?

Yeah. You told us.

At the time Ben-Gurion said they didn't know what's going to happen to these – he decided at that point we are not going to let the British send these people to Mauritius, what can we do? He thought, we have to find out which boat and what date it's been planned to sail. And of course, the *Haganah* people had their ways of finding out and they did. So what did Ben-Gurion then decree? He said, we have to find out which ship they're going to be shipped out on and we're going to stop this. How are we going to stop it? We're going to put an explosive device on board in the engine room to stop it from leaving. He had a group of people who were very, very good at spying and even in – during the British time they used to raid British camps and steal their weapons. They were a special group, the head of which I got to know very well too 'cos he worked closely with the person who designed the bomb. His name was Jenka Ratne. And he during – he became so famous about his designs that the British heard during the war what he is capable of and they asked him to come and join them here in England, in Surrey, in the Royal Navy, he was given a department, he was a head of department, he designed special mines. [03:08:14] And his name was Jenka Ratne. Jenka, when I look – well, I worked under his command right from the beginning, he and my other senior people but he took a liking to me because he also studied in England and he spent time and I did exactly – I –

That was later.

Yes.

That was later but he made this bomb which detonated –

He made this bomb which detonated and you know the story, then?

You told us this story. It sank. Its – many people died.

It blew up a large plate and the boat sank there, with the loss of British life and Jewish life. That was – he – one thought he'd – his – had not reckoned on the weakness of the rivets there, they'd rusted away and so it –

So it was lucky that your parents were not on board at that time.

No, no.

Were they supposed to be on board there?

No, not – they were not yet on board. Some were on board but a day or two later the whole lot were supposed to be there.

But it was the boat they were supposed to travel on?

Absolutely.

So you worked with the man some years later, then, who was –

The two men, because the person who was told to put the – he also became one of my seniors. His name was Munya Mardor. He became one of the directors of the Ministry of Defence. A well-known person.

So Natan, it must have been quite an exciting time for you to be there with all these people.

It was very – yes, because they were the crème de la crème, all – each of them. They worked closely together in the underground and they knew each other and worked together and I managed to – in a different way, to work under the command. [03:10:10]

And were there – what were their backgrounds? Were some survivors there? Were some –

No, they –

No. Where did they come from?

They had been brought up in Israel and worked their way through Haganah. I mean Munya Mardor, who became the director general of the Ministry of Defence in later years, and worked closely with this guy, Jenka, during the days of the British, he had formed a special unit that used to sneak into British military camps and steal weapons – he became an expert on this – and hide them in special places. He became notorious in – amongst the Israelis as well and he did a fantastic job.

But I think I asked you before but I'll ask you again, was it a problem for you? I mean you had spent this time in Britain –

Yes,

You identified probably with Britain –

I did.

To fight against the British? Or in your mind was it –

I never fought the British, never. That was always in my mind because my Christian foster brother was always in my mind. That's it. Yes, I would not possibly have done it, even

commanded. I could not do that. And as I told you, I was even helped by a British soldier when my mother arrived. I told you how she arrived. He helped me.

So then after Tzfat, you – where was that, corps, the Science Corps?

Oh, yeah, I was –

Where was it based?

That was based near Tel Aviv, a place called Giva [ph], and that was the beginning of it.

And then what happened?

Well, what happened, there were various institutes, there were I think five institutes, each one specialising, ones in weapons, the other in high explosives, because there were chemical engineers working in them, we worked night and day, twenty-four hours, building things.

[03:12:10]

Because the war was – there was a – independence war was – ex –

Yeah, exactly.

Tell us a little bit. What was going on then, let's say, from '48 to '50 or –

'48, as far as the Science Corps, we were set tasks to build weapons. Let me just show you something [inaudible]. May I?

Just afterwards, Natan, because we're –

No, I'm interrupting.

Yeah.

Yes, the target was to build the latest type of weapons, latest type of – well, and it was Jenka Ratne who was the head of a whole department and he had under his command the *crème de la crème*.

But there were attacks, there were attack – what sort of attacks? What was happening in that time in –

At that time we [laughs] – we were Science Corps, we were not combat. We were not in combat but the others were. I mean down in the south they were fighting Egyptians, they were fighting Jordanians. There was, you know, during – when the British – a lot of Jordanians were commanded by British officers at that time. So it was a busy time just to survive.

But was there an element of fear? How – were you or was an element to you personally?

As far as my closest senior people, no, there was a spirit that is – that we were working night and day. I'm telling you, the spirit was we've got to achieve and do it and to fight for our country and our families. That was the spirit.

What about your parents? I mean, you know, coming from Mauritius, that must have been quite difficult –

It was.

For them to be in a war, in some sort of war situation. [03:14:05]

Well, at some time I used to visit my parents and at that time my brother was also in – he was an officer in the Israeli army, as he was – immediately he was sent to a unit. He fought in the [laughs] – in the south and I fought in the north and my parents were worried obviously. And he was – Jackie, my brother, had already married and had a first child, a baby, and there was the worry because the Egyptians sometimes used to fly over those areas and drop bombs, so I

was worried. And in fact, once I was on leave and the sirens wailed and I just scooped up the baby quickly and ran into the *holot*, into the sand dunes, 'cos I thought they wouldn't be bombing those areas. This is the thing that the nation had to go through.

And what do you feel, Natan, just because one can't help now thinking about it today, that, you know, there is a war going on so many years later. What do you feel about that?

Well, I feel torn apart as to what – first of all, I am deeply saddened as to what happened on – when they first attacked us. What I'm very disappointed in that Israeli intelligence didn't – weren't ready for it. This is the first time this has happened. That really disappointed me and hurt me. And of course, I cannot get over the fact Hamas has got away with it for so long that we – our intelligence didn't do a better job, that they didn't realise what was going on underground. They did know, and for some reason they looked – I just cannot understand it. Efraim Halevy, he would probably know. [03:16:01] It was – who did you mention before, was –

Arieh Handler.

Ah, I'm talking about – I'm thinking about Efraim Halevy. Have you come across him?

No.

Efraim, he was in the same group as he – Bnei Akiva.

Bachad, the religious Zionist –

Later on, it's the senior [inaudible], it's Bachad, yes. But when I was in *Hashomer Hatzair*, he was in, er – but then I don't know how he got to the – he got to the top. He became –

What would these pioneers think about the situation today? You know, that it seems so unresolved in some way with, I don't know. I don't know what you feel, whether you feel hopeful that any solution that can be [overtalking].

At the – it's going to take a long time with the present government. This is a problem. It's a big problem, the – our internal problem, that is very, very disappointing. When you think of all the families whose loved ones have been captured, one doesn't know if they're dead or alive. What I can to this day not – thinking that babies were beheaded, I have had nightmares about this. I just can't...

Yeah. Yeah. Well, and you were there at the beginning of this, that's why I'm asking you because –

Well, I was there when there was really the spirit that one was prepared to die for one's country, that's it. I mean I used to be sent on missions where I used to go under the [inaudible] under the worst possible fire and everything. In fact, [laughs] my commander has written a book and he mentions Natan HaKatan, there was a small Natan and there was a big one who's the chap who was dishing out all the weapons we had left.

You were Nathan HaKatan?

Yes, I'm very proud of that and I'm leaving that for my next generation, I've been telling them about it [laughs]. [03:18:05]

And that was in Tzfat?

That was in Tzfat.

At the battle, hmm.

Yes, yes. The – I was very proud to read that I was mentioned in that way.

Nathan HaKatan, that's a very nice –

Yeah, my – I mean Hana and the others laugh at HaKatan. I said, well, to differentiate, there were two Natans. One was a big guy and one is me [laughs].

HaKatan. And Nathan, when did you change your name to Zohar? We talked about that last time.

You know what happened. Do you –

Tell us again. I remember it now.

Yes. I had a – when I came to Tzfat and joined the *Haganah* and my Hebrew was very poor at that stage, but I made friends quickly and they took to me and I became part of that and we were a unit. And Moshe Zaharoni, he came from Tiberias, he was probably – I mean he was probably at the time fifteen, sixteen years of age. One of these wonderful Sabras who was ready to give his life, and he did. He was killed by a sniper near me. And I decided then and there that day that I would change my name from Sonnenschein to Zohar because he was Zaharoni but we were fighting in a city called – the Book of Zohar on Kabbalah had been written there. That made me change the name because I wanted to be Hebrew.

What did your parents say when you changed the name?

When I finally – they had no resentment and neither did my brother.

But they didn't change their names?

They didn't. Some – later on the younger generation have changed it to Zohar.

So, you're not the only Zohar in the family now?

Not now, I've – just one or two have joined me. [03:20:01] But I – for me it had a lot of meaning. It's –

You're happy that you did that?

Oh, yes, I'm very – not only happy but proud. And Ben-Gurion also at the time wanted everybody to hebraicise [sic] their names. He was quite –

Yes. What do you think about that? Was it the right thing –

Yes, I do. I do indeed. I felt very strongly about it. You know, having background of a Zionist youth movement, all that, I was already focused.

To give a new beginning?

Yes.

A new beginning [overtalking].

Absolutely. And I was proud that I was able to do this. And it was very easy because at that time I was already in the army, so it was just an overnight thing, Nathan Sonnenschein, or Otto Sonnenschein became Nathan Zohar legally.

So how long then were you in that unit? Until the early '50s or –

The Science Corps, until I came to London, 1956, '57.

So quite a long time.

Oh, yes. Yes. Sadly, all my senior, closest friends have all passed away. I was known as Junior. I was the youngest. You know how old I am today? I'm ninety-three. They today would be at least – they've all passed away, all in one of the wars that have been fought. They all participated.

Nathan, so you were there in the '50s, so did you see – you must have seen the Mizrahi immigration as well from Iraq and other places.

Oh, yes. Yes. There was a time before I left for England, I used to go into the *ma'abarot* to teach Hebrew and not – under the pretext of teaching them Hebrew but to learn how to- for health reasons, you know, they used to sit around on the floor and eat and that. They had to learn Hebrew but that wasn't that easy. [03:22:02] But basic things they –

What are the ma'abarot? Explain to us what that is.

Ma'abarot were camps, large camps under canvas. I mean there was one near Haifa which I used to go under the pretext of teaching them Hebrew but to teaching them hygiene. They didn't know these things because they came from very backward –

So where were the ma'abarot – where did people come from, the one – the ma'abarot?

They came from various places, like Iraq and Syria, Middle Eastern countries, Yemenites. Some of them were lovely people, easy to deal with, others were difficult.

And because now people are saying, you know, people feel that Israel didn't deal very well with the Sephardi Mizrahi immigration and that there was, you know, that sort of Ashkenazi majority at that point didn't –

Yes, yeah. I hated that from the beginning, this differentiation between what they call the Ashkenazi and Sephardi and – I'd not been brought up with this. It really upset me because some of my closest friends were Sephardim, like Hana and her husband, Sephardim, but they are the elites. And Hana can trace back her thing generations. They were really the elite. I mean [laughs] Brian's grandfather, he built a city called city of Smouha. Did you know that?

Yeah, you told me that, yeah. So, it must have been difficult. I know especially for some of the Iraqi Jews, you know, who came from quite well – wealthy family to arrive in Israel and they feel that they weren't treated that well. I don't know whether –

No, there was a time I witnessed this. There was this horrible differentiation going on which I hated because, for instance, Tzfat, most of the families were of Sephardi origin. [03:24:01] In fact in their homes, my friends used to speak not only Hebrew but Arabic and Yiddish. All the youth of Israel, of, Tzfat spoke both those languages fluently because they were at school together, all these were close family. But sometimes I was shocked because they would invite me in for a meal, they all used to sit around, like Arabs, cross-legged, dipping things in. It – that was a bit of a shock.

Different culture.

Yes. But we were together, we were fighting the same enemy. They became very close. And when some of them were killed and a few were – it was for me a most terrible thing. And my friends, especially what really, really broke my heart was this Moshe Zaharoni.

Was he Sephardi?

No, he was Ashkenazi but from a well-known family in, what's the name, I've mentioned it, below Tzfat, what was the name of that town?

Tiberias?

Tiberias, yes. He comes from a family that had been maybe generations I suppose. Now –

And do you think that the word Mizrahi had a negative connotation at that point?

Yes, yes, it did but I didn't like this differentiation or the segregation even that –

Was there segregation?

Well, it happened, especially in Tel Aviv I would have thought, people were a bit more snooty-nosed but with time – you know, they always used to make fun, the Ashkenazim, of

the Sephardim. Even in England I remember, I never knew there was such a thing as a Sephardi Jew when I grew up. [03:26:00]

Although in Manchester you had a distinguished Sephardi community.

Yes, I'm just – I'm just coming- Do you know where the – and they were wealthy and they all lived in Palatine Road, West Didsbury. And do you know what the British used to call it? Palestine Road, West Yidsbury. I shall never forget. There was anti-Semitism when I lived in Manchester. You were –

Was there any conflict? You think the Sephardim and the Ashkenazi in Manchester, did they live quite separately?

No, they were separate. They were very snooty-nosed. That was the wealthy part and these were the working part and –

They were the established one, the Sephardi?

Yes.

Because they had been there for longer.

That's right.

It's so interesting, isn't it?

Very. Very. But I never liked that differentiation of Sephardi. I didn't even know what that meant, or *Teimanim*, Yemenite.

Yeah, because I know the ma'abarot, it's a big issue, isn't it, how long it –

It was.

How long people stayed there and –

Yes. But some of the youth from the ma'abarot did extremely well. They learnt Hebrew quite rapidly, and in the army also- they also were given very important jobs and were capable and they rose in rank quite quickly. Some of them were terrific.

So the army was a kind of leveller?

It always were – always has been, yes.

In Israel, yeah.

Yes. That was a melting pot, no doubt about it.

Okay, Natan. Anything else? What else in the '50s or anything in Israel, before we move to back to England, you want to add?

No, I – it's just that my wonderful years were in the Science Corps because I had also interrupted education in this country and I was amongst people who were highly qualified and worked closely with me, although we did- I was taught things that, you know, I hadn't been taught here. [03:28:19] And sadly all these have all passed away because they were at least ten years older than me.

And were you paid a salary or –

At the time?

Hmm-hmm.

Well, all of us were given something being in the army but in the Ministry of Defence I was given a salary at this stage.

So you were employed by the Ministry of Defence?

I was, yes. Yes.

Right. So Natan, tell us about meeting your wife and then how did you come to move back to England?

Yeah. I met Ruth in a town called Nahariya. Do you know it?

Yes.

Okay. It started off that Nahariya became the town where from the army we were given recuperation leave, if you were in a fighting unit you had to recover, you had to report to the town major, that's the officer in the army, and he billeted you there to recuperate. It was by the sea, you know Nahariya.

Yeah.

And I [laughs] – what I did, and I thought it was a terrific place to meet girls as well. It was – I thought, my friends, they are working twenty-four hours, they have to come also to recuperate. And I used to organise my senior friends from the Science Corps, you know. We used to have wonderful times. And on one occasion I came there, I had arranged friends to meet up there and what we used to do of course, we stayed in special hotels for the army and then meet on the beach the following day, except it had this horrible sand called *zifzif*.

[03:30:08] Did you ever come across it? Sort of if you were there it just stuck to you, the sand. Anyway, I decided on one particular vacation for all of us and we're there and I get up in the morning, early, and I see hundreds of men crowding around a certain area and I sort of pushed my way through and there were three girls sitting in the sand there. One of them was this gorgeous, beautiful girl, which was Ruth. Next to her, a blonde girl dressed in a bikini, the first bikini in Israel. The men had never seen one of those, and this is why like bees to a honey pot. And I had to push my way through there and I see Ruth there and I fell in love,

and I said, 'מדברת אנגלית? [Do you speak English]'. She said, yes. I said, 'May I sit next to you?' She said, [laughs] 'החוף שייך לכולם.' That was her answer.

Translate it for us. What does it mean in English?

Well, it means the sand or the – belongs to everyone. And I thought, [laughs] okay. And these men were all fighting to get a look at the bikini. I thought, this is no good and off I went. But I knew that this was a place where everybody came to relax and she had come there with these friends because she had to report to the army, was due for – she was seventeen and her army service was due, so this is why she came. And one of those girls had – it was not Ruth's idea. One of the girls said, there's a place called Nahariya, let's go there, and that's how they came, the three of them, and I decided I must see this girl again. [03:32:00] And I know that in the evening most of the young people went to a certain hotel, dancing, and that's where I found her again. And I saw her there and she had also sort of a headpiece and it looked like a crown. She looked like a princess. I really fell in love and I decided I must get to know her better and I – dancing and she says she's from Tel Aviv and she's come – anyway, finally I managed to get her phone number and that's how it started. And she was – then a few weeks later she reported to the army and she had to go to [inaudible] which is the engineering corps because she had been studying architecture at that stage here in London. They decided there. And that's [laughs] – Ruth was not fighting the enemy, she was always fighting the army [laughs]. She [laughs] used to [laughs] – I thought that they put her into prison, the way she behaved, because she always very, very – well, Hana will tell you. She had a very strong character. If she felt something wasn't right, she used to fight it. So [laughs] she was put into a unit in the Science Corps – in the engineering corps where the head of that unit was an ex-*Irgun Zvai Leumi* person, whom she didn't like. So, one day he's giving her an order, said, Ruth, do [inaudible]. And she in front of the whole squad said, do it yourself, 'cos she didn't like him and she didn't – and of course in front of, how dare you and, you're confined to barracks. And this is what happened to her. She was confined to barracks. I lived in Haifa at that time. I had to come and help her get some release [ph]. During the night she – because she was confined to barracks she had to sleep overnight, she wasn't allowed to leave the camp [laughs]. [03:34:07] I must tell you another thing there. [Laughs] In this camp there was a this – a young girl, a sweet girl, she was on night duty but her grandmother who was

worried about this child, used to come every night with her chair and sit outside on guard duty with her. You see, this is a Jewish [inaudible]. Now, what happened in the case of the Ruth, they because she was retained in the barracks for so – for weeks as a– the night guards used to come and wake – shake her and say, it's your turn. She says, no, I'm not on duty. So, they left her alone and they went off to sleep. So one night the [laughs] whole camp was left unguarded and a senior officer came [laughs] to inspect it, so there was a problem [laughs]. We solved it. But I'm just telling you her character.

And what was her background? Where had she grown up? Ruth.

Oh, Ruth. Ruth was born in Lithuania and she was born in Kovno to two wonderful parents. Her father was a businessman. He had a factory producing clothing and also, they – he had a department store in the main street in that place. As soon as the Russians came, they grabbed him and sent him to Siberia where they starved him to death, and that left a mother and a baby, Ruth. She was only a few months old. Then they came for Mother and Ruth and sent them both to Siberia as well some weeks later. [03:36:01] Do you see a photograph over there?

Yeah, we will look at it.

Yeah. That's her. That's her uncle who has also passed away. He was a doctor. And at that time when the communists came, because he was a doctor, an elite doctor, they gave him a special booklet, a red pass where he could travel everywhere [inaudible]. He went immediately to Siberia to look for mother and child.

After the war?

Looking out for them. He didn't know where they were. Before that he had tried through the Russian authorities to get the release. They wouldn't. They were considered capitalists. So, what he did, because he was a very determined, strong- came to Siberia, walked the streets, yelling, Luba, his sister's name, and finally found them, brought them back to Kovno, got in

touch with an Israeli outfit called – that was not Betar. What was it called? Anyway, they got – he got them to Palestine, Mandate Palestine at the time.

So what, '46 or a similar time to you?

Yeah.

'46?

Yes, maybe a little earlier.

So she was there with her mother?

She was there with her mother. There were other members of family there but she was there always with her mother but no father. And at that time the uncle and aunt and the son who now lives in California – I speak to him every evening – he treated Ruth and Mother like, you know, Ruth was like a daughter. When I came, he treated me like a son as well.

The uncle?

The uncle.

What was his name?

His name, Vidor [ph]. [03:38:00] And –

Surname?

That's Vidor.

Ah, surname was Vidor. And his first name?

First- I've got to look it up again, I keep- Isak [ph]. Isak [ph] Vidor.

Isaac. Isak [ph],

Isaac Vidor, yes. In fact –

Vidor with a W or with a V?

No, V-I-D-O-R, Vidor. It used to be Vidorchinsky [ph].

Ah, okay, from Vidorchinsky [ph] to Vidor.

Vidor, yes. And his son is also PhD. He's also Vidor.

Right, okay. And when – which year did you get married, Natan?

'56. You've probably seen an invitation.

Yeah, we're going to see it in a second. And how did – did your parents react? You were still quite young and Ruth was quite young.

Yes, I mean –

Did they encourage you? Did they – what –

They didn't encourage and didn't discourage because I was already my own person. In fact, I was earning money, helping my parents even, and so was my brother who was living close to them in Holon.

And what about her mother?

Oh, her mother was very happy that she was marrying such a nice boy I suppose – I hope. No, she – no, at that time the parents could not come to the wedding because her – this was her stepfather who was like a father to her and to me all those years. He was a director, a senior director of the Citrus Marketing Board. He worked in the London office and then they decided to open an office in Hamburg which he organised.

So they – and you got married in Israel?

We got married in Israel but he had a heart problem, so they were not present at our wedding.

And where did you get married, Natan? Tell us a bit. Where was it?

In a nice place. You see my memory's so bad – it was not in Tel Aviv. [03:40:02] It's on the thing, on the invitation. Yeah. And the first thing we did when we were able to, we went to visit the parents in Hamburg.

They had settled there in Hamburg?

They had not settled but he had to work there. The mother used to come backwards and forwards during the period that – Ruth before she went in the army she was still at school – the mother used to spend time with her in Tel Aviv and have to go back and look after the father as well, her stepfather. It was a difficult time.

And when you – after you married, what was your plan? What did you think, to stay in Israel, to – what is it –

Yes, the plan we [ph] stay but Ruth wanted to continue her studies. She was an expert in dress design and she got a place at St Martin's School of Art and that is the reason we came back to London. But also at the same time I thought, if I'm coming back, I never – I didn't do a *Te'udat Bagrut* in Israel, I didn't get to that stage –

Which is the A-level? A-level?

I got – yes, A-levels in all the necessary subjects. But in England she was accepted by St Martin's and that's the reason really, we came back. But I decided to do my A-levels and all what's necessary for university entrance.

So were you happy to come to England in '56?

Yeah, yes, I was happy in as much because I knew I was doing what she wanted to do.

You wanted to support her?

Oh, yes. She supported me always. I'm – to this day I'm lost without her. She was very, very close and she had a very clever brain and how to behave and, you know, she had a wonderful sense of art and things like that and she designed – did you ever see The Avengers, the film, The Avengers with Diana Rigg? **[03:42:16]**

Yeah. Yeah.

She did the dress design and all those things for Diana, she – that was the first thing she got after graduating from St Martin's was to go into the film business.

Set design? Or costume design?

Costume design.

So what films did she work on? Avengers –

Oh, that's the only one. That's the only. After that the problem began, she started smoking. We were begging her – her parents begging her not to smoke. This is why she passed away. Her lungs were completely damaged.

Was she a chain-smoker?

She wasn't a chain-smoker but she certainly smoked more than was required. We all, her parents, her uncle, we did everything to try and stop her. She just was hooked on it. And then she passed away peacefully at the Royal Brompton Hospital in September. I was with her to the end and since then I'm broken-hearted.

Because you were married for how many – so many years.

Yes, since '57. And she was loved by all, not our friends but our friends' children. Next door, you should see the letters and cards I have had from the children that remember her so well and had such happy times together. Of course, we have close friends – when I met her, she was a teenager, so I met her teenage friends. She had difficulty in [laughs] getting pally with my lot because they – she said they're her parents' age [laughs]. [03:44:03]

Wait, how many years older were you?

The difference between us? Well, I was born in 1931 and she was born in '38. Seven years' difference.

Yeah. And Natan, just coming back from Israel, back to England, what was that like? Because it was still – I mean not that long after the war, well, '56.

Yes.

In terms of lifestyle and living and culture.

Yes. It wasn't difficult because we had a lot of Israeli friends here who were students as well. We used to meet regularly.

And where did you move to settle in England?

Where? The first place was in, the other side of Padding – near Padding – Bayswater. And then we moved to a flat in St John's Wood above Lord's – opposite Lord's Cricket Ground. And from Lord's we went back to Bayswater and then we moved into this flat.

And tell us a little bit about your work, your career, from then onwards.

Yes, well, before I left England, as I told you I won a scholarship in the Manchester Technical College. At that stage I was living with the Jewish family who'd brought me to England. But the family, it was just the mother and the girls. The men were still in the forces. And I won a scholarship there to a technical college where I studied for a few years. But the girls decided – the daughters decided that – and their house had been completely demolished in the East End, a direct hit, luckily nobody was in the house. [03:46:07] The men were in the forces. The girls all – each of them – there were three girls – they were shorthand typists, secretaries, but they wanted to come back to London, so the mother agreed and we – I had to stop my studies at that college, came to London and because I was the only man of the house [laughs] at that time, the girls were earning a living and I felt very bad that they had to support me, so I decided I would look for work. And I did in – came here, I got a job almost immediately in an engineering firm where the office was in Victoria Street. And we lived in a flat in Chelsea, opposite the Royal Hospital. The menfolk had not yet returned from the army but I – at least I started earning and my first job was as a design engineer draughtsman. And at that stage I – my focus was already wait for the end of the war, my parents were alive, my brother at this later stage of – came to visit me and he said, we decided I would come to Palestine as soon –

Natan, but we are speaking later, after you came from Israel. Now we are talking about '56 onwards.

Yes.

Not before.

No.

How did you pick up the – your engineering?

In '56 I came here and I got in touch with a contracting company that found me jobs in various engineering companies where I worked.

But you also – did you do some A-levels? [03:48:01] Did you resit some A-levels?

No, I did my A-level only once.

Yeah, so you didn't have to do any additional [overtalking]?

No, no. And I did extremely well on the A-levels, funnily enough [laughs]. But –

When you – originally when you did them?

Yes, yes. But I started working for companies that needed engineering draughtsmen but also companies that did work with Germany, so bilingual. And I worked for a company who had certain agreements and so I became very useful and one of their competitors then poached me and I joined that company and I worked there until I retired.

What was the company called?

Rosin Engineering. This was for the chemical engineering. I was a senior sales technical engineer. That was my title. I also went to places like China and negotiated contracts.

So you travelled a lot?

I – not a lot. I could have travelled much more but Ruth would not permit it. I did a lot of work with India but never actually – they used to come and see me. I did a lot with Russia, so I used to deal with the Russians at Highgate. They've got – I don't know if you know this –

they had special offices for negotiating and I used to go there as well. So – and also, I was responsible for the company, organising all the exhibitions we did, particularly in Germany.

So what sort of products? You said chemical engineering. Tell us, what were they?

We built special equipment for dealing with chemicals. I mean for instance, in this country when they were still in business, ICI was one of our biggest customers. [03:50:05] But otherwise – and we did a lot of –

What is ICI?

The ICI chemical – one of the biggest chemical engineering – chemical companies in this country. You haven't heard it- one of the foremost –

Right. So, you provided equipment for –

We used to – we had a factory near – outside Birmingham where we built all these units. The –

Like, give us an example of –

I'll give you an example that ICI, for instance, was having to dry a certain chemical powder and they could not do this and we designed special units for doing this. And it was very – and it – it was not just chemicals, it used to be sand-drying, big dryers, I mean I also sold one in Ireland at the time. The most difficult visit I ever had was to China for polyester. Polyester, you know, for making the thread of that, preceding that you have certain particles of the polyester that you have to dry down to a very low moisture content which is 0.0001%, it's just a fraction. And we were experts at that. And for that we designed special drying units, it could be a rotating type of thing, it could be a chamber, and we became experts known in this field internationally. So the Russians bought from us, the Indians bought from us, Israel, I also – I mean Dead Sea Works, I had a contract with them. Another one in –

What did they need? Also drying –

They were drying salt. [03:52:00]

Yeah. And they're still doing it?

They're still doing it, yes.

And Natan, what was it like for you? You said you went to Germany on business and obviously you spoke German. Did you tell people about your background?

Yes. You know what happened on one occasion? I – also this is when I was still studying. Ruth's father had lots of contacts and he got me a – during one of my vacations a job in a shipbuilding place on the Elbe. And Ruth and her parents went to the States to visit the family and left me in Hamburg in their flat and every morning I got up very early and had to cross the Elbe river to get to this place where they were building these small refrigeration boats and I was given a job in their drawing office, in their technical office. And it was very interesting. It was during a vacation from studying. And [laughs] you'll never believe this. The head of the department said, when your wife gets back from the States, we'd love to – my wife would like to invite you for dinner and that. Cut a long story, we came there for dinner, his wife was Scandinavian, out come the albums and everything. It transpires he was a U-boat commander during the war. So, you can imagine how I felt that evening [laughs].

So what did you – did you say anything?

No, no, not a thing. Not a thing. He was – at that time I may not even have told him I'm Israeli, I told – he thought I was from England, British. Although when I was working in the drawing office, at the end of each week they used to come in from the office for *Kirchensteuer*. You know that? And they said, for *Jüdische* and a finger went like that and everybody looked [laughs] and I felt very uncomfortable. I thought, *Kirchensteuer*?

[03:54:00] Yes, and then somebody told me that, you know, this is what you have to do, pay.

Germany, a tax. It's a tax.

Did you know that?

Yeah.

Yeah. Anyway, I learnt a lot in that shipyard.

But did they know you were Jewish, then, in Germany?

Yes, yes.

You said you were Jewish?

Yes, yes.

But also because I guess of your name they thought you were Israeli, or did you –

They didn't at the time cotton on. He didn't.

*But did you ever – you never thought of changing, anglicising your name? Did you?
Anglicising your name.*

No, no. No, no.

There was no need – you didn't feel there was a need?

No, never.

*You didn't – did you have any bad experience with being called Nathan Zohar? Or people
didn't understand necessarily what –*

No, no. [Laughs] When I got a scholarship to the technical college in Cheshire – Lancashire, rather, I – my name appeared on a list in the local paper of people who have got these scholarships, whatever [laughs]. They got it wrong. The name they had was Oho Sonnenscheeny [ph], so [laughs] came the day I appear in school and the whole college thought, this must be a Chinaman [laughs]. Oho Sonnenscheeny [ph]. I've still got the paper cutting [laughs]. Anyway –

And Nathan, did you ever go back to Vienna?

Yes, but with difficulty. Difficulty on my part. Vienna started sending me letters. They *Wiedergutmachung*, they wanted to entertain me to visit the city where I was born, all this. My brother before me had actually taken advantage of this and told me about it. But I said – I got to a stage, I said I want nothing more to do with Vienna and what they did to my father and what I saw at the time, I never want to go back. But subsequently I have a very – we have very close friends who's a retired GP also came from Vienna with his parents and he became a doctor here. [03:56:04] Anyway, his wife became very ill and he also had that same invitation. And she was ill for a long time. He said, Natan, one day, we'd love to go to Vienna. Would you and Ruth accompany us, because I don't think – I said of course, we'll come, and we went together. This was probably about ten years ago. And we were entertained royally. It was really – and also, we met at least another dozen boys and girls like myself who'd been dispersed in the world, and it – breakfast time, we used to talk and tell everybody what each of us had done. And it was very interesting how successful some of these were and what they'd achieved. So – and also we were taken to see Vienna and Ruth was – for her it was the first time to go to Vienna. So, I'm glad we went. But I must tell you one incident. We went – my – when I was growing up, we belonged to the *Haupt* Synagogue which was very close to Gestapo headquarters. Do you know Kristallnacht? They left that only synagogue alone 'cos it was so close to the [laughs] – their headquarters, they were afraid that would be destroyed as well. So –

Yeah. Schwedenplatz. Schwedenplatz.

Yeah. Anyway, that – I've forgotten the name of the synagogue but –

Seitenstettergasse [sic].

Seitenstettengasse, yeah. My mother when it was *Purim* or anything like that, she used to dress me up. I mean all my costumes were made by my brother, Jackie, and that. But it was *Simhat Torah*, I never forget, she took me to this synagogue and Jackie had made me my headdress and the flag and everything. And do you know the mothers were sitting in the balcony and it had a very beautiful – it has a – to this day a beautiful roof with shining stars, you know what I mean? [03:58:00] And one of the places to visit on the itinerary of the people invited was to the synagogue. So, Ruth said, come on, I want to see how you grew up, where is it? So we're sitting in a synagogue that – and I'm recapping and seeing my mother on the balcony, what had happened to me at the time [laughs]. I was – I probably was only about six or something. And she used to bend over the balcony and “*wie geht es mein Kind*” [how are you] sort of waving. Suddenly, I wanted to go to the toilet, so I'm telling my mother and she's misinterpreting. She says, “*ja, mein Kind*”, so I'm waving this and I'm waving this flag, and Ruth is sitting there bursting with laughter, what the hell's going on [laughs]. I said, I'm just re-enacting what happened [laughs].

While you were there now?

Yes, with Ruth. It sort of all came back [laughs].

You saw your mother there?

I saw my mother there.

In your mind.

Yes. Yeah. And it's a beautiful synagogue. I don't know if you know, the ceiling has got flickering stars as well and that hadn't changed. So –

So was it a kind of – was it a good thing being back in the synagogue, in some way?

It was good.

For you.

Yes, it was good and the fact that I had shown Ruth this part of my childhood.

And what did Ruth – you said – so she studied, she worked for the film – and what was – what did – did she work then subsequently?

Oh, yes, she worked –

Tell us a little bit about her.

She – well, she used to have to go on location quite often and be part of that team. And they used to send her a car to pick her up at six o'clock, five o'clock in the morning to go on location. [Laughs] I used to be woken up sometimes five o'clock, the telephone used to go, and I said, who is – it's Sid speaking. It's a woman. She was the head of a jujitsu – because, you know, if you watched that series, there was a lot of hand-to-hand fighting.

In Avengers, yeah.

The Avengers. [04:00:00] And this one, she was in charge of getting the jujitsu organised at six o'clock on site. And I said to Ruth – I said, it's six o'clock. She said, yes, so what? I said, [laughs] you've woken me up again. She says, well, Ruth's got to be on set [laughs]. That's how it was.

But other films? You said not other films.

No, that's the only one she did. There's the –

And what other things did she do? Ruth.

That was her main job. Oh, she also was invited by a legal firm to help them with copyright. Somebody was copying a certain dress thing and that, and she was called in and also to try and get, well, I used to help on that as well, certain items that you could buy on the open market, if that was looking like a copy. So she used to advise the legal people what's what and she worked on that for quite a while.

But you didn't have children, Natan?

No, sadly not. That's my greatest, greatest saddest thing.

Did – Ruth wanted to have children? Or –

She did not.

She didn't.

She went through a certain period where she felt that she didn't, so that's the biggest, biggest mistake but there's nothing you can do when –

Why did she feel that way?

I don't know. She never told me. Because she loved all our friends' children and they loved her. I've got so many cards from all these children who are now grown up, their memories, because they all loved her. And they loved her, talking to her about dress and that sort of thing. And of course, we used to – when the parents used to want to do something, they used to drop the kids with us and we had some lovely times with them and they remember this.

[04:02:05] For me it's very touching. Today, to these days I still get phone calls saying, Nathan, are you okay? We'd love to come and see you.

But for some reason, maybe there was something in her past –

Oh, yes.

That she didn't –

Oh, yeah.

Want –

I don't know. Maybe what she went through, something, she was afraid. I really don't know. Although even her character, she was always very positive about everything.

But by the sound of it, you had a wide circle of friends.

Very wide. We still have luckily, and inherited the children.

And did she stay close to her mother? You said the mother was in Hamburg.

No – yes. Yes.

What happened then to her parents?

When her father died of a heart attack, he's buried in Israel.

But I mean the mother and her stepfather.

No, she – the stepfather.

Oh.

And the mother used to – we lived in a house in Bayswater where we have a basement flat that was her granny flat. She used to go to Israel and then come back and stay with us always. But she died – one of the first victims of mad cow's disease. Do you remember?

Yeah.

It was horrific, for Ruth especially. And there was this terribly close bond between mother and daughter and uncle, very much. But that was a nightmare because no doctor had come across what it was. We had several close medical friends who helped us at the time but Ruth nursed her to the very end and it was awful. Awful to see her mother fade away like that and –

Mad cow, that was some twenty years ago or something, wasn't that?

Yes. And we don't know how she caught it and –

How did she contract it? [04:04:01]

It's – you know, it was – they said it was due to eating a certain meat of cows and that. That was [inaudible].

And was that difficult for Ruth to deal with?

Oh, it was horrible. Horrible. In the end we had to get her into hospital, and Uncle came with his wife immediately 'cos that was his close – he was our greatest support.

Where did he live? Did he stay in Israel or –

No, no, no, he never – he visited Israel. He lived in the States. He managed to get to the States also through a Zionist movement after the war.

So he didn't come to Israel?

He did not live in Israel. He used to come to Israel to visit his sister, yes. Yeah. He and his wife. Yeah. And the rest of the time he had to requalify in – when he came to the States and then they lived in New York and he had a – he was a GP, he had a practice there.

And was it at that time when Ruth's mother died that you became involved with Westminster Synagogue?

When she – yes. You –

You told me.

I told you, yes. Yes, that's –

Because you needed –

Had no burial right.

She had no burial right?

No, not at first.

She didn't belong to anything? And you didn't belong?

I do now. I did –

Yes, but not then.

And from that time on when she – yes. Yes, I had a lot of help at that time. I shall never forget.

And how did you find that Westminster Synagogue? Was it near where you lived?

Oh, lots of – no, no. Lots of our closest friends were members and I used to socially meet the rabbi there as well, who said, Nathan, it's time you join, and he was right.

But before then you didn't feel a need to belong to a synagogue [inaudible]?

Since – I told you how my foster father was – how my Jewish foster mother was treated when her husband died of a heart attack. [04:06:04] They would not bury him. I told you.

Yeah, you told me. You told me.

From that time on, I said I don't want anything whatsoever to do with synagogues, I will go through with my *bar mitzvah* out of respect to my foster father. And that's how it went. Even when I met my parents again in Israel, I never went to synagogue. I – there was no need because all the festivals and everything were [overtalking].

You were Israeli.

Yeah. But as far as this country is concerned, I carried this terrible pain in my heart that how could people treat other Jews like that. And I swore I would never go into a – and when Ruth's mother died, I realised this is it, and that's when we joined at Westminster and I'm glad I did because I don't know if you know that syna –

Yeah, I know it a little bit.

Have you met Thomas, the rabbi?

Yeah. That's Rabbi Salamon, is it? Salamon.

Salamon, yes. You know him, okay. He's in Israel now. He texted me the other day- we are on our way to Israel to find out what is happening. And I replied, I wish I was coming to you, because that means so much to me, and he knows that. He officiated at Ruth's burial and he's going to – Ruth's stone-setting is on the 2nd of June, the same cemetery where her mother's

buried. And what I did, I wanted a replica of the actual stone and grave of her mother and I've organised all that. And Thomas approved as well what I did. He was very helpful.

So you became involved with Westminster Synagogue?

Yes, to the degree that [laughs] since the lockdown I haven't been anywhere, certainly not to the synagogue, although I love going to that synagogue because I love the melodies that they sing there. [04:08:03]

So you started going to synagogue?

Yes, the High Holidays, Ruth and I always went. But not on a regular basis, although our closest friends do go. And –

And what did you like in Westminster Synagogue? What –

Well, first of all, what I like is that it's a mixed congregation in every way, even Jews and Christians, and I like that. And I certainly like the rabbis preceding him very much and I love the melodies that they play on the organ and sing, and Thomas has got a most beautiful singing voice. I really love that too. So – and I – all the High Holidays, you know, *Yom Kippur*, I always went, always. And I liked the sermons that were given. So yes, it – and Ruth loved going to it as well 'cos she loved meeting her closest friends and that was *Simhat*. In fact, I'm – for *Purim* I've been invited to go on two occasions by one of our close friends. She said, Nathan, you've got to come out and do something and not be at home all the time, you must go out. Would you come with me on these dates, and I said yes, of course, with the children and you, it will be perfect.

Because you haven't been going out so much?

I haven't at all. Right through the lockdown, I have not been going out. I mean lots of our friends go to the cinema, they go to the theatre. I haven't been – we haven't been, Ruth hasn't been either. But these close friends, they come and see me. I mean- one of my friends, a – I'll

help you meet him one of these days, he's very interesting and very close – in fact, he's coming to see me next week and taking me out for lunch. He's making me walk, you know, I'm being looked after. **[04:10:01]**

That's very good.

I'm being very well looked after. As you probably know, I'm being – did I tell you that I've inherited the three – I call them nannies – that looked after Ruth. As one of her last wishes she said, 'You will look after Nathan, won't you?' It's all Ruth.

Ruth organised- so, what did Ruth – did she have a lung disease, or what did she –

Oh, yes, she had – she was being treated at Royal Brompton Hospital. She had been smoking, we had begged her to stop, everybody did everything possible but in the end, it was a bad, bad lung problem and they did everything at the Royal Brompton. She had a most wonderful consultant who looked after – their daughter, they really did, those doctors, whenever we went because–

Yeah, so you were saying that Ruth had the carers here at the end of her life.

Yes, right to the end. It was the last – part of it was she had to go into hospital and because she had a CT scan and they warned her it's urgent, she must come in. And have you met the senior- Mary?

Yeah.

She came and she stayed with her, with – we slept – they slept overnight in her room. So – and the team did everything possible to save her. And it got to a stage it wasn't just her lungs, her whole body was racked in such pain over a long period and all the painkillers she was getting had no effect whatsoever. She – towards the end she was begging me that I should take her life, believe it or not. She couldn't stand it. She could not stand it. **[04:12:00]** And she kept on saying that I should have taken her to Dignitas and – because a close friend of

ours did that, why didn't I listen to what she was – I said no, I would never, never support that.

You wouldn't have gone to there?

Never, I – it made her very unhappy because I didn't. Although I did everything possible that one could, to take her to all the specialists but they didn't – weren't able to help. So, she was suffering on many different problems.

So it was a difficult situation for you.

Oh, yes. Luckily, her mother was no longer alive, because her mother was so close to her, and the uncle.

So how has it been then for you since she passed away?

I can't even explain. I have terrible nightmares, not only from the War of Independence, though I'm still suffering from – I mean she was my rock in everything, supported me in everything I did and encouraged me. And she had wonderful dress sense of course and behaviour and everything, every – you should read some of the letters I've been getting, how much she was admired. And people loved being with her because she was very sensible. The other person closest to Ruth I would say is Hana. She's also a fantastic person in every way and comes from a wonderful background. [04:14:00] As I said to you, to me she's the epitome of Israeli youth as I used – adored.

And she's one of your friends who's helping out?

More than that. She's an executor. She and other close friends, yes.

Yeah. So, you're lucky to have a support network, a good support network.

I don't know – I didn't mention this to you. Hana and there's another close friend, Tim, who you may have heard of, he's a lawyer who's dealing with all my things as a friend. He's putting so much work. And both he and Hana are my executors. So I've got to a stage where my mind is so addled and everything that they have taken it upon themselves to look after me, like brothers and sisters. I can't tell you how. And not only they, their children as well. So, I'm –

But you said, Nathan, you have – you think you have – you had or have post-traumatic stress from the – from independence war. Did that affect you throughout your life or more now?

No, more lately. It started many months ago where during the night I started punching Ruth. I was having a bad dream. I made a joke of it but it wasn't really funny [laughs]. But the other night I woke up, I punched the bedside lamp off [laughs] and I yelled, Ruth, are you okay? It's post-traumatic I suppose. Anyway, what I wanted to say to you, the – my friends, so Hana, Tim, the solicitor, and Mary, my nanny, chief nanny, they all decided they would like to invite everybody for dinner who's been helping me. [04:16:09] And they booked a restaurant, Caraffini in Chelsea – I don't know if you know it – but it's a restaurant we all love going to. Ruth and I did, and Ruth and I were looking for a day that we would be able to entertain. Anyway, all those close friends were invited for dinner and it was a most beautiful day. And Mary went and bought a special chocolate cake with all the candles on it. I wish I could show you the photos because they're amazing.

And this was just last week for your ninety-third birthday?

Exactly. It was on the 28th of February.

So how many people were you altogether? And you had a nephew – your nephew came?

Yes, he came specially from Berlin.

So this is your brother's grandson?

Correct. And his two daughters are my great-great-nieces.

And they came to here with you?

No, they will be coming.

Ah, they will be coming.

Certainly for the stone-setting. In fact, his wife phoned me yesterday, when they come a few days earlier, they're booking a theatre for the children but I'm going to join them. I'm very lucky to have such lovely, lovely – those [laughs] children are absolutely gorgeous. Have I shown you the photos?

Yeah, and we're going to have them [overtalking].

And the dog is like a daughter [laughs]. He [laughs] – Erez, the nephew, he phones me every night before he goes to sleep, did you take a walk, did you do this, he says keep – and if there's something, he's here.

So is he your closest relative? Erez.

One of. Yes, one of my closest, yes. My brother's grandson. **[04:18:00]**

And Natan, you – what I wanted to ask you, so we talked about post-traumatic stress. How do you think has your – the experience of the Kindertransport, did that have an impact on your later life do you feel?

No, it didn't actually. As I probably told you, the only thing that happened to me when I was with my Christian foster parents and didn't know if my parents were dead or alive or where they were. And I think I told you, even in church my foster mother said, 'Otto, darling, don't worry, we will find your parents, do not worry.' Did I tell you what the next thing she said to me? 'You are Jewish and I want you – we're in church and I want you to know and to

remember always you are Jewish. What I – I don't know sadly how to bring you up according to your religion. One thing I do know, Otto, darling, when we kneel, in your religion you do not kneel.' That's what she said. And that's how I was brought up by her. And finally, they found out where my parents were because Jackie, my brother, also through his commanding officers were trying to trace what happened to them. And he was the one who first was able to notify me, we found our parents.

So you think that separation and Kindertransport didn't have a sort of lasting impact?

No, it didn't. It didn't because I was always blessed with wonderful people who looked after me. I take it this must have happened. Of course, when I was with the Christian parents, not knowing where my – I used to cry at night, weeping. I remember that vividly. I was ashamed of myself but I couldn't. That was – because I didn't know what happened to them.

Yeah. But they could help you in a way, they were supportive. [04:20:00] The –

The Christian?

Yeah.

Oh, yes, she –

They had the emotional – they could –

Oh, every – oh, yes.

Tune in or support you whilst many people couldn't.

Because she, my foster mother, used to say, Otto, don't worry, darling, we will find your parents. She used to make it quite clear that the search was going on and she was doing everything possible.

So that's quite special. Why do you think was she that- was she capable of doing that or supporting you?

Yes, she was capable. She was – do you know, I was thinking back, she was such a – she came from an ordinary background from Somerset, brought up there, but she was very intelligent and she was the whole *macher* of the village, very church-going. And anything had to be done, the head of Red Cross, war effort, all these, she was the person dealing and she was the person in fact when the evacuees came to the village, do you know how I came to her?

I think you told us. You went up to her.

Exactly.

You asked.

That's it.

You chose her.

I chose her, yes, that's –

You had a good instinct.

Oh, wonderful. And her son. And I made her an offer I couldn't – she couldn't refuse [laughs]. That's it. We spoke about it for ever afterwards. But – and her husband had said to her – this I got from my foster brother afterwards, John – before Mother left, he said to her, don't you dare bring one of those bloody evacuees back with you [laughs]. She didn't listen. She was a very strong lady. And obviously I made her an offer in front of her peers, she would have been very embarrassed because she's dishing out all these evacuees and [laughs] anyway –

So what did you actually say to her? What did you say to her?

I went – all I said, I said – up to her, I sweetly said, ‘Please would you please have me?’

That’s all I said. [04:22:01]

That was enough.

And that’s when my life started again, as being British. And the rest was her son of course. And also I realise now, how is it I went into engineering? What focus? My foster father, he was very technically minded. He also had a huge vegetable garden, and in the front, flowers and that. So he taught me how to dig the earth, how to plant vegetables, how to treat flowers, you know, I was getting education there. At the bottom of this garden, he had a big shed which he’d built himself with all the mechanical equipment you could think of, lathes, cutting, all that. So I was always – and I used to watch him and he used to teach me, so already there was that influence I suppose.

Natan, you just mentioned being British, so I wanted to ask you about your identity. I mean you came from Vienna as a child, you lived in Britain, you went to Palestine, to Israel and you came back. How would you identify yourself today?

Israeli. Israeli first and foremost, to my death. Definitely. Yes.

Not British?

No. I would behave always towards the British for having saved my life and that but I would never – I would never fight a British person. That’s why I was not anywhere near the Irgun Zvai Leumi, or wanted anything to do with them, although they tried to get me. I didn't want –

You didn't want to be involved?

On the contrary, I hated them for what they did because to me, a British person was a British person, they'd saved my life.

Because the Irgun believed in military methods to –

Yes.

Yeah. [04:24:03]

But I mean they were suffering like – in Palestine they wanted to be home with their mother as well. But I'd been brought up according to the British way of life, I of course said, you know, decency and fairness and that's how I was brought up.

What about Austrian? Or Jewish Austrian? Does that – you identify at all?

Not at all, no. Although I was a member of Maccabi [laughs] and I used to be taken to Hakoah on a regular basis because my –

That's in Vienna?

In Vienna of course, 'cos I used to watch Jackie. He was a very strong swimmer, he used to swim for them.

Would you ever apply for Austrian citizenship?

No, I – on the contrary I was requested many times, I never.

No. What – do you understand, what do think about lots of second-generation now applying for Austrian citizenship?

I accept it. I accept it. I also – I'm thinking that, say, my nephew, Erez, who lives with his wife and two children in Berlin with another hundreds of other- and for instance, Erez told me when I showed him the postcard, the famous postcard, he immediately took a photo of that. He said, this is to be handed down to the next generation.

Which was that?

That my father gave me when they said goodbye at the *Hauptbahnhof*. He gave me several – did I show you or not?

Yeah.

The postcards, self-addressed to himself, saying, wherever you see a postbox – and it was with a stamp on it. He said, ‘Wherever you go, you must write, even if it’s only a few lines, that you are okay,’ and I did that. [04:26:01] But at that stage already I was able to write sentences in German, “*Liebe Eltern*” [Dear parents] and that. I showed you that-

You did, and it’s extraordinary because I can definitely say that I’ve never seen anyone who first of all has this in his possession but managed to write something during the journey of the Kindertransport. I mean certainly you are the first person who has shown this to us and if somebody else did, they might not have it, you know, so you’ve, you know, you’ve sent it and you have kept it or managed – your parents managed to keep it. So that’s an absolutely extraordinary –

Yeah. Oh, yes. It went with my father once he received it, all the way to Mauritius even, he carried it all the way back to Palestine. When we met again, he gave it to me. It’s something – I’ve shown you the original, haven’t I?

Yeah, and we’re going to film it now as well.

Yeah. But what I want to [laughs] emphasise, which you probably have heard already from me, when it came to the end after “*Liebe Eltern*”, then I’m write [ph] and my father was a stickler at calligraphy and grammar and I was only a young kid at the – and one thing he taught me, he said, you know, [background noise]. Excuse me.

We’re going to –

[Break in recording]

Yes, we were talking about the amazing postcards you sent. And we're going to film it soon.

That one is really something.

With a K, where you first wrote it with a capital K.

That's it. "Alles, was man- " - anything you can touch is a capital letter. And then I was – said – and a kiss, well, it is touching in a way but I was confused. I remember that well. And thinking of my Papa, because he was such a stickler for that, otherwise known as a *Yekke* [German Jew]. You've heard that expression? **[04:28:01]**

Yeah. But you don't know how the – we don't know or you can't remember exactly what – how that postcard was sent?

Yeah, it's – I –

Did you give it somebody? Did you put it in a letterbox?

I wouldn't – I can't remember that far back.

Okay, because we just saw that the stamp was from Frankfurt.

Yes, yes, you identified the thing very well. I never thought of it that way. You're absolutely right.

And it says you're in Würzburg, so my feeling is you must have given it to somebody and that person must have posted it in Frankfurt.

Yeah. But who was on the train at that time that I could trust, you see. That's the thing. There were no senior people. We were all children and they were all crying their heads off and –

Maybe just some bystander or passer –

I pass – I wouldn't have done that. It would have got to that stage in my mind after what I'd seen the weeks preceding, that I would trust any –

Maybe there was somebody, you know, from a Jewish community within Germany, like there were people on the train who accompanied –

Well, there did – there wasn't any senior – in fact, they put me in charge of a younger child, which – which thinking back is, you know, I was only eight.

You told us. So Natan, so you have this in your possession and we're going to film it soon. But until now you haven't told your story, or your story has not been recorded.

No.

So, I want to ask you what changed? Why did you want to talk now? And also, why didn't you want to talk before?

I've been encouraged by several of our close friends to tell my story because [laughs] much to Ruth [laughs] getting fed up hearing my stories [laughs] and I love telling them, all my dear friends will always tell you. And I know I've led a very, very sheltered, happy life.

[04:30:04] And all the whole time, wherever I've been, I've been amongst the best in every way. If it was in the army, if it was saving lives, one's life, all those things, I've always been so lucky. And I started talking and many people, non-Jewish friends of mine – are you okay? Many non-Jewish friends of mine said, Natan, we are telling your story to our friends, it's amazing what you have survived. Why don't you write a book about this? Why don't you – I've been encouraged many times and I felt rather bad about this, that – and more recently,

Hana and a friend of ours who's an executor – well, made me see, look, I've reached an age, if I don't do this soon then they'll never know. That's how I look at it.

And what do you think held you back before? Did you think it wasn't important or – what held you back from putting it down on paper?

Putting it down? Laziness I suppose. It's because also some of my closest friends in Israel, my seniors, have written and left books about – where I also feature and I felt it's time that I did the same thing. That's all. But I've been so absorbed with Ruth's health problems that I just could not. It's no use me blaming on the – on her health problems but the fact is, because everybody said, well, why don't you, it's so much easier if you talk into a microphone, at least leave whatever you want to say. [04:32:12] And many friends who themselves have written wonderful autobiographies have offered to help me.

Well, there is the right time. Things come when you're ready.

I realise I've got to this age now where most of my friends of my age have passed away, that if I don't do this now then –

And Natan, from your point of view, what are you most proud of? Or what is the most important thing in your story you want to pass on? From your perspective.

There's only one thing, that's having met Ruth [gets upset]. That is the most wonderful thing that's ever happened in my life. I wish you could have met her. Hana will tell you about her. That was such luck, how we met and how she accepted me as well, she had a lot of choice. To this day I've also inherited her friends, school friends in Israel, they phone me. And when I met her she was still at teenager and they were, and there was quite a distance because Ruth wasn't really interested in my older friends, which she said her parents' generation [laughs]. But I am very grateful the fact that to this day I have her school friends.

So do you think in terms of a message for anyone who might watch this, is it very important to meet the right person? What is your message for anyone who might watch this interview, based on your own experiences?

Yes. [04:34:00] I really don't know what advice to give. All I can say really, if you have had a wonderful life as I have, then please make a note of it and that the younger generation, it is most important that they learn from that. And I realised that, especially when my nephew was here with my lovely nieces. We sat here hours because I wasn't in Israel during his childhood. We had so much to talk about, not just personal things, family things, but also what he went through in the army and everything. So, we have quite a common denominator and I just feel that, and we've covered so much which is of interest to him and has to be handed to the next generation, family things. And I realise –

Like what, Natan? For example, like what? Like the postcard?

That's one thing, yes.

What else?

Oh, but they should know what my parents' generation went through. This must be told.

Because they had a really difficult time, and also in Mauritius.

Yes.

That was not easy.

A terrible time.

Do you feel they recovered from their experiences?

No. No. They – my parents never recovered. All I remember especially with my parents, what a gutsy lady my mother was, going into Gestapo headquarters – I told you – asking for release, coming to Tzfat in the middle of a battle, saying, your father's not well, he's sent me to bring you home – in the middle of a battle, [laughs] came [laughs] – how I felt, these are things that the younger generation must know, what their great-great-parents did. [04:36:05]

And anything else, Natan, based on your experience coming here on the Kindertransport?

Well, as you know, I have tremendous affection for the Jewish family right to the end and the Christian family, whom I loved.

So you had not only one but two foster parents who –

Oh, absolutely, to the end of my life I will always –

Who you were in touch with and stayed in touch with.

Oh, yes. And you see the letters I got from – in the middle of a battle – from my Christian foster mother, looking after her second, Jewish child. [Laughs] He should look after his health and not get involved in danger [laughs].

And do you think, Natan, what about today? Do you have any view on, you know, unaccompanied minors, the children, the whole issue of, you know, letting in unaccompanied minors to Britain, and refugee policies today? Do you see any, not parallels, but do you find we can learn something from the Kindertransport today?

I'm sure they can, of course. I'm not the only one who thinks so. You know, King Charles, he interviewed or either met a lot of the Kinder – were you there when he –

Yes, I was.

And I really – I've always enjoyed his progress, whatever he did. But I thought that – I was very touched how he spoke to the Kinder. In fact, I wish I could have met him at the same time. I would have loved to tell him my story. I always feel that I owe this country a great gratitude. I do. [04:38:00] The difficult times but what they did to support me, they gave me an education, a home.

Where is your home today? Where do you see your home?

You mean home in the form of a *Heimat* or where I feel most comfortable? Because this is my home which has been left by Ruth. I can't just abandon it.

And in terms of a Heimat?

Well, my heart will always be in Israel. I've always felt that and it goes on. In my heart and in my brain, it's Israel. What's going on in Israel at the present time, I feel so upset. I feel upset that I just weep when I think of the families who have been suffering and are suffering.

Yeah. And we talked about it, yeah.

Yes, it's, er, and the other thing I miss terribly, that a whole generation of my friends and people who I lived with have passed away. I can't – because I've been not living together with them all this time. I was I suppose at the back of my mind, looking forward to the day that we should be together again. Some of them have of course left lovely legacies. They've left stories of their life as well. They were each of them tremendous achievers.

Well, now you've done quite a long recording here. How do you feel about it, that you have now talked to us for a good I think almost five hours, Natan? [04:40:00]

Yes. Well, I'm – first of all I'm relieved to have survived to do this. And secondly, I know I'm doing something which my dear friends, like Hana and others whom you have met, have always wanted me to do this and encouraged me and have wanted to go out of their ways in

every way just to help me do it, but do it. And I realised as I am – time passing, I'm getting older, if I don't do it now...

Just a few more questions, Nathan. Obviously, if you have something else, I haven't asked you and you can say anything. But I was going to – have you got any regrets? Anything you think you should have done which you didn't do or...

I'll begin to weep. My greatest regret is that Ruth and I didn't have a child. That is the greatest regret. I realise how important that would be. It's also leaving things to the younger generation, that's another problem. I'm trying to sort things out, to get things to whose cousin in the States, she has left a will that all her jewellery, everything, should go to – and I want to do this and I'm doing my utmost. And my friends are trying to help me to do this, like Hana. It's not easy. Basic things but...

And anything, Natan, you would say maybe to your younger self from today's perspective? You would say to yourself, when you came here as a boy to England?

No, there's nothing I think I could improve on. [04:42:01] I always tried to conform to my surroundings. If I came to England, I wanted to be British and to behave in a fair way. I was brought up like that and I adored that. But as my wonderful foster mother said, I'm Jewish, don't you ever forget it. I mean some of my closest friends of course were Christian and colleagues over the years, I have had the most wonderful relationships, camaraderie in every way. I'm so grateful to this country for having had me and having allowed me to grow here and gave me an upbringing, a...even when I watch, you know, ceremonies like, you know, recently with Charles, the – it is very meaningful to me because that's how I've been brought up. I just hear [laughs] and see the Changing of the Guard, all those things I've grown up with.

It's part of you?

It's part of me. And then of course I come to my Israeli part, which is somewhat a copy of that but it's there forever. It has to be because I always dreamt about Israel and being part of

it, especially in the army. It's funny, from childhood I was always somehow focusing on military things. I can look back now and I realise why. [04:44:00] I mean my brother, Jackie, as I told you, was in Betar. Before that when my father obviously came back from World War Two – sorry, World War One, the photographs of a soldier with *Sternen* here and there. And I thought I wanted to be like him and then of course [laughs] it's the next gen – Jackie and I always focused. And my foster parents, military. So, there was a strong – I'm not talking about Israeli military, I was always that strong, strong thing in my mind because I wanted to do the same.

It's interesting you mentioned Betar because I just found out by reading my father's interview transcript that his father – and this was in Katowice, in Poland before the war – was a member of Betar and he used to go to weekly meetings and he talks about it.

Your father?

My grandfather.

Your grandfather. He met Jabotinsky probably.

That, my father doesn't talk about but he talks about Betar and that there were weekly meetings and that he remembers, you know, his father going to the meetings, so –

Right, yes. All I remember, terrible rows at home between my father and my brother 'cos he was – brother was trying to persuade him to be a Zionist and to let him go to Palestine illegally. My father would not support him. He needed some money, some funds to help him but until the end my father succumbed but he never supported.

Natan, I wanted to ask you, what about Stolpersteine? Is there anything in Vienna about your family?

No, not that I know of.

Are you interested in, you know, they –

I mean I came across them when Hana, Brian and I and Ruth went to Berlin, so we saw a lot of those. But in Vienna I came across when I finally did go but they – it was something which didn't really excite me. [04:46:07]

No?

No.

Not something you're interested in.

Maybe I should but it hasn't.

Because they're also laying them for people who were forced to leave, not only for people who were murdered. But, yeah. Okay, Natan, I think we have covered many, many different topics, certainly have covered your life. Is there anything else you'd like to add which I haven't asked you?

Thank you. No, no, not that I think of. I think you've asked me all the necessary questions and also that I've managed to offload as much as I can about things that I felt that would interest you and that are important to be noted. And that should be – remain in people's memories. I may be repeating myself but I have English, non-Jewish friends whom we've known for years and I've lost contact with them 'cos Ruth was so ill and also, she – the friend was [inaudible] and I must invite them soon again because we haven't seen each other – have been begging me for a long time, saying, Natan, for the sake of our friends, 'cos we tell them your stories, please write your memoirs. Please, would you do that? And I promised them that one day I would. But when one meets people like that who are asking for that, you can't refuse.

No, so you will get a recording of this interview and you can – that recording you can send on but also there will be a transcript, so there will be a text which you can then correct if

there are mistakes in it but also you have it to pass on to whoever you want to pass it on to.

[04:48:07]

Well, certainly I know one person I want to pass it on to. You've heard me mention, it's my nephew who was here up to a few days ago. He'd love to have that.

Did his grandfather – your brother, did he talk about the past? Did he put – was he interviewed ever?

No, no. Jackie, my brother, I haven't seen for a long time and I don't think he did. I don't think he did. And he had a lot to do because he served in the Jewish Brigade. And I don't know if you know this, that the Jewish Brigade when they finished their mission, they were in Italy in – waiting to be demobilised and go back to – but they divide themselves into two sections. You probably know this. One made it their task to hunt down all the Nazis, serious Nazis who did the terrible things and give them a summary dispatch at the end and murder them in the most horrible ways, that they should suffer as they made other people suffer. The other section which I was discussing with [inaudible] my brother was waiting, is he would pick up all the survivors from the camps that he could in trucks with some of his colleagues and go to the port nearest where the – they were working with Mossad of course – for getting all these people to Palestine. And Jackie – I was talking to his grandson – I said, I know he'd never told me this directly, he certainly wasn't one of the murder squad but he must have been dealing in that. **[04:50:06]**

And did he know about it, your grandson?

He didn't but he made it his business to and he said yes, Jackie did do this.

Okay. Okay, Natan. Well, from my point of view I have asked you whatever I needed to ask you. We're going to now look at some of your photographs and documents and you'll tell us what is in your archive. And in the meantime, I'll just say thank you so much for sharing your story with AJR.

It's my pleasure as much as it was yours, believe me. And it's quite a weight off my mind. It has been bothering me because I felt it's a duty.

Well, you had to wait a little bit here with us but I'm glad we managed to come and –

I'm so pleased to have had you here. And if there's anything further you need to know, don't hesitate, please. And I'd like to meet you socially again, both of you, what any – not just for a cup of tea, some cake as well [laughs].

With pleasure, Natan. So thank you very much in the meantime.

No, thank you. Yeah.

Okay.

[Break in recording from 04:51:17 – 04:52:32]

Okay.

Thank you. Yes, please. Who do we see in this photograph?

Photograph is me, Natan Zohar. At that stage it was Natan Sonnenschein. Born in 1931. He looks as though he's had a very good meal.

And where was the picture taken?

The picture was taken in Vienna.

Thank you.

Shall I identify this photograph now?

Yes, please.

Okay. This is a photo of me, Otto Sonnenschein, taken in Vienna. I think I was probably about seven years of age at that time.

Do I have to speak again? Okay. This photograph was taken in Vienna. I think I was probably seven years of age at that time.

And this is just a surviving fragment of a larger picture?

Yes, absolutely. Oh, yes. This photograph was sent by my father to a friend of his in London and he requested a friend to try and find me foster parents so that I could leave Vienna and come to live in London. **[04:54:13]** What this friend did, he used to go to a Turkish bath every Friday afternoon where all the people from the tailoring business used to meet up. And this friend went around showing this to the people who were there, saying who would take this refugee child? And one gentleman said please, let me have the photograph. I want to take it home to show my wife. The happy end is that he took it home, showed it to his wife who said we have got five children and we're going to save the life of this child. Please let us have him. And this is how I came to be fostered by my Jewish parents in the East End, that is Bow, London.

And their names?

The name was – the surname was Tober, T-O-B-E-R.

Yes, so this is the backside of the photo which says your name and how old you are.

It does say it.

Yeah? Otto Sonnenschein, acht Jahre.

Oh, it is. I thought seven, eight, yeah.

So that –

Yes, *acht Jahre*, that's when I came to London.

Yes.

We're looking at a photograph which was taken in Somerset when I was taken in by a most wonderful Christian family who became my wonderful parents. And this was our – their and my pet dog, a spaniel called Queenie.

And what were the names, please, of your foster [overtalking]?

Their name was George and Eileen Hookway. [04:56:06] They also had a son who was older than me. He was a teenager and treated me like his younger brother. His name was John. And I shall never forget him.

And did you like the dog?

I loved the dog but the dog did not love me because I was a newcomer and dogs don't like newcomers [laughs]. It really was jealous. I – every morning at six o'clock I took that dog up this hill to the farm to buy milk and take it for a walk. May I just hold it a wee second?

Who is in this –

It does say a picture of your-

Am I allowed to pick it up or not? This is – do I spell out her name?

Yeah.

This is a photograph – should I talk now?

Yeah.

This is a photograph of my wonderful Christian foster mother in Somerset.

Where in Somerset? Where?

A picturesque village called Burlescombe, a most wonderful, wonderful village where I grew up, the happiest years of my boyhood.

And this is your foster mother?

And this is my foster mother, Eileen Hookway, who treated me like her own child and nurtured me and taught me all the good things about being British.

Thank you.

I'm not allowed [inaudible] of being 1948 when I was still serving in the *Haganah*, a command car.

And who's driving it?

Who's driving it? One of the soldiers that was serving at that time. **[04:58:03]**

And when was it taken?

I can only imagine that this must have been taken in the '50s.

Okay, thank you.

These are my school friends from Manchester.

Do you remember any names?

I can't remember.

Some other refugees, you said?

Yes, there were Hans, Kiebel [ph] is one name.

And they sent you the photo?

Julius Mendelsohn [ph].

And did they send you the photo to Israel?

I don't remember that.

It says May '48 on the back.

Then I must have got it in Israel.

Thank you.

What – oh, I'm with the closest friend of mine, called Erich [ph] who like me came to this – to England with Kindertransport but he was not as lucky as I was. He was not fostered by a family. He was always in various places. And finally, we met up in Safed during the War of Independence and served together and saw some action together.

But this is in Tel Aviv, is it?

This is on the shore of Tel Aviv when we both had leave to come to Tel Aviv.

In 1948?

Yes.

No, don't touch it.

No, I can't see. I don't –

It's you. You're on the left.

I cannot see at all.

This is – it's a picture of the Scientific Corps.

Right, then we are visiting Beersheba. We were probably down in the Negev doing some trials.

And you're on the left?

I can't see.

Yeah, you told me, you're on the left of the picture. And what is it called? What was the name of the scientific –

Chemed. C-H-E-M-E-D [sic]. **[05:00:00]**

And what does it mean?

Chemed, that is the Science Corps, which was Ben-Gurion's brainwave and –

And when was this picture taken? In the '50s?

Early '50s, yes. Early '50s.

Early '50s, thank you.

We're looking at a photograph of a visit to visit Prime Minister Ben-Gurion who was the head of the department I worked in and he invited us when he lived down at Sde Boker. Sadly, at that time his wife had already passed away. But it's a memorable occasion because he talked to each and every one of us and was interested to know the work we were doing.

And what was he like as a person? Ben-Gurion.

A very, very imposing personality. I had met him on one prior occasion in London when he came to *Hashomer Hatzair* to talk to us. So, this was a special privilege to come down to Sde Boker. And of course, he was the first prime minister.

I don't know who sent me this but this is as you can see photographs of the High Command and others and some of the people in the High Command, I worked for or was under the command, so –

Like who?

Chaim Herzog. And I mentioned to you before –

What was his name? He's on there.

I met him in Venice the last time [laughs].

What is his name?

The second on the left. On the left.

Is it Peled?

Peled. Oh, thank you, yes.

What was his name? [05:02:00]

Peled.

And he was your commander, when?

He was the *Mefaked pluga* of *Palmach* who came to our rescue when the British left.

In Tzfat?

In Tzfat, without arms and unable to defend ourselves. And as they marched in overnight – I said marched in because they came a secret way from behind through the *wadis* to escape the Arabs who were on guard to try to stop anything coming in and out. And in the distance, we suddenly heard Shir Hapalmach, the song of the *Palmach* which immediately raised the spirits of everybody. I shall never forget it. And they came in bringing us ammunition, weapons and high explosives because we had none of these to defend ourselves. His name was Elad Peled.

Elad Peled? And why is this picture important to you? This photograph.

Because first of all it is an important photograph generally but some of the people on this photograph, I had one time a contact in one way or the other. It's just left a wonderful memory.

Thank you, Natan.

This photograph is of my brother, Jackie Sonnenschein, who's standing in the background on the left-hand side. Sitting on the grass on the extreme left is my Jewish foster brother, Moshe Ben Chaim, one of the founders of the *kibbutz* Kfar HaNassi. Next to him, his wife –

With his daughter? Is that his –

No, no. His wife, next to him, and some of his children who are sitting around, and me, kneeling on the right-hand side.

And when was it taken?

Kfar HaNassi *kibbutz* Kfar HaNassi. [05:04:00]

In the '50s?

This would have been in the '50s, late '50s.

Thank you. Now? Yes, please. What is that photograph?

I'm saying, that photograph I think was taken on the balcony of a house on top of Mount Carmel.

Yes, what can I say? I married the most beautiful girl and this is a photo of our wedding.

In 19...?

'57.

In Israel?

In Israel, yes. Is there anything I can add there? No?

What is it?

The invitation to the wedding. That's good enough. Needs no explanation. You've seen the photos of her.

This is Ruth and myself on the veranda of a house in – on the top of Mount Carmel, Haifa.
Before we got married, I used to have a flat there.

When was it taken, do you know?

This would have been taken in 1956 before we married, so about a year beforehand when I first got to know.

My parents Rifka and Israel Sonnenschein.

And when was it taken?

I imagine this must have been taken in the late '30s.

No, they look older. That must have been later, Natan.

Well, when was the Anschluss?

'38.

'38. So, it was taken after he was – he came back out from being interned, so it was in the mid-'40s.

You think this was taken in – where? [05:06:01]

I think this was taken in Vienna.

When was your father born? Which year?

I don't know. I can look it up but I think it was 1890. I'm not sure.

Hmm, it could be a bit later, this picture.

Yes.

Who do we see here?

You're looking at Ruth's mother together with her loving brother, that's Ruth's uncle, Isak [ph] Vidor.

Supper that was prepared by all my wonderful friends who have been –

Yes. What's the occasion for this photograph?

The occasion – can I see? We're sitting at a table. This is the occasion of my birthday which was given by all the people who've given me their help and assistance and it was the most wonderful event. It was taken at our – most of us enjoy a restaurant called Caraffini in Chelsea.

For your ninety-third birthday last week?

That was my ninety-first birthday, yes.

And here's your – also your nephew from –

From – yes, my nephew, Erez, came specially from Berlin to attend this and he stayed a few days to help me, as he always does.

Yes, please.

This is a photograph of my wonderful niece – great-nieces, who live in Berlin and come to see me quite often because we're in love with each other. These are my great-nieces.

[05:08:00]

And when was this picture taken?

This picture was taken on a previous visit, probably about five, six years ago.

But you just received – they gave you this book recently.

Yes, about a year ago on a visit there.

And Ruth is on the picture as well.

Yes, that's right because there are other – no other pictures after that. They loved – they fell in love with Ruth as well. But did you see the other pictures inside?

Thank – yes, Natan.

Oh, I see. We're looking at my mother's passport where I am also mentioned as being her son.

From 1939?

From – yes, 1939 is the date on this passport. I was wondering what happened to my father. I can't see.

And does it say that they had to add the name Israel to your name?

I can't see it. It's too far.

Yeah, that's what it says.

Two on top. Shall I tell you something amusing? Have you got the time?

What do we see there?

What do I see there? It's my Maccabi membership card.

Issued in...?

Vienna.

In 1939.

In 1939, is it? Yes.

And what did you do with them, Maccabi? What sports did you do?

I don't think I did any sport, just – I can't remember. Ping-pong probably. Table tennis.

[05:10:00] Broke out in '48, that was when the – Israel was established. So, I was one of the few members of the family that entered illegally.

I can start talking? This card is one of several self-addressed stamped cards my father gave me before we parted. My mother and father came to the Vienna *Hauptbahnhof* where there were many Kindertransport children crying and saying their goodbyes to their parents. And before my parents said goodbye to me, my father took me aside and gave me several of these cards and said, please remember at the first opportunity where you see a suitable postbox that you post these with me, writing that you're feeling well and everything is going okay.

Yes, please.

Liebe Eltern. Okay, I start?

Yes.

Yeah? Do I start?

Yeah.

Yeah. Liebe Eltern, ich bin jetzt in Württemberg [sic]. Heute werde ich eingeschifft. Die Sonnenschein das Mädchen ist nicht mitgefahren. Der Herr Winternitz ist bei mir morgen zu mittag komme ich an nach London. Viele Küsse und Grüße Otto God, my writing getting worse as I go along.

And tell me, Natan, how did you get this postcard?

This card? **[05:12:00]**

How did you find it?

This – you're asking a good question. I told you that in that home in the flat, there was a box of all the cards that I put, and letters.

Your parents-in-law? Where was it?

Yes. And the person who rented that flat when she left, emptied all that and left it in the garden somewhere and then she realised that there are some documents there, so she took the whole box, drove in her car to Rehovot to her parents and gave it to her mother. Her father was a physicist at Rehovot and gave it to the mother, and the mother thought this is very important, we must give it back to the owner, these are important things. So, they tried to find where Otto Sonnenschein is and could not trace me in Israel anywhere. And then do you know, they were translating them, there was the English translator, the Hebrew translator, [laughs] the German one, [laughs] and they [overtalking].

They found you?

They didn't find me for weeks. This went on and they kept on trying to contact various – then they could see that I came with *Aliyat HaNoar*, it didn't work. Finally, I was traced through

Friends of the Haifa University and they gave them my address and phone number and that's how I came to get all this stuff back again.

So how did you feel when you suddenly received this postcard from yourself?

Well, you can – oh, when I saw the postcard. Well, I burst out laughing. I showed it to Ruth [laughs] and to Hana [laughs].

And when was it roughly? Like ten, twenty years ago? When did they find you?

Oh, this was less than twenty. Probably about ten years ago. Less, even.

So, this was in your parents-in-law left it behind?

They didn't leave it behind. They had – they didn't know it – even that it was there. [05:14:03] It was in a [inaudible], it was just pushed to the back.

So who put it there in the first place?

I did. Before we left for England, I went to the flat and I put a few things in there which you couldn't – same box, it was I who put the – and had long forgotten about that. So in there, there were the photographs, there were all sorts of documents, everything was in there.

And where was the flat?

In Kikar Dizengoff, you know? One of the side streets there, a better part of Tel Aviv, one of the expensive places.

So that had your – had this postcard for many years? Rehovot?

It was – no, no, the moment they received it in Rehovot, they started trying to find. It took them ages. I don't know, months, till finally they hit on Friends of Haifa University. And

because we were members, they traced me immediately. And I told you, Hana was also an executive there but she was not involved, she was just – I told her what I'd found.

So this postcard had quite a journey.

Yes, quite – and has still – still has to – it's still working.

So where do you think should it go next?

It should go in the Imperial War Museum.

Okay. Yes, Natan, what is that?

Sorry –

It's your Austrian passport.

Yes. Oh, I see, you want me to talk about this. What can I say about it?

You received it in order to travel to Palestine.

Yes.

After the war.

After the war, correct.

Yes, please.

Do I repeat that?

Yes, please.

This – can I talk?

Yeah.

Yeah. This is my Austrian passport on which I have stamped my visa to get to Mandate Palestine. **[05:16:10]**

So you had an official visa to go with the Youth Aliyah?

Yes, that is it.

And it states here that it was in – it looks like you arrived in 1947.

I thought it was earlier but it was obviously 1947 because after being reunited with my family, I was sent to Safed, Tzfat, to continue studies at the technical college there.

But – this is my first Israeli identity card.

How old do you think, Nathan, are you on this one?

Eighteen maybe.

So it was given to you when you arrived in Israel?

No, the identity cards came much later, years later.

So maybe in the early '50s even?

Yes, it could be.

Hmm, you look quite young here.

But is that important, this one?

No.

It's really what's stamped there that shows you when I arrived.

Okay, thank you.

The –

Yes, Natan, what do we see here?

This is a mixture of correspondence which has come from my wife, Ruth, when she was in the army, from my brother when he was in the British Army, Jewish Brigade, and some other letters from friends.

And this is what was found in the flat in Tel Aviv?

This was found in a flat in Tel Aviv. When Ruth and I left I put it in a safe place which was in a ceiling aperture and was discovered by a tenant at a later stage and who realised these are important documents and took it home to her mother in Rehovot where the mother and other members of the family tried to trace me to be able to return all these documents which they felt must have been very important for me. **[05:18:26]**

And the Kindertransport, your postcard was in this pile? It was in there?

Yes. Yes.

Okay. So, I think maybe this will be of interest to an archive or we should pursue it, see what you're going to do with this. But I'd like to say thank you so much for sharing your life story with us, showing us your photographs and the documents and it was lovely to meet you.

Likewise. I feel exactly what you're saying and I feel that it is high time that I did this and I am so happy and grateful that you came to interview me, you and Frank. And I realise how much trouble you're going to and I am thinking, as you all are of course aware, that this is important information for the next generation, and which I support wholly, wholeheartedly. And as I am getting older much faster, I realise how important it is that this is being dealt with and it is quite a weight off my mind because it's being done with a lot of love and devotion by all my friends who've been persuading me for a long time to do this, and how right they are. So I –

Natan, thank you.

And I thank you and Frank for coming and having the patience to listen to me because quite frankly, Ruth, my darling wife, didn't have the patience any more to listen to all the stories which I have to tell and get off my chest.

It was our pleasure and privilege. [05:20:01]

Thank –

[05:20:08]

[End of transcript]