IMPORTANT

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Interviewee Surname:	Schwiening
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Interviewee Sex:	Female
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Interviewee POB:	Breslau, Germany

Date of Interview:	31 October 2024
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Interview Transcript Title Page

REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV308
NAME: Ruth Schwiening
DATE: 31 October 2024
LOCATION: Market Bosworth
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00]

Today is the 31st of October 2024. We're conducting an interview with Mrs Ruth Schwiening. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in Market Bosworth. Can you please tell me your name?

My name is Ruth Schwiening.

And Ruth, where and when were you born, please?

I was born in Breslau on the 15th of the fifth 1935.

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

It's my pleasure.

I'm sorry you had to wait for a little bit until we came, but here we are.

Yes, that's wonderful.

Ruth, can you tell me something about your family background, please?

My family background. My parents were Jewish and more German than Jewish. Jewish was secondary to them really. And we found this out later that it wasn't quite true because later on we found that my father wanted to be – here – having been here in England for decades, wanted to be buried in a Jewish cemetery, Orthodox Jewish, because there was no other – there wasn't a Reform Jewish cemetery here in Nuneaton. My father was a farmer and I think maybe that had been instilled in me a little bit because we also now have eight acres of ground, a field and wood and a little pond – we like to think of it as a lake – and we've had all kinds of animals. But as we've got a lot older, the animals have died off but we still have two little Shetlands, so we were interested, Jürgen as well. He was brought up in the war for ten years in a small village and he lived on a farm as well. **[00:02:06]** So we had kind of alpacas and everything but cows, sheep, goats. That has passed now and we've just got the two little Shetlands. We had a language school for many years where people came from abroad, from – even from Israel to learn English. And our setting was not to confine them into just book-learning but to show them a little bit of English culture. We took them to Stratford and various other places of historical interest. We integrated them into the English way of life, introducing them to friends and partly showing them shops that they were interested in, like the – what, er, the – instruments, the farmer's things, um, a big shop, anyway. And they lived as far as we could give them, an English way of life. We also accommodated two students from Berlin from the Jewish community there and we offered them a home and to pay for their fare over, to introduce them, also to give them the opportunity to experience English way of life. Now, we are a lot older and we have retired from teaching English and German but we're still very interested in the history of the Holocaust and we go to Beth Shalom, the National Museum in Laxton, that is Newark, and we give lectures there – not lectures, talks. **[00:04:09]** We used to do that in schools because the Holocaust was on the syllabus for children to learn. In any case, whether it's on the syllabus or not, it's very important that they learn something about the past. Now, in retirement, Jürgen has taken up writing. He's written a book about his life in Germany and he's written a book about my life in Germany. Um, what I was going to [laughs]…

Yes, Ruth, but let's go back to your father. So, you think because your father was a farmer, that it influenced you.

Very much so, I think. I love animals and it's such a pleasure for us. We've got this land about ten minutes' away and we walk down to the land and we've made it. When I say we, it isn't me really, it is – it was a plain field when we bought it and it is my husband who had this dream. We planted about 800 trees, a little woodland, and we use it as a kind of paradise for my husband and also for me, but also, I have other responsibilities, so I don't go down – I go down every day. As I say, it's about a ten-minute walk, come rain or sunshine – we have to look after the ponies. My father was – owned two farms, one in Schlesien which – when in 1933 Hitler decided that no Jew was to own land, so his living was taken away from him. **[00:06:11]** He was then – he had three little children and he had no possibility of doing his work, so – he managed to stay there, in Osolin – now it's in Poland. He managed to stay there for three years. And he got this ground in Schlesien because he promised to – he got some money, he promised to educate young people in the way of agriculture so that they could eventually go over to Palestine, which is now Israel. So, they stayed with us on the land in Schlesien until it was 1936 and then he was robbed. And I say robbed because that was it. He would have loved to have stayed there but he had to go in order to look after his – financially, to look after his children and his wife who were – had polio as a child and couldn't walk very well, so she wasn't an independent woman at that time.

Your mother?

My mother.

To just – just let's go back. What about his parents, the grandparents? And how did he come to be a farmer? Just tell us a little bit about –

Yes, that's interesting, Bea. That's a very interesting question because farming wasn't in his family at all. He became a farmer really because when he went to the university, he wanted to study medicine, and medicine – he wasn't able to pass the exams for medicine, so he decided he wanted to study agriculture instead, and look after animals. **[00:08:02]** Not far from being

a doctor, a doctor of humans [laughs] and doctor of animals. Those are not too far apart. And so, in 1936 they had nowhere to go. Germany didn't want Jews in any way. He was responsible for his family. Where to go? He decided then, or they decided, that the best place to emigrate to would be Austria. Austria being an independent country, the language the same as German, a bit of dialect, but also the fact that he and as many Jews did, who didn't emigrate, thought this is only a cloud, it'll pass over and then we can go back to our home, to our families and to our friends and to the place we love, the culture that we were actually steeped in. So, they thought, well, Austria is the best place. And 1936, they emigrated to – and bought another farm. How did they buy it? We're not quite sure but they had money given to them by their relatives and also then the farm itself was not a modern farm, it was pretty dilapidated.

In Austria?

In Austria. So, they set up again, courageously. They took their animal – no, not their animals. They took their children and started again. 1938, then as we know was the Kristallnacht and that was the time which altered their – my parents' lives and also of course we children had to go, had to leave. **[00:10:02]** But where to? My father was then taken to a concentration camp. There was a knock on the door, my father stood there and the Gestapo – a member of the Gestapo said, are you Lothar Auerbach? Yes. Come with us. This was November, when it was cold. No time to say goodbye to his wife, no time to kiss his children goodbye. His wife didn't know – my mother had no idea where he was going to. And they loaded him up in the back of a lorry, I don't know – I don't like to think whether there was a gun at the back or not – and took him away. Took him somewhere where nobody knew where he was going. My mother didn't know whether she'd ever see her husband again. And how, how do you tell your children the next day that their dear Papa had gone? My mother woke up the next morning, looked out of the window and noticed their pet dog, Asta, had been shot. Windows broken, crushed, glass was left on our cots, on the children's cots, and away he was.

And what was – where was that, exactly?

He went to – first of all to prison.

The house, the house. Where was – in Austria?

The house? Oh, in Austria. In –

But where exactly?

In Kärnten, not far from Klagenfurt.

Okay. So, in the countryside?

In the countryside. Very isolated. Very, very isolated. Yeah. They took him first of all to prison, a man who had done nothing wrong except being Jewish. **[00:12:02]** They took him there and kept him there for two nights and then further on to Dachau concentration camp where he stayed for six weeks. Six weeks. Six weeks doesn't sound long, does it? But six weeks changed my father. He then – well, that's continued [laughs]. Would you like to – shall I continue in that?

I'll tell you what. Before we just go, because I just try to understand a little bit before. If you don't mind, just to go a little back. You said he had a first farm. So, was that in Reichenbach? Or where was that?

No, that was Osolin in Esdorf.

Esdorf?

It's now Polish, Osolin.

Okay. Esdorf?

Esdorf.

So that was German at the time?

Yes.

It was part of the – and then you said they – he had – he helped with the sort of Haksharah, was it, that –

Yes.

To train young Jewish –

To train young Jews.

So, tell us. That's very interesting. So, who gave him that piece of land, or, you know –

It must have been the Jewish organisation in Schlesien.

So once the land was taken away, or he couldn't work on the farm, then the Jewish organisation really used him or said to him, we want you to train our young people to work on a –

Yes, yes, in Israel, in Palestine.

Yeah. So, did they then form a sort of Haksharah or whatever it was called, a residential training place for young people?

That was the place. Yes.

And were you there as well, or was it only your father?

I – yes. No, no, we children were there.

You all were –

But yes, remembering that I was very young.

Yes. So, what was that place called? The second – I mean that training place.

It was at Osolin, which is Polish now but it was in, er, well, Esdorf. **[00:14:03]**

Esdorf. So, was that where his original farm was? Was that –

Yes. Yes.

So, was it the same?

Yes. It was – the farm was at Esdorf. These young people came to Esdorf in – and lived with us and were trained.

I understand. So, he wasn't allowed to operate the farm anymore but he was allowed to do the training? Or –

Well, he wasn't – he, I don't know how long he did the training. I imagine until 1936 when he had to leave because he had no financial possibility for their family – for his family.

Right. And were you born on that farm?

I was born in Breslau – no – in 1933 and he had – so before they actually had the farm.

Right. They lived in Breslau before they –

That is not true. [Laughs] They lived – it's a bit confusing for me as well [laughs].

Okay. Don't worry.

1930, my mother was in Denmark. She got a job with a professor in Denmark and they corresponded with each other. But in the meantime, 1930, my father actually started building the farm there, or – yeah.

Okay. So maybe tell us a little bit, how did your – what was your mother's background? And how did your parents meet, if you don't –

Now, that's very interesting. I don't think I can tell all that [laughs] but it is very interesting. My mother's background was as far as I know – please imagine they had – or such a traumatic time that they didn't want to tell their children, that is me and my brothers, they didn't want to pass on their trauma to the children. So, I know – my mother spoke hardly anything – nothing about her mother. **[00:16:02]** And my father as well. They didn't talk about anything that had happened in the past. When they came to England, that was a new beginning, or the end. The beginning of the end for my parents, for their lives in – on the Continent. So, they wanted to leave that all behind them. They didn't tell us that their mothers were taken to concentration camp, possibly they didn't know at that time, nothing was mentioned. We have managed to find all this out on archives and by in – my research work.

Later on?

Much later. My mother though was a bookkeeper and they met at the university in – not Reichen – in Breslau. Yeah.

So, your father was studying agriculture.

He was studying agriculture, having failed to become a doctor. He studied agriculture. There he met my mother's sister, and how far that romance went on, I don't know. But then obviously he fell in love, or my mother fell in love with him, and they became then husband and wife and moved to Osolin, to, well, Esdorf. [Laughs] I get confused.

To Esdorf, to set up, to –

To set up a farm, yes. That was their ambition, then. That was their dream. Everybody has a dream. They dreamt that they would live there for the rest of their lives, they would have children. My father wanted boys to work on the farm, my mother wanted girls to help make the beds – after all, that's what they – girls do, or did in those days. **[00:18:04]** But their dream, because they were Jewish, their dream was shattered.

Yeah. So, it was quite a – not radical, but quite a progressive idea. I mean to work, I guess at that time.

Yes. Yes.

Because they were sort of middle class.

Yeah.

The idea to have land and then raise a family in a farm.

Raise a family and hope that the family would stay there and would run the farm, continue it, and then their great-grandchildren and so on and so. Isn't this a dream of many, many people? And their dream was shattered.

Yeah. And you were born 1933?

1935.

5. Sorry, '35.

Yes.

So, we're – yeah. And you were – you're a twin?

I'm a twin.

You have a twin brother.

Hmm-hmm.

Yeah. And did your mother – did they realise they were expecting twins at that time?

I don't know [laughs]. I don't know. I don't know that, you know. They were very happy I think to have children because they wanted children, not only because they wanted children but also, they saw us as a kind of future generation for them and continuing the farm and making it – expanding it and so on. And also, to continue helping and working with young people. And this is why I said before, they – I thought they weren't so much Jewish as German, but they were also hoping to help young Jewish children and young people to work in Palestine. They – I think my father wanted to live in Palestine at one stage but he went there and he worked on a rose farm in Palestine.

He did?

Yes.

Oh. When did – when was that? ***[00:20:03]*** *When –*

1920s.

Oh, okay. So, do you think this whole dream of working then was part of their sort of partly Zionist upbringing? Were they part of youth movements or –

They weren't part of a youth movement at all, no. No, they weren't.

But you said –

But he wanted –

So, he did go to Israel, to Palestine, sorry.

He – yes, he went to Palestine.

To explore.

To work the land. And he became ill. He got malaria I think and had to come back to Germany and so they – their lives were altered a bit then. I don't know ever if my mother would have gone to Palestine. I have no idea. She never spoke of it.

Right. But it was influenced by this idea maybe, the –

Yes, yes. Yes.

And at that time, I guess the youth movement certainly had this idea of working the land, [overtalking].

Yes, working the land, the land of milk and honey.

Yeah. Yeah. So, it's really interesting –

It is.

That he then applied that locally, in a way.

Yes.

That he wanted to do it in Germany.

Yeah.

And Ruth, what are – you were very young obviously in the '30s but what are your earliest memories? Do you remember anything at all in Germany?

No, I don't. I don't remember anything at all. I don't remember going to the orphanage, I don't remember how I came- I only know the story was that somebody from the Jewish – because the Jewish organisation was responsible itself for taking the Jews out of Germany and Austria. They got no help from the Germans at that time. And somebody from the Jewish organisation when my father was taken to Dachau concentration camp came, or wrote to her, and said, look, Hilde, you will have to leave. Yeah. **[00:22:00]** I will help you, or we, as an organisation, will help you. Well, how can you help? You have three children. You have a – your husband is in Dachau concentration camp. We will take one of your children with us, or somehow get him or her to Berlin. How can you help? Well, we will then make sure your child is put in an orphanage and then take him or her to Britain on the Kindertransport. Now, as a mother, you can imagine perhaps how – what a problem that would have been for my mother. Take one child, only one child. She had three children. Which child do you choose? So, they said, look, Hilde, we'll help you in that, we'll help you with that problem, we will take the girl – the girl being me. I can't let my little daughter go. But you must. And we will make sure she will be safe with the Kindertransport, but she must go on – to the orphanage first. So, I was taken then. I don't know how. I don't know how my mother must have felt, except that when my children were that age, I used to think, could I have done that? Would it have been better to keep the family together? Because my mother didn't know and she – whether she would ever see me again, she didn't know whether she'd ever see her husband again – both of which she did, fortunately. **[00:24:00]** I remember nothing. My older brother told me he looked out of the window when they fetched my father and he saw my father being led away. I wondered whether that was in his imagination, whether he'd seen films, whether he'd read books, how he got that knowledge. But bearing in mind he was older than –

How much older?

He was about eighteen months older. He could have seen that, he could have remembered that. So there my mother was left with two children, or maybe three, maybe –

Yeah, in this isolated place, near Klagenfurt.

Yes. And then a neighbour came to her, and this was in the night, and said, look, we'll help you, Hilde. We will take you by pony and trap in the middle of the night, we will hide you under a – under straw and we will take you to the nearest station where you can get a train to Berlin. The Jewish organisation didn't know of this, I don't think. And my mother got a letter then from Klagenfurt, from the organisation there, and said, you must leave immediately, you must take your children with you and go to Vienna – Vienna being the hub of what happened to the Jews. And from thereon we know that what happened to most of the Jews in Vienna if they couldn't get out, and no country wanted to take them, they went on east. And we know what happened then.

Yeah. And this is all post-Kristallnacht?

Post – my mother then went to Berlin where she had friends and from then onwards, she went to England. **[00:26:03]** I don't know anything about that but –

What about your brothers, Ruth?

My brothers were with my mother.

So, they stayed all the time with your mother?

As far as – yes, as far as we know.

So, you were taken from that place to the orphanage in Berlin.

To the orphanage.

And this is obviously something you can't remember. You found out later.

I can't remember.

No. So, what – do you – what about the date, roughly? Do you know when you went? So, Kristallnacht was 9th of November '38.

I went – yes.

So roughly when were you then taken to the orphanage in Berlin?

It must have been straight after that, given a couple of weeks after that, after my father was taken to Dachau concentration camp, my mother got a letter saying, leave immediately, and that was giving ten days' time, and go to Vienna. Instead of going to Vienna – she was an astute woman, she was very clever –

She went to Berlin?

She went to Berlin with the boys.

Yes. And, so in Berlin – you were then both in Berlin.

Yes.

You were in the orphanage.

Yes.

Was there any contact then between –

No. Well, I don't know. We have since looked for the orphanage in Berlin but it wasn't there anymore.

What was it – was it in Pankow? Was it that orphanage?

I don't know.

Where was the orphanage?

There was an orphanage especially for Jewish children. There was one we found out just for the boys. Um, and I don't know. It's a blank.

You don't know where, which – where that orphanage was?

No. No.

Because I know that on the first Kindertransport – do you remember when we were in Berlin?

Yes.

There was a group of children from an orphanage.

Hmm-hmm.

But maybe that you were not on that first transport.

I don't – I don't know. We couldn't find out.

Because when – so the date when you went on the Kindertransport, was in –

3rd February. 3rd of February, yeah.

3rd of February. So, you spent roughly, what, kind of two months it must have been, in that orphanage. ***[00:28:03]***

Yes. Yes.

And – but you don't remember anything from that –

Nothing at all. We have – my memory is shocking and the older you get, it's even more shocking. But what I know, what children know is mainly what they've been told and also books they've read, films they've seen, talking to other people, you know, and my – mine, my memory is nil, she's nothing really, before the age of, I would say, four and a half to five.

Yeah. Yeah. So, let's come back to you. So, you were at the orphanage and you know that you left on the 3rd – or arrived on the 3rd?

Left on the 3rd.

Left on the 3rd. So, what did you find out, then, about your own journey?

What I found out about my own journey, personally we have tried to find out somebody who might remember seeing this little girl who was very tiny, than more – even tinier than the majority of children of that age, but she came, er, with – we tried to find out somebody who might have come on the same transport. Eventually, we found out, astonishingly enough, that she came together on the same transport – not together – as a distant cousin who is now in Jerusalem, so there was somebody. But otherwise, we couldn't find out anything. Anything I've read about the – anything I know about the Kindertransport is what I've read and what I've spoken to people here, Ruth David, who came over. **[00:30:04]** I was fortunate. I think I was – I always think I was fortunate to be at such a young age. Other people came over at the age of fourteen perhaps – sixteen was the oldest – and they remember everything, and not good memories. Not a good memory at all. I have no memory, so nothing to fall back on and say, oh, that was awful. The only thing I do know is what I've read and that is frankly speaking – and what I've heard from others about the transport, about going over on the boat, on the night boat. It must have been horrific for children, that their parents weren't allowed to come on the station to say goodbye. I've done a picture there of a little girl saying goodbye to

her mother. And the parents, they weren't allowed to do any – wave or anything because they weren't on the station. One – I've read one case of a little boy who – no, it was a little girl who was leaning out of a window saying goodbye – bear – when to her father, and the father couldn't bear her, his little girl going, and pulled her out of the window because of the trains with big windows at the time, you could pull up and push down.

And do you think you are drawn to reading these stories because you can't remember them? I mean –

I think – yes, you're absolutely right. You look on our bookcase and downstairs in our library and it's a lot about Kindertransport. But not only that, it's a lot about life for my parents and for Jews in Germany who had to leave, who didn't leave and consequently their lives were taken away from them. **[00:32:11]** I yearned to know something about my past. I think that is natural. It's natural that you want to know a little bit about what you were like as a baby, what were you like, you know, how much food did you take [laughs] and where you lived and what was the atmosphere like you grew up in.

Yeah. And you said your mother didn't talk about that.

My mother didn't, my father didn't. No. Now, I work in glass and I do pictures of their lives as I imagined it to be, not as it actually was. And I always think, yes, I've done it in glass but that is their new life perhaps. Their old life, like glass, glass is fragile, love is fragile, life is fragile, their lives, it shatters. So, their life in Germany was like a pane of glass, it was shattered. But you can put it together again, in fused glass. And it is – it isn't the same picture but it is a picture and you can actually live a life after life, so their life in Germany and Austria was dead, their life in England was like phoenix, coming from the ashes.

But it shattered, it was [overtalking], so the –

It was shattered.

The glass for you symbolises that.

It was shattered.

So even the material, that that aspect of –

But you can –

Being an emigrant, a refugee –

Yes, being a refugee in any country. **[00:34:00]** But in Britain, one mustn't forget that it was a time when we were Germans and we were – England was fighting Germany, so we were sometimes regarded as the enemy, and you had to grow up with that. And I must say, Erica and Christof and indeed Miriam, to a certain extent suffered from that, you know, but – and I remember at the age of ten or nine walking up the street home and having stones thrown at me, I was a German spy, so –

Being identified as German, yeah.

So, they thought. Yeah. So, you had not only the being Jewish against you, you didn't – the Jews according to ignorant people killed – murdered Jesus, but also being German, the enemy of England. You had these two factors with which I grew up with as from the age of, well, five, six, seven.

But Ruth, maybe let's just go back a little bit to your own journey, arrival and who took care of you when you – and also to say, so your mother chose you or they recommended the girl because they thought it was probably easier to find foster parents, rather than for the boys?

Yes, yes. That's absolutely true. Yeah. Somehow people wanted girls, thought they were easier to handle.

And you were probably ideal age because you were young.

Yes.

So, in terms of fostering, that –

Yes, yeah. And I must say that my very – I think I remember it – but do I, I don't know – was that this family was wonderful, was caring, was loving, and I think I must have felt for the first time, secure and happy. **[00:36:20]** Now, whether I imagined that, having looked at the photographs, the two or three photographs I've got of my time there – my mother came to visit me – not my father – and the little story goes – whether it's true or not, I don't know. But apparently, my mother said to me, 'Ruthchen, give me a kiss.' I looked at her and said, 'my mummy says I must not kiss strangers.' And so, my natural mother was a stranger.

By the time she met you again. So, tell us, just to understand it properly, who were your foster parents? What's your experience when you arrived in England?

Yes. When I arrived, I can only tell you from the letters or – yes, I have a very moving letter from my foster sister about ten years ago. They were a couple who met me, I don't know where they were and who they were, it was the weekend and they met me and took me to their home for the weekend and then my foster parents must have come and picked me up. My foster parents were Jewish and they were – lived in Sydenham in London, which is surprising. **[00:38:00]** And that is really – they got a daughter and couldn't have other children and according to the letter, they were very pleased to have a little girl, me, so that she would – I would be able to play with their little girl. They wanted –

And what were their names, Ruth? What were they called?

They were called the Harts, and Geraldine was the little girl.

Geraldine?

Geraldine.

Hart?

Yes. Yeah. The mother is now – I think they were divorced eventually and she is in Australia. They emigrated to Australia.

The – your foster sister? Or –

My foster sister, yes. Yeah.

And the parents were called? What was the name of the –

Their – I don't know the first name.

The Harts, anyway. Yeah.

My mother –

And they took you in.

They took me in, first of all a strange couple, of strangers, and then they – like a suitcase, you're passed over to somebody else and this is what I must have felt at the time. You know, I – not at the time but now, you're passed over from one person to the next.

Well, you had already the two months in the orphanage.

Yes.

So that must have been already an upheaval for you obviously.

Yeah. Yes, yes, as a small child. After all, what we know of the psychology of growing up, isn't the first seven years in your life the most important? Isn't the first four years of your life perhaps the most important, the groundwork that you get?

Yeah. That's why it's very interesting what you said about, you know, what is worse in a way, not to remember, or people who can remember, you know, the older children. And it's one of the questions which I often think about with – 'cos we have interviewed people who came like you very young, without any memories, and older teenagers. And it's a very interesting question because I think you can argue both ways, you know, because like you, for the young children not to remember anything. ***[00:40:08]***

I think – I don't know. I mean I remember the time in the war, we weren't accepted. Of course, we weren't accepted. We were the enemy of the country that we lived in. And I remember it was the wartime, we had one room with the five of us, in one room which we shared and we didn't have what was called then an Anderson shelter, so we crept along the ditch. These are the kind of memories that stick with you. They are reality, nothing that you've actually learnt from books, from films, from hearsay. They were reality. So bad memories are also in you – within you, and they stick with you. There's a story of the snake, the snake who can cast many of it – shed away its skin but the last skin is so tough, it can't get rid of it, and that is for me quite a good analogy that the really embedded memory is something that sticks with you.

And what is that for you, that –

Pardon?

What is that for you, that embedded memory? What is that?

It is what it is. I mean it's a memory of something that I can't shed, as indeed the poverty which we lived in, the poorness we, you know, we – we were at that time destitute throughout the – I would say throughout most of the war years. **[00:42:02]** And we were strangers. And my father had a terrible accent. Not terrible for me, but it was a very strong accent. Even Erica and the rest will say – tell you that. They met my father. And these are things that, yeah, you live with.

And he was interned as well?

He was interned. He was taken away for the second time. So, the second time my mother, handicapped, as they used to call her, crippled, the little German woman, the Jewish woman that was crippled – she was referred to. And he was interned. But that was a good thing for him. He became a lecturer. He lectured agriculture. They – even when he left, he wrote – they wrote a poem about him.

Where was he interned, Ruth?

In the Isle of Man.

Which camp? Do you know?

I – no, I can't – I don't know off by heart. Yeah.

But he became involved in the – in camp life?

He became very involved. He got food, he didn't have to look after us children [laughs] and he – it was a good life for him compared with the life he'd led.

Yeah. It wasn't isolated. It was being part of a community in some way.

Absolutely, community – he could possibly relate to. But my mother apparently, when the Germans were very close to coming over to England, said to Peter, my older brother, look, upstairs there's a tallboy, which is – I don't know if you know what a tallboy is. It's really a – some shelves, yeah, enclosed bureau, like that.

Oh, yes. Yeah. ***[00:44:00]***

And in that I've got poison. If they come, if the Germans come, I shall give poison to the children or you must do that, Peter, and then I shall take the poison myself. Whether that was

true or not, whether there was actually poison there later on, I remember the story and looking in the tallboy, in the drawers there, and what did I find? I found powder but it was Beechams flu powder or something like that [laughs]. So, she must have been desperate, losing her husband twice.

Yeah. You didn't tell us how your father managed to get out of Dachau.

Yes. He managed – that's quite interesting as well because as I say, he was only in Dachau six weeks – six weeks which made him into a different Daddy. You could get out. Dachau was one of the first concentration camps for the Jews to have been built, or to have used. It was there before for anybody who didn't agree with the Nazi regime and Nazi ideology. He managed to get out because, as others did, if you could prove that you would emigrate, you would leave the country, then you could disappear, you could get out, leave. Yeah. So, she, my mother, must have queued up night and day to get a visa for him to leave the country and this she managed to achieve.

So, what did she get? What sort of visa?

The visa was to come to Britain.

For him?

For him. For him.

By himself?

Yes. To get out of the concentration camp.

So, she managed to – from the British embassy? ***[00:46:01]***

To get a visa. And this – we always imagine – we know of the Ukrainians, they had to have a visa and we imagine that happens overnight. It doesn't happen overnight. You know, it can take weeks.

Did he have a guarantor?

No.

Was it a domestic visa? Was –

It must have been a work visa.

A work visa, yeah.

And he got this work visa as a agricultural worker. He wasn't an agricultural worker. He owned a farm. Yeah.

But obviously that was one of the ways to come into this country.

It was – yeah, for him it was the only way. So, in actual fact it was Frank Foley – I don't know if you've heard of Frank Foley –

Yeah. So, did Frank Foley give the – his visa?

Yes. Yes. And his accomplice-man, we met the son here or Market Bosworth – sometime later came to us and had lunch with us and it was an interesting conversation.

So, Ruth, when your father was released, were you still there? No? You didn't see him when he came out?

No, no.

So just – let's follow his story. So, he got released and then he left within a few days? Or what happened?

He went to the farm again I think and then I don't know. He must have – I don't know what happened. He were – oh, yes, he went to Berlin. He went to Berlin. The farm was empty. He had no idea that my mother had already gone on to Berlin. How he found out, I don't know. And he went to Berlin and they came over separately. We think my mother must have come over on a domestic visa. You know, women came over to work in households and as domestic helps. **[00:48:06]**

But they didn't come together?

No.

So first your father came.

Hmm.

And then where did he – in England, where did he go? Where did –

He – they both, and I only found this out recently – they both went to the south of England to some farm and he worked there for a time. We only know that through research work.

Right. Where was that farm? Somewhere –

Down in the south of England. We actually know the name. It's in the book there.

Okay. And your mother managed you think to get a domestic visa, with the two children? With her two – your two brothers?

As far as we know. As far as we know.

And when did they come to England? Do you know the date at all?

They – no, I don't know. It isn't – I –

Okay. So how long did you stay with the foster family?

It must have been – again, dates, it must have been about sixteen months, seventeen, eighteen months. I don't know the date. Enough time for me to forget my mother. And this had repercussions because I was taken away from my mother at a very sensitive age and the repercussions – and I stayed with – under a family who loved me, who said that, you know, you are now our daughter and acted accordingly. It must have had repercussions later on because I never found – I never found a real bond with my mother again, although I went back and eventually, we were a family, be it a very – in very poor circumstances – we were together. I never felt that she – remembering the time she was a refugee and she – they needed money and they – my mother was applying for compensation, and she worked in the gasworks in Nuneaton, she came home and she would – all these applications, she went in to get her money, which she didn't have time to give us children. **[00:50:26]** Hers was a hard life and she didn't have time, she didn't – I felt, always she didn't have time to be emotionally involved as a mother perhaps should have been with me. With my older brother, as is often with Jewish families, the older boy who will carry on the name, any time or emotion I felt was spent on him, Peter.

So, did he have the closer relationship? Closest [overtalking] with your mother?

He had a very close relationship, particularly to my mother. He felt – throughout his adult life he felt the responsibility, indeed, he may have even felt the guilt, that happened to my parents and he wanted to compensate and he looked after my parents, my mother particularly, with such care that no daughter could have done in any case [laughs]. You know, such love and care and he just – she became as important to him as his wife.

Yeah. But you, also you basically had a few separations on the way. So, when your mother came, was there a process of taking you away from the foster family or was it very sudden, or how –

I think it must have been very sudden because my mother then – I landed up together with my mother. **[00:52:07]** And what I'll never forgive is that this family gave me a home, gave me apparently love and security, she never – they never – I always say she, because she was the one who was responsible for doing all this – my father was working – my mother was also working but somehow this fell to her – they never really – no, not- I say really, but they never got in touch with the family again. Never thanked the family for virtually saving their daughter.

Yeah. So, you were not in touch with them after –

I was, I was.

Oh, you were?

Later on, thanks to Jürgen. He found out their address and we got in touch, frequently by mail.

This is when? In the '50s or '60s, or when? When?

It must have been the '50s. No, no, probably later.

Later. '60s?

Yeah, later. Even later. And we wrote to her and found out that she sent a letter, which I can show you later on, the foster sister, and my mother never – in fact, she never spoke about this family at all, never thanked them. Though apparently, my foster sister in her letters says there was a lot of shouting and she was hiding under the table and they never saw me and they never – they realised I wasn't coming back – it's in the letter there – I wasn't coming back,

when the packed away all their toys – all the toys and then they realised that I wouldn't be going back to their family.

Because they assumed that they would adopt you or –

Yes, they –

They wanted you to stay. ***[00:54:02]***

They – yeah. And adoption for nobody who had fostered children was allowed until there was proof that the parents weren't coming back. And they must have had the idea that both my parents were killed and they were then entitled to adopt me.

That was a difficult situation where –

A difficult situation but then you will always think of yourself as being what – well, how would you have acted, what would you have done? Would you have ignored the fact that this family had given their daughter a home, had given their daughter, had given their daughter love and given their daughter all the material things that she never had. I don't think I would have done. I think it would have been part of me having to say thank you for doing this.

So, you feel they should have done more? [Overtalking].

They should have done more.

So, in fact is it that your first memory starts with that foster family? Is that in –

That indeed. Now, again I perhaps kid myself that it is my memory or as I mentioned before, is it the photos I've seen of a happy little girl playing on a tricycle with her foster sister next to her, with her foster mother behind her? It's such a happy photograph. Is it something that I can actually genuinely say I remember that? Or is it something that has been imposed upon me by photographs, by books, not even by telling? I don't know. Often people say, Ruth, you

ought to see somebody and talk to them about it and get a little bit of psychological help. **[00:56:09]** I've avoided that because – possibly because two things. One thing, pride, says I can cope with this. Secondly, I would not want to talk to anybody about my past unless they were – actually understood the situation and were genuinely with it and perhaps even had lived part of it.

Yeah. 'Cos you think you would have benefitted from yourself –

I think so. I think so. I think now – I think many people would benefit from exposing their emotions to – and talking about it, that you – that they don't have – they don't have because of the opportunity or for whatever reason.

Because for you basically, coming back to your parents and brothers was like going to a strange family at that time. At the time.

Absolutely, absolutely. I had to relearn how to live with my brothers and with the – with my mother.

And language-wise, maybe by then you might have forgotten your German as well.

I had forgotten German. I learnt German. My German is from a second – it is like a second language. It's not my *Muttersprache*. German is not my mother tongue. It's something that I went to university, that – funnily enough, my mother encouraged me to study German, to go to Berlin. **[00:58:01]** She found the place, to go to Berlin, to – yet she was so opposed, she would never – she said, I'll never go back to Germany. We did have the offer –

But she wanted you to go.

She wanted me to go. She organised it all, as she did most of my life. She organised everything [laughs].

Yeah. But what's also interesting, that you had a twin brother, you know, and that –

That unfortunately, has ended up not as I would have wanted it. I was very close to my twin, very, very close, but unfortunately this ended up sour.

And do you think that had to do with your different experience –

I think it had to do –

As a –

With the past, entirely with the past. My parents – my mother had only a certain amount of energy and, which you can understand but that energy as far as emotion was concerned was with my older brother, Peter, not with me, not with – when I met Jürgen it was – hell broke out, so it's not what – not with me, not with my younger brother, my twin brother. But the energy was spent on Peter, who was super intelligent, went on to read law at Birmingham University, never did anything with it, but he was the apple of their eye. As indeed in many Jewish families, the boy is the saviour, you know. The girl is less important. But there it goes. **[01:00:02]** It's something I could cope with. Of course, then when I met Jürgen that was a difficult situation.

Okay, let's – before we get to – just to understand, you said you lived in poverty. So where did you live with your parents?

In Nuneaton.

So how did they get to Nuneaton? Why? Where did they – why did they –

I don't know. I don't know how they got to Nuneaton. My mother was offered a job, funnily enough in the gasworks in Nuneaton. The gasworks, thinking about the – you know- and she worked there for many, many years. How my father got – he was – probably got the job through the organisation, the Jewish organisation in Wolvey, which isn't far from here, from –

What job? What did he do?

He was a farm labourer.

So, this is still during the wartime?

Yes.

Yeah. And you then started to go to school in Nuneaton, or –

Yes, yeah, to the infants' school.

And what were your experiences there as a refugee, a German Jewish girl?

I don't think I was very popular, in fact, very unpopular in the junior school. In the infants' school, I think was something different. I don't – you were only, well, four, five years old, and I don't think there was any particular sign at that age that they were against me. I was accepted, I joined the other children in having practice air raid shelter in the school fields and I was just one of the other children, you know. That's really all I can remember of the infants', the – to the – yeah. **[01:02:05]** Funnily enough, the headmistress was known as – her name was Erlenwein [ph], which was a very German name [laughs].

So, this – my next question was going to be, were there any other refugees there? Was there any sort of community?

I don't know. No. No, no. In Nuneaton, certainly not. We were possibly the only Jews. We were isolated and –

Yes, so that's quite difficult.

Except that somehow the Jewish Refugees Committee were responsible for our wellbeing, yeah. And they sent somebody – it wasn't a rabbi, it was a learned man – to teach us Hebrew and to teach us about the Old Testament and be with us. This stopped after a time, I suppose at the beginning of the war. He came from Birmingham and then I lost – there was no other Jews, as far as we knew – as far as we knew, in Nuneaton or around.

So, your parents were not part of any other –

No. My mother was part of the Fabian Society. She was very intellectual and she did join the Fabian Society and she got lots of books, the Red Book Club – I don't know if you know about that – which were working class books for the working class. And that was the only org – she had one very good neighbour and a very good friend from the gasworks, who -when there was so much trouble between Jürgen and them- took us in for a time. They never had any really close friends except in Manchester, a guy called Falk. **[01:04:04]** He was an Orthodox Jew and he- I think was in Austria for part of the time as well.

Now, because I wondered whether your father – because at the time there were, you know, there were certainly some agricultural training centres, Jewish, in England, whether he got involved in that at all.

No, no. No, nothing at all. He became a member of the Jewish congregation, the Coventry Jewish congregation, and he bought himself a seat at the synagogue, yeah. I found that out by coincidence, I don't know- and I said, Dad, look, I'll take you, or we'll take you to the Jewish synagogue in Coventry, if you like. And he said – he didn't want to go. He said no. And then he – they both bought themselves Jewish – in the Jewish congregation a burial plot. And I remember saying to him, Dad, you're in the congregation, you've got a burial plot there. Why? Why don't you want to go to the synagogue? He said no, I don't want to go and I've bought myself a – I've bought for you and for your mother a plot in the Coventry Orthodox – that was the only one there – because I don't want to be buried next to a Christian. As my brother Peter said, he never spoke to me about what had happened. He, when I had my first exhibition he said – which was the Bloodstone of the Star – he said, don't do it, Ruth, don't do it. **[01:06:02]** Why not? Don't do it. They'll break your windows. This trauma for him was

still alive. And I don't want my children in any way to know that they are Jewish. And he never spoke to me about being Jewish or what had happened or anything at all. And beside the fact that I did do it and no windows were broken at all. But he did say when he was dying – I was there and I had this Star of David which Jürgen bought for me – and I said, Peter, do you want this? And he said, not yet. And then he said, I was born a Jew and I'm going to die a Jew. That's the first time he ever mentioned to me about the past, about anything how he felt. His wife was – she wasn't interested in the past at all. She was a lovely woman and I related to her a lot. But she was quite unaware I think, wouldn't accept that her husband was different [gestures quotation marks]. So, I always feel that the Jewish community at that time from when the man Echt from Birmingham came to us, after that they lost their flock, they lost, they – us. Had they been more patient and had they actually shown more interest – but they couldn't because it was wartime. And so, we lived in a community of Christians, so-called Christians, away from any Jews at all and –

So Jewish wasn't mentioned by your parents? ***[01:08:10]***

No.

So –

Except one occasion when I gave my father this book by Blum [ph], was it, you know, I think his name was Rabbi – and he gave it back to me and he said, why should I be interested in this just 'cos it's Jewish? He was a Jewish religious leader.

But you, did you know – but you knew you were Jewish, so it wasn't that it was a secret, or did you –

I don't know how I found out. I don't know how I – I always was ashamed of it, I never wanted to be different, I wanted to be exactly like my friends. I wanted to, you know, enjoy being British and I was ashamed of my parents speaking with a heavy dialect. And I realised at one stage but must have been very late in life that I was Jewish and what that meant. And that is when I really read, read and read a lot about the German history, a lot about what I

imagined to be in the – in Auschwitz and I decided to come to terms with it. And then I remember when I had my first exhibition that is when I came out of the cupboard.

So, much later. Much –

So much later. Even when I went to university, I did not acknowledge the fact, I didn't want to acknowledge the fact, that I was Jewish. Only a lot, lot later. I never spoke to my parents about it and it was really, for me being Jewish was a – for me being different and for me, being ashamed of my Jewishness. **[01:10:06]** But I did know a lot about it- and that when I decided I'm going to do an exhibition – I was offered an exhibition by the curator in Nuneaton and I decided this is the time to do one.

And which year was that? When was that?

Now, I've got it written down there. About thirty, forty years and I've still got some of the work.

So, the '80s?

Probably the '80s, yeah.

So, much later.

And – pardon?

Much later. Not when you grew up, no.

Much, much later. Much later. Yeah. So, I decided then to do this exhibition and got lots of people interested in it and it went around a bit. It was done on plywood and I attached barbed wire and all – how I imagined – it was arrogant of me. I should never have done it because you couldn't even imagine the horror but – and I've still got – I had the books printed and I've still got these little books of photographs that – of my work. But most of the work was so big

and bricks and windows attached to it and it was too heavy and too big for us and we got rid of it then, as indeed art should be. Art shouldn't last. [Laughs] It should be transitory.

But – so your parents made some choices raising you to kind of –

No.

Not talk about the past and –

Well, yes. They didn't – yes, that's right. They did make these choices but these choices were also imposed upon them.

Yes. Yes. They were probably scared themselves of – yeah.

Yes, they were. **[01:12:01]** They were.

And you said they never talked about their own parents and what happened to them.

No, no. Their – no. We only found this out much, much later that my two grandmothers who I didn't know were taken to – not Auschwitz, Theresienstadt.

And murdered, or –

And – yes, murdered. And I won't – you know- died. I used to say died. Rubbish. I don't like these euphemisms. They were murdered.

So, you grew up here in a very small family unit without grandparents, so that made you different as well.

Without, yes. Yeah. My uncle who I met very briefly was in Shanghai with his family and then went to America. And my aunt who I did know later on, who – my father met her in Breslau, at university, she went to America.

So, this is your mother's sister?

My mother's sister. Went to her husband. The trauma of going to a different country. He was a doctor. They were both doctors in Germany and he – they got divorced and I think he was in some kind of home for a time and then went to Germany and proceeded with his doctor…

So, there were some other family members but you were not close to them, or –

No, no. Only my aunt visited us several times from America after the war.

And you said your parents were supported by the Refugee – they got some sort of support by the –

Late – no, later on they – later on, much, years later. **[01:14:06]** They got some kind of compensa – they got the – they sold the farm in Esdorf at a loss. So that money must have been put into the farm in Schassbach- in – not far from Klagenfurt. Yeah.

Schatzbach?

Schassbach.

Schassbach?

Yeah. I think you wouldn't know it. It's a small – out of the – out in the sticks somewhere. And then after the war, came the claims for compensation, for – they managed to sell the farm back in Austria, a – the Gestapo used it for a time – not after the war but before, when they left. And my husband can tell you more about that than I know. And they did manage to sell it and they sold it to a wonderful family who we've written to, who we've visited and who have been here, and so it goes on and now it's a thriving farm.

Right. And you've been there?

Pardon?

You've been to visit it?

Yes, yes. Run by young people as an organic farm and the – we saw the bread oven that my mother used, that she used to bake bread. And lovely tale is that my father as a farmer and had trees there, lots and lots of trees. The baking oven was just opposite a window and instead of just putting wood on, he used to put the trunk through the – straight into the oven – the bread to – for the fire. I think that's quite a nice little story that they told.

So, did your parents' lives then improve once they got restitution? ***[01:16:01]*** *I mean in terms of their security.*

It did. It did. They sold – when compensation – I hate the word, compensation. How do you compensate –

Yeah. That's why restitution is maybe a better word.

Resti – [sighs] yeah, I don't like that word either. I don't know if there's a word to cover the feeling that, you know, it's almost an insult –

Yes, it is.

To offer money but to save you-money. Money means a lot, doesn't it, to then, at that time and that's when their lives, when they got this money from selling the farm and then eventually pittance of compensation for my aunt, my, aunt, my mother's – my father's sister who was killed. There's no compensation possible for that. And their lives did financially improve, so that they could eventually buy their own house and they gave the – us, their three children, the opportunity to go to university to study and to make a life for themselves. The only thing was that – which we've not touched on and perhaps it's not interesting for you – was that the sadness in the family between my husband and myself.

We'll come to it. We'll come to it.

But –

We'll come to it in a second, Ruth. I just want to ask you the – so when the war finished you were ten?

Yes.

Yeah. How did that affect you or the family?

It affected me insofar that – a lot. As far as I can remember, that I was in hospital having my tonsils out at that time and the bedstead – tied onto the bedstead was a little flag of red, white and blue. **[01:18:08]** And then coming out of hospital – we still lived in quite a poor house and – but coming out, one day there were big trestles of tables down the street and we had parties, the first party that I'd known – street parties, music.

For VE Day, or –

Yes. Yeah. And that's what I remember of that time. Yeah.

Was there any thought about going back to Germany, or your –

Yes. There was a talk of us – the possibility of going back but I knew and my parents then spoke about it and said, well, you children are in education, in the middle of education, it wouldn't be the right thing to do to break away. I'm surprised that they even talked about it because then I know my mother had no intention ever of going back to Germany. I don't know if my father might have done. I don't know.

So, then you finished your schooling here and went to university?

Yes.

And what did you study?

I read history and I did education and then geology. It was a new university, at Keele University, where you had to do a foundation year which then you had to cover – if you wanted to do the arts, you had to also do a subsid in sciences, so I did geology as a science – the science, and then history and German. That's why German to me is a second language. It isn't a natural language to me, it's an – a language that I learnt. **[01:20:01]**

And so, as part of that, you then went to Berlin?

Yes.

Encouraged by your mother?

Encouraged by my mother, which is strange.

So that was a year abroad as part of your university –

A year, yes, yes. And that is when I met Jürgen.

Okay. So, what happened then? So did something –

What happened?

Yes.

As a child I was very – you wouldn't think it, would you – [laughs] very shy and, introvert, yeah. And I was used to my mother organising my life for me up to that time. And I felt very lonely when I was in Berlin. I hadn't been brought up to be alone. And so, I decided to really [ph] – it was up to me to try and integrate and try and make the most – and I went to the

ESSF, which was a kind of left-wing, if you like, political party, and there I met Jürgen and our relationship then developed throughout the time.

And Jürgen's background was what? What was his story?

His – well, his background, he studied law at Göttingen University and then went over – at the time you could change universities in Germany and he went then to Berlin. And I went to a political – well, Jürgen says it wasn't political. But anyway, I met him there at the ESSF and I said, as I would have naturally said, oh, call in sometime, which he did. And from then onwards we kind of got to know each other better and [sighs] I – he said, well, how about getting married? I said, you can't marry me, I'm Jewish, you know, and it wouldn't be acceptable, although I wasn't Jewish, I never went to synagogue, or wasn't particularly Jewish at that time. **[01:22:10]** And I say at that time, not even now. [Sighs] And he came over to visit me in England. I was still in the middle of studying. It was a year, I had another year at university to get my degree, and he came over and visited me several times and it seemed to be – and he stayed with us and it was accepted. But that kind of relationship, which was not a close relationship but – as my parents thought of, and then it was [sighs] the time that we would decide to get married. And that was when all hell broke out and my parents said, well, we'll not come to your wedding, although they went to my brother's – Peter's wedding – we'll not come to your wedding and neither will anybody in the family. And we moved out because it was unpleasant by then, although it was only my husband and my – Jürgen came over just for a few days at a time. And so, I decided, right, I'm going to get married in Germany. I'll go and get married there. If nobody will come to the wedding, nobody then – we'll – we should then get married in Germany. Although Jürgen's parents weren't overly pleased about it, we did, we got married in Germany and my twin brother did come over but at the wrong time, Jürgen got hepatitis, which is a liver disease and my brother had to go back. So, there was nobody from England at our wedding, which was very, very modest. In fact, so modest it hardly bears mentioning. **[01:24:02]** Jürgen's father was a witness and his children came and his brother-in-law came, who is now 100 and we are in touch with as often as we can. And that's the story.

And how did you feel at the time? Could you understand your parents at all? Or at that time were you very hurt, or –

I was very hurt, I lost a lot of weight, I was well, they say, nervous breakdown, I left home, I couldn't understand, I was torn, I was brought up to be my mother's companion in every sense of the word, to be her stick when she needed to walk. I wanted their love. It's almost like a dog being kicked but yet always going back to its master. I craved – I did everything I could but that was a step too far. And I thought later on – I thought, how can a mother – my father was different – how can a mother treat her own daughter in that way? Reject her. Because that's what I saw it to be.

And what did they – what was the – what did they say? Was it because of the non-Jewish or the German element, or both?

It was the German.

The German.

No. Now, this is where Jürgen will tell you a different story and I don't want to, you know. It was because – I think it was because my mother wanted me then to help her in difficulty with walking, which I always did. **[01:26:04]** I used to have to meet her from the bus at the age of ten when she came back by bus. Other children were playing and I had to get to the bus station to help my mother down the bus, down the steps.

Is it the – she had polio as a child.

She'd had polio as a child, yeah. I've forgotten what the question was [laughs].

Why they'd – what was the argument for why they didn't want you to marry Jürgen.

Yeah, mainly because they feared that I would move to Germany and live in Germany, which I had no intention of doing at that time. I didn't want to live permanently in a country – by

that time I knew what had happened and I didn't want to live in a country which had rejected me and my parents. I think this fear of rejection stays. So, I make a great effort in my life to make friends and to try and, you know, take part in where – and any sign of rejection is the worst sign possible for me, of not being accepted, not being loved.

So, for you that was very hard, your parents' decision.

It was soul-destroying. Having looked, we've got some letters of – from my parents [clears throat] going back to the '20s actually. But having looked, there are one or two – I think I got a card on my wedding day. That was it. And what really hurt me I think was the fact that when my brother got married – Peter, the older one – they could go up to – married a girl from Glasgow I think – no, no, Edinburgh or somewhere – Kilmarnock, they could go up there and they could give him a nice present, of knives and forks and a cutlery set. **[01:28:08]** When they gave it to me, it was later, after his wedding, after he got married. I've still got it but I don't want to see it. So…

Yeah. And how – then you said you moved out.

I moved out for a time and then I finished my year at university and after that I went to work in Germany in a school, a *Gymnasium*, and we went to live in Germany. You know, my – yeah, Jürgen got a job as a teacher.

In which city, or where?

In – not Wiesbaden, [laughs] I can't remember. Warburg, Warburg.

Warburg.

Yeah. I worked there at a *Gymnasium*, girls' *Gymnasium*, for a time and yeah, then Jürgen got a job back here at the same school I taught at and so we worked together in the secondary school and – no, it was a grammar school I think at that time. He got a job as a teacher's assistant and I was a teacher.

And what was it for you to – your experience of living in Germany then, in the, I guess '60s, early '60s?

Yes. My experience, I was the only woman in an all-male school, so I loved that [laughs]. All male teachers.

And how different was it from being in England, culturally speaking as well?

Culturally speaking? It was very different to what I knew because I went occasionally to the theatre, occasionally to the opera, so it was very different and it was a time of freedom for me. **[01:30:05]** I was away. I was away from the hassle of my parents and my mother taking over, it was a possibility of being myself, so I loved it. Only- I was lonely. And I think –

Was your aim, for both Jürgen and you to come back to England?

Yes. Yeah.

On the long run, you knew you wanted to be here?

Yes. I knew I couldn't be in a country which had behaved so monstrously to my parents. Yeah.

Ruth, I think maybe this is a time, let's take a break.

Yes.

Because we can – okay.

[Break in recording]

Yes. We were talking about the time when you got together with Jürgen and then lived in Germany and then came back to the UK.

Yes, lived in Germany, got a job in Germany, no, that was – I'm getting confused. I'm getting confused here. That was the first time when I went to the university in Berlin. That was that time. I went to the university in Berlin, met Jürgen, came over to England for a year or so and we both worked at the school, my – the school I was at.

Which was where?

In Nuneaton. Yeah. And then went back to Germany for a – just over a year. By that time, I'd had the children and went back and I taught then at the girls' *Gymnasium* and also at a *Berufsschule*. **[01:32:06]** And after that then – I'm confused. It's a long time ago, you know, yeah.

Okay, don't worry about it. So, my question is, did your parents then – did you manage to –

You know what? I'm convinced, in order to get on better with your parents, that if there's any kind of argument, whether it be as serious as Jürgen and me had or not, children are the saviour. Children can unite any differences and this is with us as well. When Erica was born, by that time then – and having said that, to be fair, my father who was quite a different character to my mother, got on so well with Jürgen, you could – they talked occasionally, the German words and they kind of really related with each other. My mother then accepted Jürgen but there wasn't that great feeling of love. But then there wasn't the great feeling of love towards me either. There was a acceptance, yes, for both of us but she – her hard life, she had a hell of a difficult life. And I don't think she really, in spite of the fact that they were better off after a time and they – she could – I remember her going with me to C&A which was, you know, C&A, you don't know- a big multi-storey –

C&A, I know C&A. ***[01:34:01]*** *Yeah.*

Having enough money to buy herself from Sixth Sense – do you remember that? It was a very upmarket department – a coat, and this was really fantastic for her. But you'd think then, she had the money. You'd think then, buying for herself – by that time I was an adult, or at least thought I was – that mother and child – mother and daughter going away to a big shop, she would have bought me something. I remember that. She [laughs] didn't. She didn't. And this was, well, her. Her hard life I think also impacted on the way she emotionally – she wouldn't – I think she couldn't allow herself – I think she was possibly always waiting for something to happen - bad to happen and she couldn't allow herself to be emotionally too charged with her family, not even with her husband, you know, and I often thought this isn't a good relationship between husband and wife. But who knows? Not even children can look in to the relationship of husband and wife or family. You think you can but you can't. It's something so private that nobody, you know, can really get into that kind of sphere that they are a partner.

No. But you said that once you had children, that helped you, the rel –

Yes, yes.

And you also chose to come back to the same place, you and Jürgen.

Well, I – we – it wasn't so much a free choice, it was a case of going where there was a job. **[01:36:04]** But [sighs] yes, the job was here, so we went where there was a job. And I can't say that I was unhappy about that because this – the dichotomy was that I was pulled here and I pulled there and, you know, being there instead of here was a difficult situation for me.

Yeah, because although of course you're first generation, you're almost second generation, and often they say, you know, that this responsibility to your parents is a part of being a child of refugees or a child of survivors.

Yes, yes. Yes.

That there is a strong feeling, no matter what the – you have to help your parents or take care of your parents.

And I'm very much now attuned to refugees. Erica has hosted for over a year a Ukrainian family, in spite of the fact that she has a very busy life and also a family of her own. She has hosted this family and she – partly I think it is because we are also involved very much with the Muslim – they came here – they – rubbish – a few young women from the Leicester group of after eighteen, a group of young Muslims –

Was that here?

Who came without their families and we hosted them in – only for one day now and again and they did artwork with me and then they sat around and sang and they did a meal for us. **[01:38:00]** They – I wanted to give them – or rather – I say, I – we, wanted to give them something, some kind of security, some kind of home which they had to – where they had leave. And I think this has had also an impact on – a little bit of an impact and Erica and the children know, probably they know more than we think they know about the past and so they also – my daughter-in-law also had a family of, no, two people, a husband and – not husband – wife, mother and daughter, in their family, living with them.

So, the concern for refugees and involving [ph] is something you –

Is – overwhelming. Overwhelming. And I feel rather sad now that, um, for one reason that we're not quite sure about, that the girls, the women, no longer come. Now, we – I don't know if this is because of what's happening in Israel now – it could possibly be – or whether it is the person who used to bring them from that organisation has been ill herself and can't, so I don't know. They have not got in contact. But yes, this idea of being a refugee has never left me, and the responsibility and also the help I was given- you know, I feel that I should then give back to people in a similar situation.

Yeah. And would you – do you feel yourself you are still a refugee? How would you –

Pardon?

Do you feel today that you're still a refugee? How do you think of yourself?

I think – I've got a book there, 'Once a Refugee, Always a Refugee'- and [sighs] I would like to think that I am totally, totally accepted here but I can't. **[01:40:08]** And I still think of myself as a refu – as a past refugee and I still have a certain perhaps exaggerated feeling of responsibility for people in that situation. I was sitting in Erica's home next to this young woman who has now got her own house and got her own family and doing very well, sitting next to her and showing her a video that had been made of me through the – through Nottingham University where we went to give a talk and the lecturer made the video, showing her this video, and us talking, and she was sitting there crying and saying, the situation you went through is similar to the situation I'm going through now. So, the sympathy is there but you have to curtail sometimes.

The feeling you want to help other people in –

Yes, and I feel now as a kind of, um, not – I feel there's energy left but this energy isn't being used and yes, I can go down to the field and I can paint there and paint an old shed that is now not used anymore and I can do pictures here and I can play with my glass. But that's not enough when you still feel you've got something to give, but nobody – but nowhere to give it [laughs] except, I suppose to my grandchildren or my children, but no, there's a little space there saying, Ruth, that's not enough, you're not – you're living an existence where you're not using –

You want to do something more? ***[01:42:20]***

Yes.

Like what?

Like going to Beth Shalom. They don't now – that seems to be out. Or going still into schools and talking to them about the prejudices that were – are within us and why we should try and get rid of them. And this isn't happening any more.

Yeah. Because you were doing that for some years. Yeah.

Yes. Oh, yes, for quite a long time. There is a gap there. And sometimes you feel, well, why are you here? Why are you here? It's to paint pretty pictures? Is it to put glasswork together and do fused glass? You're not doing anything. You're passing time. The children have grown up, the children have their own lives, children know where they're going. The grandchildren have their – the love of their parents over – [laughs] sometimes they're overdoing it, you know, with the way of material things and that. But there you go. And doesn't that happen to a lot of people who – we were lucky that after the age of retirement we could do something, we did have our own language school, we felt use there, we felt a purpose. There comes a sign [sic] in life where you, after, say, well, you – different now. It's different. Different experience up perhaps. So, my advice to you youngsters is, carry on, carry on, carry on as long as you – as long as possible. **[01:44:08]**

What I just wanted to ask you, because we haven't spoken about your art, how that energy in being a refugee, how that shaped you? You told us a little bit about the first exhibition. So maybe tell us a little bit more how your own experiences, how, you know, are expressed in your work, you're – we're surrounded here by your wonderful work, of glass, paintings.

Thank you. I felt my parents hadn't told me anything about them and yet I wanted to know, so I read and Jürgen did research work into it and then I felt, well, this is – now I know how – I think I – oh [laughs]. I'm just looking at the picture there. I think I know how they felt but I don't. And I wanted to express that, for myself. The first exhibition was really for the public. I wanted to in my ignorance – and it must have been my ignorance – I wanted to show the public what happened in Auschwitz, what happened in the concentration camps.

And this is following – you did an MA in Art and Holocaust studies?

No, this was – I did my MA when I was probably seventy – sixty, seventy.

Okay, so this is much earlier, the exhibition.

Much earlier. But later on, I felt I wanted to do something glasswork, after I'd had my first exhibition. I wanted to do something in glass, having been to a course, I found it very, very strange that something solid could become fluid, like glass, heat it up, and it did, and it melts, you can see it melt in your hand, you know. **[01:46:04]** And I wanted a project and then I thought, well, having looked at Chagall and various painters, I wanted to do something in glass and I decided to do this, but as I imagined their life to be. And so, I started with my serious artwork, for myself, and I found it fascinating and went on to do this and then various other – it's not all serious. You see a picture of- various pictures. I can look at one there and it – but it is mainly based on my parents' story, as I imagined it, yeah, influenced by Chagall.

Right. And your parents were still alive when you had this exhibition?

When I had the first exhibition my father was still alive. My mother, I think she must have had Alzheimer's before that. I can't remember the last time I spoke to her. My father was still alive and he saw one or two of my pictures and he –

What did he say?

He was pleased. He said, oh, that's me. I can show – I did a – it's awful to say – a Jewish-looking man [laughs]. It's awful to say that but – and he said, oh, Ruth, that's me. And I've got a photograph – I've got a picture that I did in pastel of my father. My father was a hero. He was the love of my life, really. And especially later on I began to think, how can anybody go through that torture that he went through? He didn't – he was standing once at the sink in my – at our previous home and I said, Dad – I wanted to know – I had no right to do this but I did say – I didn't feel at the time that I had a right or wrong and I said, Dad, what was it like in Dachau? **[01:48:12]** What happened? And my father stood over the sink and cried. And it was then I realised, Ruth, you have no right to bring up the past. And from then onwards I decided two things. One thing is to never, never ask him again about his past, about their

past. If they wanted to say something, they would, but I would never question about what it was like or how did they live or anything like that, and they didn't talk about it. The second thing was I think – and this is what influenced me a little bit in doing my artwork – and I suppose in a way it's to let people know, to stand up and be counted, that I am a Jew, and what happened. And that's I suppose our influence, going to Beth Shalom and going to schools. And then I thought, right, Ruth, for your own sake, do pictures. Let's see if it's cathartic. Is that the right word?

Cathartic, yeah.

And do pictures. And see if you can do them in honour of your parents. **[01:50:00]** And that's when I started working in glass, at their story but as I saw it, not as it possibly was. And –

Yeah. You were almost telling it for them, or not for them, they couldn't, but you were –

They – yes, yes, exactly. Exactly, yeah.

Yeah, which is interesting because again I think- some second, third generation, that's exactly what they're doing partly, you know.

Yes, yes.

And partly because parents couldn't do it themselves.

And also, in Germany I mean a lot of people of your generation don't know, don't know about the Kindertransport. No?

And have you spoken in Germany? I mean I know we were in Berlin together but before that, have you been –

No, I haven't been to any schools. The only place I have spoken is in Berlin, there is- what's her name, who runs this establishment – oh, Erica will remember – in Berlin to try and ignite the knowledge.

The Exilmuseum maybe, was it?

Sorry? No, it wasn't a museum. No, no. Oh, the name –

Okay, don't worry about it.

In Berlin, the name – she holds a summer camp quite frequently and most of the children – not children, young adults, come from Russia to reignite their knowledge of their Judaism and of their heritage.

Right. And you have spoken there?

I've spoken there, yes. Yeah. I've worked there actually in Berlin and the Wannsee Con – where the Wannsee Conference was. **[01:52:02]**

Yeah, in the villa.

Yeah.

So, when – Ruth, when did you start talking or going to Beth Shalom and –

Oh, I don't know how I – I'm not sure how I got there. Oh, it must have been over twenty years ago. I know when it was first established more or less that I –

Because you were – you're obviously among the younger Kinder.

Yes. Yeah. And I've done art, creative art [laughs] sessions there, yeah.

What I was going to ask you, when you started to have a family with Jürgen, and children, what values, what did you want to instil in them? What sort of identity did you want to give them?

I didn't want to give them any particular identity. If you ask Erica, it would be a very interesting question to ask her, how does she see herself, how did she? I wanted them to be able to have empathy and sympathy and a knowledge of perhaps of what it must be like to not be wealthy or not be, you know. I – for them, yes, they're all highly qualified, yeah. But for me and – it isn't – the qualification, it is of course important. It's important in their own being, you know, that they feel that they reached a certain height in education and that. But for me, a person who shows empathy, who shows – and this is what I wanted them – for them to realise that life isn't all honey and milk and that there are people who are far less fortunate. **[01:54:11]** And I think that is – I think we can as parents be proud that they are all that type of person, they are sympathy – they have sympathy and they know what is in their own mind what's right and wrong. My daughter at the moment is having problems at the Warwick University and she's had to call in her union and I said, Erica– and Miriam, give in, give in. She said, no, Mum. Yesterday, she said, you've taught us what is right and wrong and so I am following the passage of what is right, in spite of what might happen. And this is what we aim- what I aim for in life. Qualifications are qualifications but being a human being, and I emphasise human, yeah, is more important than being a – having a degree and so on.

And did you speak German to your children at all?

Occasionally. Not now. Occasionally. I felt it was important, very important for the children. This is why we took the children to live in Germany for a year, that they could then talk to their relatives over there. And Erica studied German. Christof – Christof can speak German and it's very good that he doesn't mind whether it's the *dem* or *den* or *die* or *der*, his idea is communication and understanding [laughs]. **[01:56:03]** Miriam, likewise, yeah. So, they all can communicate. And Erica is fluent. My daughter-in-law as well.

Yeah. And Ruth, because you said you kind of suffered from the fact that your parents didn't speak about the past. Did you speak to your children about your own past?

You'll have to ask Erica.

I will. But [both laugh] I'm asking you now, whether – or –

I think by default I'm very much aware that ours is a complex situation because there you've got a German guy marrying a Jewish girl which itself is problematic, yeah. It can be problematic.

At the time, yeah.

At the time. Did I – what was the question? Did I –

Did you talk about your past? Both of you, I guess, you know.

I think they picked it up through me doing my talks and – I don't know, yet it's the kind of thing – I feel very much aware I don't want to burden them with what was or happened to my parents. So, I don't know. You'll have to ask Erica the question.

Okay, I will. Yes, you're right. Yours was a very special situation.

Hmm-hmm.

I mean did you find there were – apart from your parents that other people had problems with you and Jürgen, or –

Yes. One time when I went to the Kinder reunion, the first Kinder reunion –

Kindertransport reunion.

Kindertransport reunion. I was in a queue and probably waiting for a meal or something, and one woman – we'd – talking about the past and I think I must have introduced Jürgen and as

being German. **[01:58:08]** She said, why did – why did you want to marry a German, Ruth? A non-Jewish? I can't remember what I replied. I can't. I just remember that. And I remember at that meeting we were invited – it was a lot of people –

1989 it was, I think.

Possibly. I've still got the –

Yeah, I have it. In London.

In – yeah, London. Which part of London? It wasn't actually –

It was in a school. Was it the JF – Jewish Free School?

No, it wasn't exactly in London. It's on the outskirts somewhere.

But you went there.

I went there and I stood up – we were invited to go to the stage and I don't know why, I stood up – it must have been the first time I did this. I stood up and said, can anybody in the audience tell me where I belong? German? In England? Jewish? But brought up as a – in a Christian society with no Jews. I can't remember what else. Oh, where do I belong? Because I always have this feeling, you know, even now, that I'm in limbo, I – do I belong here? Do I belong there? Do I belong there? I don't know. And somebody stood up and said, Ruth, I don't know why you're even asking that question. You belong in Israel. I sat down very quickly [laughs]. But there you go. And this feeling of not belonging, not really belonging, still haunts me. **[02:00:04]**

And also, not belonging to that Kindertransport reunion, or also not quite belonging to that?

Yeah, I don't belong to that because I didn't know, I didn't remember, I didn't know anything about it. I would like that – like Erica is there [laughs] would like to know and having in a way remembering something.

And you still feel like that, this feeling of non-belonging? You still feel it?

I do because I get some ignorant, stupid people here saying, you know, [sighs] when they – I say I eat bacon, what are you doing, eating bacon, you – Ruth, you're not supposed to eat bacon [laughs]. You know, silly things like that. And then one friend of mine said I'd – I must have done something good in my life. She said, oh, you are really – Ruth, you're a really good Christian, aren't you? I said, no, I'm Jewish. She said, oh, I know that but you're really a good Christian [laughs]. And then I get more serious comments like somebody saying – who's dead now – saying, the only thing Hitler did wrong was not to get rid of all the Jews and gypsies and then, you know, you get ignorant people and you want to put it down to ignorance. And I get somebody who lives not too far away – there's a piece of land for sale at the bottom of her garden – Ruth, join in and buy it, and if you don't, the gypsies will come to it. I said, do you mean the Jews or do you mean the gypsies? And, you know, I mean you get ignorant people and you can only say – in order to live with these people, you can only say it's ignorance, it's not malice.

So do you feel you belong here, to this house, to any –

I love this house. **[02:02:02]** Jürgen, as you know, has cancer and he says – somebody came to talk to him about it and he said, I want to stay here until I die. This is my home. I love this house because – I love Beech House better. You didn't know Beech House. Beech House was an enormous house with seven bedrooms and a workshop and a pottery shop and a work a, well, it was just lovely.

And that's where you had the language – when you had language students?

But I love this because I sometimes sit out – sit there, at my computer and look out and see the cows and I think, this is Little Austria [laughs]. I can relate to it like that, you know, and

this is – my heart still beats – misses a beat when I go there or when I – sometimes I imagine this to be a place like Austria in the mountains, and there are no mountains but there are hills that are, you know, the trees and –

Or the farm where your parents were.

Yes, yes. So, I feel safe, I feel secure here and I love it. But then I do miss Beech House as well, and I do miss Austria as well. I suppose if I'm to be honest, that's still partly my house where we went. So, you know, if you look at my pictures, you'll see a lot of them flying and that's me, flying, not finding a proper rest place. But I'll show you later on.

Okay. So, it's a sort of – do you think you have a search for belonging, almost?

I have a –

Nostalgia is a word [overtalking].

I have a search for belonging. **[02:04:07]**

A search for something.

And it's not going to finish. It's going to be there to the end because the Jewish community really don't want me or need me, although recently I was invited to a Sabbath meal with a – Rabbi Shmuli Pink, a very nice man but –

Which community is that?

That was the Orthodox in Nottingham. No, no, wrong. In Leicester. In Leicester. But then when I saw this rigmarole the *Shabbat* meal and all the things you had to do, wash your hands and not speak, or speak or – I thought, Ruth, this isn't for you. Yet Erica, Erica [laughs] –

Okay, okay. We're taking a break. Thank you.

[Break in recording]

Yes, Ruth. We were talking about a sense of belonging or not belonging. What I wanted to ask you is, how do you think your experiences being a refugee coming on the Kindertransport, growing up with refugee parents, how has that influenced or impacted your life?

I think I am very much aware of prejudices and that's one thing I give the advice to Beth Shalom: Recognise your prejudices and once you recognise them, then you can move a step further to get rid of them as far as possible. And so, I think my experience as a refugee has made me more aware and even more tolerant to those who are not in such a happy position, both financially and otherwise as we are and I think that that's had an impact on my whole philosophy of life, if you like, since my experience as a refugee. **[02:06:24]** I think I'm more in tune with people who come over because I'm of the opinion whether it be economic or whether it be social or whether it be self-indulgent, you could say, nobody, and I would argue the case that nobody easily leaves their father country, their home country. It has to be a terrific, terrific reason why people move out of the place where they – not born but where they had happy memories, where their – the country in which they were born, they have – nobody leaves that easily. And I think that is what has influenced – being a refugee myself, and perhaps still thinking of myself as a refugee, means that more empathy, more sympathy, more understanding, trying to understand what it's like to have one suitcase. Can I later on, and if you remind me, I will show you the big picture which is hanging on the wall to the right of you, about the – or to the left of you [laughs] which is about a little refugee girl.

Yeah.

Yeah. **[02:08:00]**

And do you think the choice to become a teacher and an artist, do you think that was influenced by your experiences, or –

No, not at all. I think the choice was not to – become a teacher was not my choice. As I said before, my mother made most of my choices in life and this is what she decided to do, for me to be. Beside the fact that I will admit very readily I'm not an academic at all, she – they, I say they- they wanted their children to achieve what they never had the opportunity of achieving. And she would have been a very good teacher because when I learnt German it was really from her coming home from the gasworks, sitting next to me day in, day after day, sitting next to me with a little book of how to speak German and she took me through that book. And really that's what started me. I didn't make the choice of being a teacher. I think I would have – given a choice, I would have done something else, something different. And then when I became a teacher of languages – well, no – yes, German and history [laughs] I really didn't want to do that. I wanted to be a sports teacher and that was my interest, to be a sports teacher and I didn't achieve that. I was – I applied for IM Marsh's College in Liverpool and they didn't – again a rejection [laughs]. They didn't want me and so I went on to Keele University. **[02:10:02]** How I got in Keele University was- again not through particularly, and I'm being honest here, academic achievement. Keele was a new university, it was a four-year course and it was an experiment on doing a foundation year, so giving the student time to think about which subject and then going through various subjects, which subject they could do. And the idea of doing a foundation year which was embodied in many subjects then you could have time to think what you wanted to do in the first year. And the idea of doing arts main and then a science subsid and parallel to doing that, a teaching course. So, I ended up teaching. I enjoyed it, don't get me wrong. I did enjoy my teaching, especially when – with some classes and not so much with others. What I enjoyed perhaps, and if people are honest, they enjoy going to the staffroom and having a coffee and gossiping about this and that [laughs].

But I mean later, when you were doing with Jürgen the sort of language courses, of people coming here. That's –

It was when we bought the place. It was a big place and we did have money from Jürgen's inheritance but – he said from his inheritance. I also contributed to that quite a bit. And again, the question was…

Because I think that, you know, being a refugee and then doing something like that where you have people staying in your house and –

Yes, I enjoyed – I enjoyed that. And we've got a little book there where they wrote in each time and we had some very interesting and very [laughs] funny stories to tell. **[02:12:00]** People came from Italy, they came from Holland, believe it or not, from Germany, come – they came from Israel, one person came from Israel, and I enjoyed meeting the people.

Yes, so it's kind of cultural exchange as well. Yeah.

It was, yes. And, you know, it was more than just an ordinary school. And we had some very interesting people, people who were in Denmark and became friends and, you know, the union there and here, they were hosting – hosted by the Member of Parliament, and it was interesting people we had, and – yeah. And we did also later on bed and breakfast as well and that was quite a laugh, if anything was, and we had the hotel inspector here with us [laughs] and – anyway, and then we did food, various foods, so we did a lot of things in Beech House which – and they –

Nearby?

Nearby, yeah. I didn't want to be a teacher, even now. And my art, I regard my art as [sighs] people come and people – I used to go into a kind of selling –

Here?

Not from here but from various fairs I went to but I decided that wasn't for me and I decided that when I do art now, which I do, glasswork in particular, I do it to please myself and not to pander to any of the public, so whatever I do – and then when they come and they see a piece of my work and they say, how much is that, and depending who it is, you know, I'll say – and I will sell. But most of the pieces I'm reluctant to sell because I can never achieve them again. But then I ask myself, well, what's going to happen to them? **[02:14:03]** The children

don't want all these pieces, [laughs] so, you know, it's a dichotomy, do I – but I'm beginning to produce things, like the bride and groom up there, that I want to do and that I have joy –

For yourself?

And for myself, yes. I wouldn't have chosen this path, of vocation. It wasn't even a vocation.

What would you have chosen, what do you think?

I wanted to be a – to join the circus. Seriously, I wanted to join the circus [laughs]. And if not the circus, what else did I want to do? Oh, I wanted to study sociology. I wanted to help people, I wanted to listen to people, to see if I could help them. Sociology or psychotherapy or something. That's where my heart would have been in. For how long, I don't know.

And Ruth, how would you identify yourself today, in terms of your identity? Which belongs to this whole issue of belonging.

This is – it is a term – it's always a question, isn't it? When I go to Beth Shalom, the public can ask questions, be it sometimes kiddies, have you ever met Hitler, have you shaken hands with Hitler [laughs]. But there are more serious questions than that. What would – again, the question?

Identity. What would you describe yourself?

What is my identity? Do you know what? I do a bit of writing and I've written one little piece which I've sent away now – I've sent most of them away to be corrected – am I Jewish? And I ask the kids there or people there. **[02:16:02]** And once there was a group of Jewish people, Reform, am I Jewish? How would you consider my identity to be, if being Jewish is an identity, I don't know. [Sighs] Am I Jewish? I don't eat Jewish food, I don't celebrate the High Holidays, except I do think of Yom Kippur sometimes and what I should do there and what I shouldn't do. I don't go to synagogue. I don't read the Old Testament or the Bible or – I don't obey any of the – I don't know – obey any of the rules that perhaps Orthodox Jews might. So,

am I Jewish? Am I Jewish? The question is why do I associate myself and say I'm Jewish? Why do I wear the Star of David most of the time? And I say, yes, I am Jewish. I denied being Jewish for at least a third of my life. I'm not going to do it anymore because denying being Jewish is denying everything my parents went through. So, I say, being Jewish is like a diamond. It has many facets to it. You don't need to be Orthodox Jew, you don't need to eat *kosher* food, as a person who came from Berlin and he stayed with us and he was Orthodox and he said, right, I'll go with Jürgen to Stratford and we'll see the house that Shakespeare born, but Ruth, will do something for me? I said, yeah, what? **[02:18:00]** He said, I want to celebrate a *Shabbat* meal with you, so will you please go and find me some *kosher* wine? I mean I went to various shops in Stratford there and – but I didn't get *kosher* wine [laughs]. Anyway, so am I Jewish? Yes, I will always now identify myself – I stand up and be counted. But what I won't do, I won't align myself in anything Israel is doing now in Palestine, in Gaza. I will not identify –and in fact, I was so disgusted with the bombing and still am, that I took my Star of David off and I put it in the drawer for ages. And then I thought, no, I'm not going to do that. If anybody approaches me, and they may approach me more if I wear the Star of David, then I'll be honest and tell them what I think, what – that Israel is doing now is genocide and it is murder, and I can't agree with it. And I'm more likely to meet is provocation, I know. You're more likely to meet people who will really talk to me about that than if I haven't got this on.

And has anyone asked you anything?

No. When I give talks at Beth Shalom, I always say I'm open to questions, any questions you like, but I'm not going to talk about the Israeli Jewish affair in what's happening there because it would be – I just don't think it would be – it would be the right place but it would lead to so much discussion that I wouldn't want that. **[02:20:03]**

And speaking of Beth Shalom, what effect did it have once you started talking to schoolchildren and, you know, telling your story? And I know you've told your story for – my [ph] story as well. How has it changed you? Or has it changed you at all, talking about it, writing about it, you know, having people to listen to your experiences?

How it's changed –

Has it changed you? Was it a beneficial thing to do for yourself?

[Sighs] Do you know what? People say, how can you do it after so many years? How can you do it? And sometimes I think time is now to stop because you don't want to do it [coughs] sorry, you don't want to do it, that it becomes meaningless to you, that you do it so many times, it no longer – it's like reciting a – like a parrot reciting. No –

But is that the case? Do you feel when you stand there and talk, do you feel, oh – you know, how do you feel?

No, not now but I did for a time. And my way of talking now to groups is perhaps more honest than before and I used to feel when I was talking and I would try – I resent – not resent, I try not to do the same. I used to feel that I was an outsider. I was giving the talk and I was standing there, you know, a doppelgänger, if you like, and it was automatic. **[02:22:00]** But now, it's not so. I – when I talk now about my father being dragged into a concentration camp, I talk with more fervour, I think because I feel that. I feel I can see this innocent man, this – my father, being dragged onto a lorry. I can hear the gunshot that killed his – by then that killed his pet – I can feel the fear, you know, and it is now when I give it, it is more honest, if you like, to say, yeah, than it used to be.

Why? What has changed?

What has changed?

Hmm-hmm.

I probably am more aware, more aware of what happened to my family. But when I also talk, I say this has happened to my family. Now, we must remember, six million, six million, we can't even imagine six million. I try to help them imagine six million. I say, well, look at ten big towns in England, empty them all and you might get to the figure of six million. You

might. So, I feel more. To me then is more empathy I suppose as knowledge grows within me, as I become more, even more- when I do my writing, even more involved in what they went through and what it feels – it must have felt like my mother who was handicapped – I hate using that word – standing at the station with one suitcase and perhaps two little children. I feel more now than perhaps a few years ago. **[02:24:00]** Perhaps it was just telling the story a few years ago, I don't know.

I think it's interesting. I think maybe – do you think it has to do something with that when you become older –

I think it is.

You feel closer to your parents in some way. Or you under – I don't know. There is something to me with age somehow.

Yes, yes, yes. You become more aware. I have become more – even more aware, to be honest, in my talks and to feel more than before. I don't know.

Yeah, I think that's really interesting because, you know, we have now obviously survivors who have spoken for many years, you know, so how it changes you and whether the content changes or – yeah.

Also, I think I've become more aware of the difficulties since the Ukraine refugees–

So, the political situation here changed?

I think more aware of that and perhaps identify with them more. My story has been translated into Ukrainian and–

By who?

By Erica's lady, who stayed, Natalya [ph]. She has. It's been out in the Ukraine. I think they were – no, they couldn't.

Published?

In a way it has. It's been translated and it's been shown I think on video or on YouTube or something, I don't know. And then we are a member of Safe Passage. Do you know it?

Yeah.

Safe Passage.

I know of Safe Passage.

Get the news of Safe Passage.

Yes, so which is the initiative to bring more unaccompanied children to the UK.

Yeah. And more, yes. **[02:26:00]** About the boat children as well – not only children, boat people.

And are you involved at all with any Kindertransport organisations?

No. Only insofar that the AJR, I look at their – and I have actually spoken on Zoom for the AJR. And also, at the Wiener Library once.

And in Berlin last year.

And in Berlin last year, yes. Were you there?

Yeah.

Yes, you were there.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And what was that –

It was cold, wasn't it? [Laughs]

It was very, very cold. What was that like for you to be there on Friedrichstraße and talk on there?

Well, I've been to Friedrichstraße before, quite frequently. It was pretty scary. It was scary [laughs]. I remember thinking that and remember thinking, what am I going to do, what am I – but once you're in there and you – it didn't remind me as a child of leaving from Friedrichstraße at all because I've got no memory of that. But – and I've spoken when people have been at Friedrichstraße, and we've been there, just people passing, and I say, do you want to know something about that? You know, I tell them then, whether they want to listen or not [laughs] about it. But what did it feel like? It felt strange. It felt very strange. And I felt – yes, what did I feel? I felt at the time these bloody Germans, they ought to know, those who don't know what happened, they ought to know what happened. I don't know if it came over like that. It was an emotional time, that, for me. And I was – I think I was quite honest and I – but aware as well, don't go – don't take it too far, don't take it too far, Ruth, because if you do, you lose people who might want to listen, you know. **[02:28:12]**

And at that point you were joined by your grandson, who lives in Berlin now?

Yes.

How do you feel about that, that you have a grandchild who lives in Berlin?

Do you know what? When Brexit came – I don't know what you think about Brexit – I'm not asking you because it's again a very personal question – and we – I was listening there and they decided Brexit, shortly afterwards, I got a phone call from Christof, our son, who is a very serious young man. And he said – so we have very few serious conversations, although

when we – well, Erica took us – one of us took us to Berlin – and it's amazing that Christof actually said, this is – remind me of the original question here – but said, turn around – we were sitting at the back. He said, Dad, you're a fantastic man and Jürgen looked a bit surprised as well and he said, you at that time as a German managed or was willing to marry a Jewish person. That is something to be admired, you know. And so, Christof talks very little seriously about being German, about perhaps being Jewish, he's experienced being dragged on his back because he was German at school and being marked, scarred on his back and because of being – but the question was again? **[02:30:02]**

How do you feel about your grandson in Berlin today?

My – this was another grand – yeah, grandson. Well, my son rang up and said, Ruth, what would you think? What would you think if I took on Germany nationality? We all took on German nationality? I was gobsmacked. I said, Christof, Christof, my son, can't you wait until I'm dead? [Laughs] And he said, well, I, you know, the children need to have this, to have the Erasmus – not – what's it called, a scholarship, and they want to be free citizens, they want to be able to travel and so on and so on. And I went to Berlin and I thought, this is a bloody stab in the back by my son. And then I thought, you're not thinking right. It is to his advantage and to the children's advantage and I felt very sorry that I'd said that and so the next day, the next morning – before morning, even, I rang up and I said, of course, Christof, it was silly of me to say that. Of course, you must take on the citizenship if it is – if you feel you must. So now, believe it or not, Erica has it, is a German citizen, and her son, her children are, all the children are. I think nearly all the people in the family, except for me and Jürgen. And yet they got that citizenship, not through me but through Jürgen because he was a German national before they were born, or – I'm not quite sure how the ins and outs of it – so –

They were German in fact, even if they didn't have the papers.

Yes. **[02:32:00]** Yes. So, they –

So, didn't – they didn't actually have to apply for German citizenship? They just –

I don't think so.

No, they had it.

They had it.

Implicit.

Yeah, and they didn't know [laughs].

Yeah, because if you're born to a German national at that point, you're German.

Yes, that's right. So, they're all German, except for me. I could, easily. I could get it and – what [sighs] – at my age, what's the advantage? And anyway, I don't want it. I wouldn't want it. And Jürgen has foregone his chance. Well, he still can reapply but he doesn't want it.

So, you don't have it but your children have it.

Yeah.

And what about your grandson, then, in Berlin?

Grandson [laughs]. That's a question, isn't it?

Yes, to come back.

Well, he is by default – I think he has got to know a girl who has lived in South America for some time. The parents are in South America but the father was German, so he's got this – she's got this German connection. But they came to England but she can't get British citizenship unless she goes through exams, etc, so she's – her choice is to live in Germany

and of course, they are deeply in love with each other, so Josh does the same, he lives in Berlin and he loves it and he's trying to learn German [laughs].

So, would you have thought it, that one of your grandchildren is going to live in Berlin?

Would I…?

Would you have thought that?

Never. I think – Jürgen's not here. I think Jürgen is very proud that this happens, you know, and I sometimes say to Jürgen, Jürgen, wouldn't you be a lot happier in Germany than in England? **[02:34:00]** And I think he's very pleased that Josh is – and what Josh has done – I don't know if you're aware of this – he runs and he's got his own little business on, I don't know, running and sport, and he has run to a lot – you know of this, do you?

The stolpersteine?

Stolpersteine.

He runs from one stolperstein to another? To all Berlin stolpersteine?

Well, he's – yes, I think they're getting fewer now but he sent – yes, together with a friend. So, I don't know if he's continued doing that or not. But none of the children are particularly interested in being Jewish or what does it mean, being Jewish. Erica has now joined the AJR and has a family membership I think and she is very interested in what we're doing and finds it extremely important. Yeah. So, they'd – but they are free agents. They want to be – as Erica, she sees herself as a citizen of the world rather than anything else.

Yeah. And Ruth, do you feel British at all, after having lived here for so many years? British?

I don't know what that means. What does it mean? Accepting the British way of life, whatever means, having a cup of tea in the morning with milk, [laughs] eating proper bread

rather than Mother's Pride [laughs]. Let's say, it's strange, isn't it? I always go for the underdog. **[02:36:01]** I support the underdog. So, if somebody would say something really bad about Britain, I would be there to argue against it, and vice versa. Do I feel really British? No, I can't say I do. No. I can't say I do, if it means supporting the slavery, supporting anything that has – bad that's happened in the past, I can't say I would support that. But if somebody criticises Britain and I think it's wrong to – in that sense, I would support them. And I don't think that even now friends or people around see me as British, nor Jürgen. They're "the odd couple."

[Laughs] Yes, you were saying that you're considered an odd couple.

The odd couple.

The odd couple. I mean the truth is there are probably not many people like you who've married – who had a German partner so close in, you know, late '50s, early '60s.

I don't know. I don't know the answer.

Was it a problem for you ever that – I mean to marry somebody whose parents and grandparents obviously in the war –

Yes. Yeah.

And played some role.

Jürgen's father was in the – what was he? He was in the army. He was a prisoner of war in Russia, he was at Belarus and – yes, it does mean – it has throughout been a problem with me, particularly – now, what is Jürgen, you're not going – recording this [laughs]. **[02:38:07]**

No, this is recording. Don't say what you don't want to say, Ruth. It is being recorded. Don't tell me anything you don't want on record.

No, no. He was in Belarus and he obviously, and Jürgen knows this, did things which he was ordered to do.

And how did you deal with that when meeting him?

How did – meeting him was not a problem because love comes – shines through all eyes, doesn't –

I mean the father, Jürgen's father.

The father? I loved Jürgen's father and he loved me, I think. We used to go walking together, we went sailing together, we used to have a drink of *Schnaps* before Jürgen's mother came home and I related so well to Jürgen's father. Not so well to his mother but – his mother was so good-looking and so beautiful and she was a woman for, you know, dressed up nicely every evening, she used to put her clothes ready for the next morning. She worked mainly with men. And mainly – partly I think it was I was a younger woman and not attractive but the attractiveness in being younger and, yeah. So, I loved the father. Probably I wasn't quite aware of his dealings in Belarus at the time. Yeah. But…

Yeah. Well, it is an interesting situation –

Interesting situation.

And all, to think that you –

I didn't know about Belarus at the time, then, what happened and what he did under orders. **[02:40:06]** You know, you either do what you're told or you get shot and who wouldn't do things that they personally thought were wrong in order to save their own skin and perhaps the skin of the family.

Yeah. Yeah. Well, it's amazing I guess that, you know, people are always also individuals and if you have a –

Yeah. One thing that I do say though, people say, what a fantastic story, I say, no, it's not a fantastic story. Everybody, and everybody has a story to tell. You may think it's mundane and you may think it's uninteresting to people but everybody has a story to tell if they think about it and it is important to think of your own story and not only listen to other people's. Go away and think about that. We've got a visitor.

Oh, hello.

[Laughs] I'll take him out.

Yeah. So, Ruth, what then – so everyone has a story, absolutely. When you speak to children, also for – a message for anyone who would like – who is watching this interview later on, what message would you like to give, based on your experiences?

I would like to give the message, be vigilant, be kind and above all, look at your own life and your prejudices and then try and get rid of it. **[02:42:01]** Regardless of your skin colour, regardless of your religion, regardless of your status in life, be kind, be understanding, have empathy, and probably if you like, it may sound wrong, but be – lead your life in a good way. Hard to achieve and who's a saint? If you achieve all those things then you've achieved something positive to hand on to other people, and also to youngsters. I say we've done our little bit. Now, the responsibility of what happens in the world rests on your shoulders. It's not an easy responsibility but it is your responsibility and I'm sure, given strength, you will make the world a better place.

Ruth, for you what is the most important thing of your, let's say, German Jewish heritage?

[Sighs] What is – oh, what a question. What is the most important thing of my German Jewish heritage? Perhaps my – the most important thing for me is to learn more about what happened in Germany, more about – try to think of what way Germany's going, is it becoming again anti-Semitic or not? **[02:44:10]** Be – and trying to come to terms with that, trying to come to terms with the rise in anti-Semitism, not only in Germany but in England

and in France. And we hear Trump again with his anti-black, anti-Semitism, anti-everything, except true white Americans. Trying to come to terms with that is difficult. What is important – what's the question again?

Your German Jewish heritage.

German Jewish. [Sighs] Jewish heritage is important to me, understanding it. Trying to understand how Hitler and his followers could murder six million people, a million of who are children, going to Yad Vashem, seeing that, seeing the museum there, trying to understand how and why people did this. How. And the only way of how – trying to understand how the people were made out to be non-human and made out to be like vermin. And this is what's important to me, to try and understand how one country could go against their own citizens in the way they did. **[02:46:08]** And I think although I try to understand, try to make excuses, we always make excuses for things, whether personal or whether in history, we always find some excuse for people. I can't find any excuse. And how they did it, I can't understand, except thinking that they made these Jewish – Jews and others who didn't fit in with their ideology as making them out to be vermin and to chase them like cats would chase mice out of the city, out of their own country and saying that they were not human beings any more. I think that's the only way that they could have behaved like that. If they're not human, they deserve to be killed. How do I come to terms with that? I still can't understand. I don't think I'll ever understand. The value of life didn't exist for so many Germans, the bystanders, the eye witnesses, the people who took part in this and knew that this was happening. Can you understand it? You shake your head. So – but having said that, it would sound like I lead a miserable life. You know, we don't. We do take this question seriously and we do feel the question and we do feel, and Jürgen will say he feels the responsibility of what his family or what his – people in his country did. **[02:48:06]** We do feel that and we don't belittle it in any way, it takes up a lot of our thought. But then we look out of the window and we see our family and we see our grandchildren and now we see our great-grandchildren, and there's joy. It's a positive way. It's – look, I sit there at my computer and I look out early in the morning and I – and think, how lucky I am. I see Erica and the family coming so – and caring for us. I think how lucky we are. The past, I won't say is the past and is forgotten. No, it isn't. It lives almost alongside it and – almost alongside it and

you can perhaps identify one and then identify another and, you know, the past, I say to myself often, the past is the past, let it go, let it go. And I do meet people who are interested, like yourselves, interested in taking time and patience and listening to other people's stories, although I'm sure your stories are equally as important and equally as interesting. So [sighs] life is a malady, if you like. It's like a liquorice all-sort, isn't it? It's sometimes like many layers.

So, you think the past lives alongside the present, for you?

Exactly, alongside the present. Yeah.

And you're a great-grandmother, you said?

Yes, grandmother. My one granddaughter's just had her second child, yes [laughs]. **[02:50:04]** A beautiful little girl. They're not religious anyway. I think most of our family I would say – you could ask Erica – is atheist. Jürgen is atheist, a humanist.

A humanist, yeah?

Don't ask me what I feel.

I think we get a sense. We get a sense from talking to you.

Yeah, yeah. Right, we –

Okay. Anything else, Ruth, I haven't asked you, we haven't discussed, you'd like to add?

No, but I would like, which you're going to do- when I said also that the grandchildren weren't interested, I've got one granddaughter who is very interested and came to the first meeting of the Kindertransport and is very – has been to Beth Shalom with me and is very in – and says she'd love to go again, you know, and I feel heartened because – by that because I

thought at one stage the children aren't interested at all but – and, you know, just go their own way. But I'm pleased about that.

Well, as you said, your grandson in Berlin is running from one stolperstein to the other, so that's –

Yeah. But I don't think he knows, quite honestly, enough about – and why they've gone to live in Germany, I think I mentioned this, that the girlfriend is German and she – coming to England, she would never be able to get citizenship and she'd be limited in – yeah.

So, there is interest in the next generation.

There is, yes.

In your story.

Yes. **[02:52:00]**

Yeah.

Yeah. And hopefully they'll read my story and maybe other work, yeah. They don't ask to read my writing. Perhaps they think it's not worthwhile but [laughs] I don't know.

Well, now they will also have a recording which you can send out to anyone when I send it to you.

They'll have a recording. Yes, yes. Okay. That's great, thank you. Thank you.

Anything else, Ruth, you would like to add?

No, not really. All, you know, all my artwork if you look around, you'll find it's fun and I don't just devote myself on the misery of the past and I have friends who are very Jewish and

want me to do a in-glass picture of the *menorah* and their life, who – one guy comes from Russia and is a – and so, you know, life is sweet. I'm not saying it wasn't at one stage. And anybody, anybody, during the war years, it was hard. It was hard, whether you were a refugee, whether you came from Germany or not, you still in a position where you saw the houses being bombed, where you saw fires, where you heard the sirens, where you had very little to eat. That was equally hard for many, many people during the war. That's all that – maybe doubly hard if you were a refugee, maybe triply as hard if you were German [laughs].

Maybe. Okay, Ruth, we're going to now ask Erica to join – ask her to join and we will also look at some of your artwork with – I – we want to film it. ***[02:54:07]*** *So we have a little bit –*

Yes. I might have to take some – I would like you- if possible, please, to include in my artwork what I did many years ago, many, many years ago, my first feeling of what it might – well, I can give you the book about that and you can take it from the book, but I have a few here. And you look at that and think, she didn't do this forty years ago, she did it yesterday. Because that artwork, you can very well compare with what's happening in many countries today.

Okay. We're going to look at it. Ruth, just one second. Just one second. So, I say thank you so much for sharing your story with us today. Thank you.

It is my pleasure, very, very much my pleasure. And it is meeting you again, not only in Berlin but meeting you in our home, which is a home as opposed to a house. You know, we welcome so many people if they wish to come. And my feeling is, I love to be with people and I love even more to be with people who may have – and this sounds a little bit prejudiced [laughs] – but may have a Jewish background, may understand what's happened in the past. And so, I'm very grateful for the opportunity that you're both here and both recording this for posterity.

Thank you, Ruth.

Okay.

[Pause from 02:55:53 – 02:56:15]

Ruth, can you please introduce the person sitting on your right?

Yes. This is my eldest daughter, Erica and she – I've forgotten how old you are.

E: Oh, quite old [both laugh]. I'm sixty now.

She's sixty now. And Erica was a teacher, she followed the same progression as me, and Erica will tell you about that herself. Erica is very concerned about us, about Jürgen and myself, particularly as we're getting older and we have this establishment and we have this – the field. She's very concerned about our welfare and visits us frequently.

E: Hi.

So welcome, Erica.

E: Thank you.

Erica, just at this point where we heard your mother's story, so I wondered whether you have something to add or whether we could talk a little bit, what impact your mother's history had on you.

E: Well, it – I mean in many ways it had quite a significant impact because growing up in the '70s – I was born in 1964 – so growing up in the '70s and being a teenager in the sort of '70s and then starting work in the '80s, there was still quite a lot of very small-mindedness and quite sort of closed-mind mentality around, so growing up with a background that was Jewish and German, there was already a conflict there. So that's something I've always been really aware of, although I have to say, in the early part of my life, more aware of the German-ness than the Jewishness. **[02:58:05]** And I think in terms of how my life was as a youngster, that

probably had much more of an impact because at that point in the ’70s there was still a lot of anti-German feeling around in this country, so –

So, were you – did you identify – how did you identify, then? Or how did people identify you?

Well, I mean my name’s Schwiening, Erica, so immediately very German. I mean I was very much stuck between the two because when I was in Germany, I found myself defending English things, so defending the English weather and all sorts of things like that. And then when I was in England, I was defending German things. So, I felt Euro – I struggled with my identity in terms of nationality in my early teen years I think and at some point, I just thought, right, okay, I can’t be doing with this, I’m just European. And that’s how I rationalised it in the end. So – and then the Jewish thing I think probably came to – for – Ruth, do you remember the exhibition you had in Nuneaton?

Hmm-hmm.

E: I think that was when Ruth was painting a lot of really big paintings in – on plaster – with plaster of Paris, in relief, and with barbed wire, and it was an angry exhibition, wasn’t it?

It was a very angry exhibition.

E: And I think that was when I was in my late teens and that's when I think I really started to engage with what an impact that her early childhood and upbringing had had. I don't think I was really that aware of the Jewish side at that stage.

Oh, yes, I was going to ask you, did your mother talk about her past at all, or –

E: Not a lot, did you, really? I mean Grandma and Granddad didn’t speak any German, so – and they didn't speak about it. **[03:00:00]** I mean I knew about it but in a background sort of way I think. And it wasn’t until this exhibition which was – it was a big thing for Nuneaton to have an exhibition. There was a lot antagonism towards it, wasn’t there, and a lot of –

Was there?

E: Yeah, a huge amount of people – I mean mostly people were supportive but you only need a few objectors for, you know, people saying we don't need to be reminded of this and this is, you know, an ugly thing and –

We've got the book with comments.

E: Yeah, it's quite interesting to look at the comments, yeah.

Oh, I can look at it. Which year was it?

E: That would have been [sighs] probably in the early '80s I would say.

I've got the book with me.

E: We can have a look –

So, you were not ready to deal with your emotions.

Newspaper reports.

E: No, I don't think so. And it was really raw. I mean the house was full of those big pictures, wasn't it?

Yeah, well, yes.

E: Big, big things. So, I think that's when I suddenly thought, oh.

Something's happening here.

E: Yeah, yeah.

Because it's interesting, that time in the '80s because that, you know, in terms of sort of testimony projects, that's when everything started, when people started talking, was late '70s and then '80s.

E: But that was probably more in London and places like that, if you think about how out here in the Midlands, you know, it takes a while, doesn't it, for that sort of understanding to get out and –

I've got newspaper cuttings from then.

Yeah. And what did they say about –

Well, I can't remember [laughs]. I can't –

E: Well, I remember, it was some – there were some quite angry people saying that, you know, that it wasn't necessary to have such a raw exhibition.

They were offended, or –

E: Yeah. I think they were offended, yes. It was very different I think to anything that had been in Nuneaton Museum ever before. These were big things. I mean it's, you know, sort of four foot by six foot bits of board with big books and barbed wire and nails and all the –

It was applied, applied chicken wire and –

E: That was about the time you were doing your MA, wasn't it, I think? **[03:02:05]**

No, no, the MA – no. That exhibition was at Bramdene Avenue.

E: No, it wasn't.

What?

E: 100% that was when were at Bulkington Lane.

Well, we've got the dates.

E: Yeah.

So, were you surprised by your mother's work, in a way?

E: I don't think I was surprised because I'd grown up with all sorts of artistic [laughs] things, none of which I've inherited [laughs].

You have. You're so creative, Erica. Don't – you are creative.

E: Well, no, I mean I think it was a very different –

No, everybody –

E: She used to tell me to come out and draw big, you know, the bits of paper, it was like – a holiday activity was do some painting and it was like, Erica, draw big, and I was going, no, I don't like this.

[Both laugh] At school you're given little sheets of paper and pencil and a daffodil in front of you and say, now, draw that daffodil. And I wanted my children – none of them have actually –

E: Miriam's really artistic.

Miriam is, yes.

E: She really liked that, didn't she? But I didn't like it at all.

Yeah.

E: I didn't – maybe that was 'cos it was Ruth's thing. Maybe I needed to find my own thing.

Which you did, which you have. And that's being creative as well, Erica.

E: In a different – it's a different way, isn't it?

Yeah.

And for you, Erica, was there a sort of – when you were growing up was there a conflict between the German and the Jewishness somehow? Or was it that it wasn't known –

E: No, I don't think that was – I didn't – I don't remember feeling a conflict. There was certainly a conflict between the German and the English but I don't – I think the Jewish was something separate. And I remember, you know, sort of – I mean I – if I came across conflict, I didn't like it, and my response as a, you know, youngster, as a teenager, was always, you know, if my parents can marry, you know, then, you know, if, you know, a German man can marry a Jewish man and that can work, then, you know, for goodness' sake, we can sort out this small squabble at school. **[03:04:01]** So, you know, I was very aware of that.

So, you were aware that it was unusual that your parents –

E: Very aware, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Well, I was – it was the whole – growing up was very unusual. My growing up was very different from other people's. Yeah, very.

Culturally?

E: Culturally, yeah. Yeah. So, it was –

Give us some examples.

E: Well, it was – we ate German food almost all the time. Very little English food, didn't we?

Hmm-hmm.

E: I grew up –

Like what? We didn't talk about food.

Pumpernickel.

E: Yeah, and –

Black – black –

E: Yeah, pumpernickel and *Bratkartoffel* [fried potatoes], *Himmel und Erde* [heaven and earth: mashed potatoes with apple sauce and sausage]. We celebrated Christmas the German way, not the English way. I grew up speaking German and English. We went to – we lived in Germany for a year and I went to school in Germany, so, you know, that was – it was a really – it was a great experience for me. And some – and it's widened my experience but some of it wasn't easy, I think. But, you know, maybe things which help you to grow are not necessarily easy things all the time.

And now your son lives in Berlin.

E: Yes, yes. Yeah, he's very cross that I didn't teach him German [both laugh].

And you have German citizenship?

E: Yes, yes, of course. Yeah, so I – there is quite an interesting story attached to that actually because – so immediately upon the Brexit vote, where personally I felt I'd had my nationality rug pulled out from under my feet, I no longer knew where I was because suddenly it, you

know, Brexit was coming in and, you know, having established that I was European, suddenly that felt like it had gone. I mean it hadn't in reality but it felt like it. So as soon as the Brexit vote was – came in, Anna, my youngster daughter, said – who was in her – I can't remember how long ago – you know, teens, late teens, early twenties maybe – said, we need to apply for German citizenship. **[03:06:11]** And I'd always been quite envious – so Ruth and Jürgen had some friends when I was a teenager and their children had triple nationality and I used to think, that was magic, absolutely brilliant. They were –

Who?

E: Soraya and Nasiya [ph].

Soraya.

E: And they're English, German and Pakistani and I thought, that is just magic. And I remember saying to Ruth, why can't we have – so I was probably thirteen, fourteen – I can remember saying, why can't we have dual nationality? And she said, no, well, you can't have that 'cos we live in England and so I just thought, oh, that's a pity. Anyway, so Anna then started the process of applying for German nationality through Ruth because we did a lot of research and she found out that we could apply through Ruth. And so, she was – spent a long time collecting all the paperwork together. Have you told the story about how you weren't very happy about that to begin with?

Yes, she told us.

[Laughs]

E: So, she was really cross, really cross that we were applying for it, and how can you do that and – and I just remember saying, look, you know, this is not really necessarily about me but this is so that the next generation are free to work and travel and live in Europe, and it's their passport to Europe. But it was also really important for me. And so, then Anna got all the paperwork together, made an appointment with the German embassy and a very nice woman

from the German embassy phoned Anna up and she said, Anna, why are you doing this? You don't need to do it because your grandfather was German at the point your mother was born, so there's no matter of applying for it, you already – you are German. And so, she said, your mother's German, you are German, your siblings are German, your cousins are all German, and all of your children will be German automatically. **[03:08:03]** So we thought, oh, well, that's grand, so we all got our passports and we all got our – we all went to the German embassy and that was a quite big day for us, that.

Came here with a German flag.

E: No, we didn't [both laugh]. We kept it very low-key [laughs]. But yes, so now Josh lives in Berlin, he's really happy there and he's learning German slowly. Yeah. So, I think, you know, we've – that's okay, have buried that hatchet.

Of course. I do feel a bit left out though.

E: Well, you could reapply.

No, no [laughs].

E: You could reapply. I mean ironically, my dad's the only one who – which is the real irony of the situation is that he is the only one who couldn't get his German citizenship.

He couldn't?

E: No.

Why not?

E: Because when you give it up, so you can't then get it back. So, he gave it up to get English citizenship.

Okay. That's interesting.

E: Yeah. So, he couldn't but we've all got –

But that doesn't affect the fact that you could all get it at the time.

E: No, not at all, no. No –

If we go through the passports, there you go, [overtalking].

E: Sometimes we don't know [laughs]. Yeah.

But you're not worried about that, are you?

E: No, not at all. No. It was interesting, when we went to Berlin, I think last time we got to the airport and we all got our passports out and Anna makes quite a point of always going through on her German passport, so, you know, she does that, and the woman behind the customs was speaking to her in German. Now, Anna's German isn't brilliant, so she waved me over. She said, Mum, Mum, Mum, come and help me. So, I went over to explain and this – the lady looked at me and she said, do you have a German passport as well? I said yes. She said, what are you doing standing over there? Come through my queue. And she was very keen for us to go. Yeah. Yeah, so, um…

Okay. Anything else, Erica, you'd like to add? ***[03:10:00]***

E: Well, I think it's – I – do you want to say something?

No, I – no, Bea was going to ask about identity.

Yes, I have asked about – we discussed belonging and identity.

E: Yeah, yeah. So – yeah. I mean I, you know, it's different when you don't have roots beyond one generation in a country.

And do you feel that?

E: Yeah, very much so. Yes, I do. I do. And even though English is my first language, it's where I've lived almost all the time, I think because all of my family roots both on my father's side and my mother's side are actually in Germany, you know, I feel a very strong affiliation and a sense of a belonging there too. Yeah.

And Bea was interested – perhaps you've already answered this and I've been asleep, but I don't know – how – did I or did we talk to you a lot about being Jewish, being German, being whatever. Did we actually – like my parents never spoke to me about their history. Did we talk to you personally and the rest and –

E: Well, I mean I don't think it was a matter of having to talk about it because we felt very German when we were growing up. Very German.

What about Jewish?

It was more the German thing than for example, your mother's Kindertransport experience?

E: Yeah, I think that – the understanding of that came later on and I – but I think for you also, you didn't express it until –

No, no.

E: Did you, until later on.

Much later on.

E: I don't think it was because we weren't interested, I think it was something that Ruth didn't really engage in and express until much later on. **[03:12:07]**

Did you, for example, meet your foster family? You said you got in touch with them later.

Oh, I think no. I didn't either.

E: No, because – no, no, because I'd left home by then, so – but we've, you know, we try and involve ourselves as much as possible in what Ruth's doing and I think the talks that they both do are brilliant.

Yes, and you obviously came to Berlin together.

E: Yes, that's right, yeah.

So, is that important for you?

E: Yeah, really important. And we went to the unveiling of the Harwich statue together, didn't we? That was –

Oh, yes, and we went to Austria together for the unveiling of the *Denkmal* [memorial], what's it called –

E: Yeah, yeah, the – yeah, in [overtalking] – yeah, yeah, in –

We went to Austria and –

E: And in Schassbach, didn't we, and –

Yeah, not Schassbach – yes, that's right.

E: Yes, it was, wasn't it?

Near Schassbach.

E: Yeah.

Near Schassbach.

E: Yes, so, um –

You came to the farm?

E: Yes, and we went to the farm as well, yeah.

It's important, whereas, you know, my parents couldn't and didn't, and didn't want to perhaps, even though later on they had an opportunity to show us children a little bit about our past. They had the opportunity to go to Austria, to the house and to Osolin, to Esdorf as well but they didn't want to, whereas we thought it important for our children to know a bit about their history and – but I didn't – I think you agree with this – I didn't push that on to your shoulders at all.

E: No, but there is a burden of responsibility, which I feel, yeah.

There is, yeah.

You feel?

E: Definitely, yeah. Yeah, definitely.

And do you feel – you are the oldest child, so do you feel it's more on you or do you have more interest than your sibling? Which is often the case [overtalking].

E: No, I don't – I think we all deal with it in slightly different – in slightly – in different ways, I think, yeah. I mean we could have a long debate about [laughs]. **[03:14:03]** But no, I think we all deal with it in slightly different ways and whether that's an eldest child or just – I don't know.

I think I found that out from them when – I don't know if you remember, Erica, we travelled together from Germany and you started talking about what happened, in that Christof mentioned how good it was that Jürgen brought himself to marry me, [laughs] a Jewish – and he was German. I think –

E: When we talked about being bullied at school?

Yes.

E: Yeah, we were both – we were quite –

You were bullied at school.

E: Yeah, definitely.

Because of the German aspect?

E: Yeah, absolutely.

Not because of the Jewish?

E: No.

I never pushed the Jewish –

E: No.

Because I wasn't much involved.

E: You – she wasn't prac – you weren't practising, were you, at all, so –

No, I wasn't that involved. It was only –

E: Probably in the last –

Twenty years.

E: No. No, no, no, no, no, no. I would say in the last thirty, thirty-five years that and – but increasingly so. So low-key to begin – I mean a big exhibition and then quite low-key and that's ramped up. It certainly ramped up.

Yes, I think that came across in your interview, yes.

E: Yeah. Yeah, so –

But you had difficult experiences with the German, yeah, which is –

E: Which is to be expected, I think.

Do you experience any kind of, or are you totally – it wouldn't be totally – but are you aware of the anti-Semitism that's going around the world now? And have you had personally any conversations about that?

E: Well, yeah, I do have conversations with – about it with people but it's – I think the thing about having a Jewish background is it's not – nobody would know, so if you engage in the discussions you do it on your terms and tell people what you want to tell them, whereas actually the sort of anti-German feeling is that actually, you know, there's no point that – I mean my name is Schwiening. **[03:16:06]** And I feel really strongly about – I mean, I, you know, my partner and I are not married but even if I were to be married, I would never, never

change my name. I fought so hard for my name, so hard at school for my name that it's so integral to who I am that that thought of changing it is – I could never imagine doing that.

But your daughter – no.

E: Anna wouldn't change her name. And she's – but she –

Who has in the family? Who's –

E: None of them have changed their name.

None of them have. Oh, right.

E: Well, there's only two of them married so far.

Pardon?

And your grand – your parents didn't change their name either, Auerbach?

No, they did talk about it and I was there. Because lots of people in England at that time, refugees who came over, Jews, did change their name. For example, my cousin changed his name from Kohn to Carter, so he's now Carter and he lives here in Bosworth, came over to be nearer his family. That's us.

And your parents?

My parents, I remember them talking about it and suggestions were made, what could they change to from Auerbach and somebody –

E: Quite hard, isn't it?

Yes, somebody said, how about, Dad, if we – you change it to Haverbath [ph]? [Both laugh] And it was never changed [laughs]. Although I kept on having to spell the name, Auerbach, and somebody asks you your name, how to spell Auerbach, I thought, oh, one day, oh, one day I'm going to get married and I'm going to marry a Smith or [overtalking].

E: Now you have to do on the phone, what's your name? Schwiening. I'll spell that for you.

[Both laugh] Yes.

So, you went from Auerbach to Schwiening. ***[03:18:00]***

E: Yeah [laughs]. It didn't help, did it?

Oh, well, what's in a name? [Laughs]

But you wouldn't change it?

E: No, I wouldn't change my name. And I think the other area of my life where it has had – where I have – it's had an impact and I've used it, it's in – because I'm a German teacher – or was a German teacher, so I always used to take every opportunity possible to, you know, to bring a bit more understanding and to explain. I explain – I was very, very open with all of my classes about my background and, you know, I was honest with them and answered their questions and so I, you know, challenged any sort of anti-Semitism, any anti-German feeling that I ever came across in my, you know, thirty-plus years in teaching, so yeah, I think –

So, you were in a very unique position in a way, to have in your family the two different histories.

E: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Or related histories.

E: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And, you know, most youngsters are really, really interested. I think you found that as well, listening – once you start talking about your personal story they listen really well and they want to know, so yeah, I think –

Yeah. Okay. And you have joined the AJR as well [overtalking].

E: Yes, yeah. Yeah, my sister and I joined [overtalking].

Okay. Why? Why?

E: Just to engage a bit more and find out a little bit more and, you know, support, I think. Yeah.

Yeah. Okay.

E: All right.

Thank you, Erica. Thank you for joining us.

E: It's a pleasure. Thank you very much. All right.

Thank you.

E: Good [laughs]. Do you want Jürgen now?

[Coughs] Yes.

[Break in recording]

J: Am I supposed to look at you?

Yes, please. Ruth, can you please introduce the person sitting on your right?

Oh, do I know this person? Yes [laughs]. This is Jürgen, my husband, Jürgen Schwiening. **[03:20:00]** And we've been married now sixty-one years, I think. He comes from Germany, Hanover, and he will tell you a little bit about his own interest. We married in Germany and I think he will tell you the rest of his – what you wish to know of his story, bearing in mind it's going to be out in the big, wild world, so no intimate details are required [laughs].

Correct, correct. Thank you, Ruth. So Jürgen, we interviewed now Ruth and obviously you know the story and you've written a book on Ruth, you have put this book together, which – maybe just show it to us, which you have written. I don't know when – when did you do this book? When did you write this book?

J: [Laughs] I don't know.

When? When did you do this book?

J: When? Oh, it was about, four years ago that I wrote this. It took me actually years to compile the documents and photographs and so on. Yeah.

So, I would like to ask you just maybe to comment on, from your perspective, on Ruth's story and how – I mean you met Ruth, you met in Berlin and –

J: Yeah, we did, as students. We were both at the Free University [Freie Univerisität] in West Berlin, the American sector at the time and then we kept together and eventually got married. Of course, we would have expected to get married in England, where Ruth lived. However, there were problems with Ruth's parents who found it hard to accept that Ruth might leave England, back to Germany where the family had escaped from. **[03:22:01]** And so we decided in fact, to get married in Germany, where Ruth had a job and it was also the time when I failed part of my law exam and realised that I had chosen the wrong subject, quite honestly [laughs] to pursue. In any case, law, a degree, would not have been much use to me in England. So, I decided to become a teacher and luckily, very luckily, I was offered a temporary teaching job in Nuneaton, teaching German.

And that you – so that both of you could then come – you could come to England?

J: Pardon?

You could then come to England with your job? You could come to England?

J: Oh, yes, yeah, I decided to – we both decided to come and live in England because we realised that Ruth would not be happy to live in Germany permanently.

And did you understand – at the time, did you understand where Ruth was coming from? I mean –

J: Oh, yes, of course, I knew the story and so I understood why this was the case- that we would not in a way abandon Ruth's parents here in England, who had seen to it that she was able to leave Germany on the Kindertransport. I mean they'd rescued Ruth to England. And my parents were fairly neutral on that. My mother was obviously disappointed to lose her son to England. However, that is quite normal in a way [laughs]. Yeah.

And Jürgen, you were faced with hostility from Ruth's parents. Did you, as a young German man, did you understand – how did you deal with it, with the difficulties? ***[03:24:02]*** *Did you – could you understand their situation? Do you see what I mean?*

J: Oh, yes, I had immersed myself in the history of the persecution of Jews in Germany, quite considerably so. I completely understood why this problem arose, that Ruth would not be able to happy and consequently, I would not be happy of course [laughs] to go back to live in Germany. And as I say, luckily, I realised that my course of studies was a bad choice, a wrong choice, and that I was more of a teacher than of a lawyer [laughs]. Yeah.

And then slowly, did – you could come – get closer to Ruth's parents once you had children? That's what Ruth was telling us, that once you had a family, you got on well.

J: Well, we – yes, we – Erica was – we came in 1961 and then Erica was born three or four years after that.

But the acceptance of you to my parents was enhanced by the chil –

J: Of course, very much, yes.

The coming of the children.

J: Yes, I must say that Ruth's parents, both of them, as well as Ruth's twin brother, Michael, accepted me fully very soon. It didn't take them very long. Peter, the older brother, was a bit more hesitant to, well, to accept that his sister was marrying a German, or had married a German. However, he – and I was fully accepted. And my mother – my parents came to terms with it and so did my sister. And later when the children were born, my mother came to see us several times. **[03:26:05]** Well, to Nuneaton as well as to – yeah.

Your sister, do you not think, accepted me as a person but didn't accept me as a Jew.

J: Well, my sister of course absorbed the National Socialist ideology. She was five years older. She was still drawn in to this ambit of racialism and nationalism and all that. I really was lucky that I was only ten when the war ended, so I was not subjected to the same sort of indoctrination that – and my sister had no particular interest in history really anyway, so she found it difficult. In some way, I think she felt that I had abandoned my mother and father in Germany. You know, it would of course have been expected that the son would look after the parents. In the end, she and my brother-in-law looked after my mother when she was infirm and when she eventually died, yeah. Yeah.

Your sister though, there was one occasion if I can mention that, and Jürgen will remember this occasion, it was after the time when I totally accepted being Jewish and I said I – whatever, I'm going to stand up and be counted, we – I had – I loved Rosemarie, his sister. She was the one who introduced me to art.

J: Hmm-hmm.

I was sitting on a beach and she was drawing and she said, you can do this as well, Ruth. **[03:28:05]** So I said, no I can't. Yes, you can. And that's what started me really on the way of art. But there was one occasion – I was a little bit scared of the sister, I must admit. She was everything I wasn't. She was good-looking, she could verbalise, and she did. And this one occasion when I said something and about being Jewish and she said, that, Ruth, is a provocation. And –

J: Well, you said, actually, yes, I'm proud of being Jewish [overtalking] in one of the conversations.

And then I said – I said later on –

J: Yeah.

But I'm proud of being Jewish.

J: Yeah, yeah.

And she thought that was a provocation. So, by that time I was imbibed in being what I was and I said to myself previous to that, I'm going to stand up and be counted now. I'm not going to allow this anymore. And she was very cross with me, very cross, and I remember running out of the room and going for a walk in the park. And it showed that she had not – and I can understand it, how she was brought up and how Willi was – the husband was brought up, in being brainwashed in the ideology and being promised this, that and whatever. I can understand that. But at the time I felt very vulnerable and I'd already said to myself, if anything, I will always stand up and be counted. And she – this was like a wet sponge being thrown at me.

J: Yes, on another occasion when we talked about East Germany and refugees and so on, she said, oh, I hate all these East people [laughs]. **[03:30:04]** Ruth of course, is a person from the

East [laughs]. And so [sighs] she had a poor education and she only went to the middle school, which was a sort of secondary modern and had never actually reflected on the past, whereas I have. It's been one of my major concerns.

So, you thought – before you met Ruth you were – you had [overtalking].

J: Already. Oh, yes, I was –

'Cos I was going to ask you, how did you come to terms with the history of – in your family, or –

J: Well, yes, I didn't really have to come to terms with it. It was no problem to me at all. What I had –

No, I think you've misunderstood the – or have I misunderstood the question?

No, no.

You misunderstood. The question was, how did Jürgen come to terms with my –

No, with his family history.

With your family history.

With your own family history.

With the – what –

J: Yes, I came to terms with it. I mean eventually we built up again a sort of modus vivendi with my sister, and indeed now that only her husband is still alive, we maintain a very good relationship with him as well as with my nephews in Germany. I've got three nephews living there, who've been –

I meant more with your, you know, your father's history, with your father. You just told me what – with your father's past, how did you come to terms with that? You said your father was – joined the SA.

How did you come to terms with your father's history?

J: Well, of course I had to – I mean as I went into the question of what kind of books he read and what kind of things he said and what his military career was, he was in the police, not in the army, which was worse than being in the army but –

But how did you come to terms with that? **[03:32:09]**

J: Well, I had to come to terms with it. [Laughs] Of course I did. He was in part a victim of his time. Having – he was a long-time unemployed in the '20s and '30s in Germany, like millions of people were, and his education had been mediocre as well. He always tried to – well, not always – he tried for a long time to retake his *Abitur*, which he never managed to. So, he came from a background that was predisposed to accept the new Germany that was being offered and all that went with it. And his involvement in the war must have been a great disappointment or shock to him when, you know, people were shot in their hundreds.

And how did you come to terms – the question was, how did you come to terms with what your father did?

But did you know? Was it talked about? Maybe –

J: Well, it was never talked about with my sister or brother-in-law. For them, that is a closed chapter and they think I am sort of obsessed with the past really and –

So, for you, you wanted to know more?

J: But I want to find out, yes. Of course, I have to because my father, although I was younger, had a big influence on me, you know, I too love books and have a fairly-sized library, so did he, and like literature and so on. So, there are – there are – of course, the relationship between son and father was there. **[03:34:06]** But the Hitler time and his war experience broke his moral fibre and he never managed to really come to terms – we never spoke about it. That was one of his main failings, that he internalised all this and did not communicate well. He left no – nothing written about his life, which I very much regret because there were good times, you know, when my parents were young and when he was an enthusiastic man.

Now, I can add to that a little bit, whether you want to talk about that or not is up to you and whether Bea wants to hear it. Jürgen wrote once a letter, a letter to my [sic] father, and I've always been interested in what you wanted to know, questions you asked your father in that letter. The letter is somewhere and I don't know where, and I never really read it but you have often – a roundabout way alluded to it.

J: Well, it's in my memoirs. It's printed.

Ah, well, there you go. I –

J: Yeah. Yeah. Well, it was an imaginary letter.

To who?

J: I never really spoke to my father about his past in a serious way. He put that out of his mind. I think he felt guilty for what he was drawn in to and disappointed and disillusioned. So, this was an imaginary letter when I said, well, I know so little about you, I wish we've had serious conversations while you were alive, which we never really had, except once [laughs] when I was still at school in Hanover, I told him that I was taking philosophy as one of the subjects there which was generously being offered. **[03:36:16]** And I said, well, I prefer the Greek materialists to the idealists, like Plato, and explained to him that and said, well, I really feel we are what circumstances make us very largely. And when he said, well, that he was an idealist, he said, I believe in goodness and in all kinds of good things and

believe that the ideas around. So, I had this one serious conversation but never much – or never anything about his life. And I later found out which made me really quite sad, how he was drawn in to the *Bandenbekämpfung* in what is now Belarus, when villages by the hundred were set on fire and people shot by the hundred, and everything robbed from a country sent to Germany. The old and the young were shot and people of working age were deported as work slaves to West – to Germany, and raw materials to the last bale of hay were taken to the West. So anyway, that is something I found out and he never told me what he felt about that.

But I would say probably quite typical of that generation, that people didn't – really didn't talk about –

J: Well, it's not universal. There are a lot of people who face up to the past. **[03:38:02]**

Do you think so?

J: But they were the exceptions. And he did not manage to take this step of reflecting upon – partly because of his prolonged imprisonment in Russia as a prisoner of war.

When did he return to Germany?

J: He came back in the beginning of '49.

Oh, so four years.

J: And he was taken prisoner in '44, so five years in a Russian – in what is now the Ukraine – prisoner of war camp, and came back a sick man, you know. So yeah, he paid for it but – we did have some good times afterwards, you know, because he took up again sailing and camping and going for walks in the countryside and the woods, together with Ruth as well, so he integrated partly again into life but he never managed to reflect on his life and past. Or if he did, he never told us [laughs].

And do you feel your sort of different histories and different backgrounds maybe drew you to each other in some way, or –

J: Do I…?

The two of you, your histories or your different histories, which touch on each other, your family histories.

J: Well, yes, they're both, they're very different but there are also similarities, you know, that the – particularly – I imagine sometimes that Ruth's mother and my father could have made a good pair perhaps [laughs]. They both had love of literature and my father needed a strong person really, which my mother was, and Ruth's mother was as well. **[03:40:09]** They were both pretty strong personalities who, sort of pushed him – pushed their men along [laughs] in what – but that never happened. As I say, he died of cirrhosis of liver and partly a result of poor diet and so on.

It was my – I have to think about that. I've been thinking about that. I can't remember exactly [laughs] what you said but it was my father and – no, Jürgen's mother and my father might have made a good couple.

J: Yes, yeah.

Yeah. I don't know if you said that or – did you say that?

J: That's what I wanted to say [laughs].

You said it the other way around, I think [laughs]. Was it your father –

No, no, no. No way.

J: Yes. It was – talking about my father but it was my [inaudible].

My father and Jürgen's mother.

J: Yeah.

Because Jürgen's mother came to England a couple of times and they got on like a house on fire and Jürgen said, they would have made a good couple, wouldn't they? Perhaps. Perhaps not. I wouldn't have wanted that. Yeah, that would have been okay [laughs] but there you go. Yes, life for us, how did you – can I ask Jürgen a question now?

Of course. Go.

How did you, and how do you, come to terms or particularly, oh, leave that out, particularly. How did you come to terms with my increasing – or how do you come to terms with my increasing interest in being Jewish, in corresponding with, and my writing and my pictures, all have a Jewish theme to them? **[03:42:08]** How does that affect you? I don't know if that –

J: It – I didn't really –

A very good question. A very good question.

J: Thank you. Yeah. I didn't feel – I don't feel that I had to come to terms with it. It was something that I welcomed already before we got married. I discovered over the years that Judaism and Jewish history, Jewish thinking and philosophy and so on, have very much to offer. There is such a large substance of human endeavour and thought in what constitutes the Jewish tradition. That is something I treasure and I'm particularly sort of concerned of course by the prominence today of ultra conservative Jews as sort of dinosaurs of history, you know, that made Sachs rewrite his book when he said other religions also have something good and true to offer, which the conservative Orthodox Jewry could not accept and he had to retract it and republish his book and leave out the offending paragraphs. So, I have discovered that there is so much depth in Jewish thinking, in Jewish culture- so that has been positive. And I found no problem in, so to speak, coming to terms with it. It was something I welcome. And we have –

So, you've been on this journey together, to some extent?

J: We have many Jewish friends and –

On what journey? **[03:44:02]** And that –

Well, I guess your discovering your Judaism, or –

Yes. I must say that Jürgen says this and I, as I – his words echo in my right ear, I think- hmm. Recently we went to a synagogue – no, a *Shabbat* meal with this, er –

Yeah, you told me.

Ultra, ultra-Orthodox – what was he?

J: Rabbi.

Rabbi, a member –

J: Lubavitch [ph] and –

Yeah. And I'd been before to a *Sabbat* [sic] meal years and years and years ago, when I was a child and I had some inkling what it was about, that to me, but in my own eyes that was expanded from then, from when I was a child to now and I thought it a bit of a theatre. But I wanted to, when we were invited by – I was invited to the Orthodox synagogue to do some paintwork, or do some painting with them and – and then I got to know the rabbi a bit, Rabbi Shmuli Pink – I don't know if you've heard of him. No? And he said, Ruth, I'd like you – I must have mentioned something about being Orthodox or not. He said, I'd like you and Jürgen – I said, but Jürgen's not Jewish – never mind, never mind – to come for a *Shabbat* meal. And of course, I knew about the ritual and I rather like this, I like the theatre, I love going to the theatre, and in fact I would rather be on the stage than in the audience [laughs].

And there we were, sitting around and this little rabbi had ten children – and not all of them were around the table – and we were talking and we were doing the rigmarole of breaking the bread and drinking the wine and washing our hands and then being quiet and listening to whatever that was going on. **[03:46:00]** And I don't think Jürgen was truly in tune with all that. I wasn't – I was a spectator but not – I didn't feel inwardly in tune with it at all but I think Jürgen was a little bit out of it altogether. And you couldn't understand really why he was doing all this and – could you, or –

J: Well, yes, I mean [laughs] –

I was –

J: In the course of this meal and after we finished, the – he I think mentioned Israel and what's going on there now and then he said, among other things, Gaza is like an infected tooth, it has to be taken out. It will hurt but it has to be removed. And so, I – and that really was a terrible thing to hear, that he approved of the sort of unlimited attack on people, killing people by the hundreds, as is happening. So, he must have realised that we were – I was a bit on a different wavelength to him and right at the end he said, well, we seem to be differing in certain points. Basically, he said we both want the same, we want peace. Well, yes, but –

Then I decided it was time –

J: I think basically we are not on the same [inaudible] [laughs].

I decided it was time to go, and then there was a theatre. You know, in the Orthodox – are you Orthodox?

No.

No? Right. In the Orthodox you're not allowed on *Shabbat* under – you're not allowed to do anything manual. **[03:48:04]** Yeah?

Yeah.

Not even tear – I remember as a child, newspaper was torn for the toilet. You were not allowed to switch a light on, you're not allowed to do anything. There we were, back in that situation, in the Orthodox home, and he had not – we'd taken a taxi to his house and he hadn't – we didn't know how long we were going to be there, so we hadn't ordered a taxi back. So, there we were, stuck on the outskirts of – just on the outskirts –

J: In Leicester.

In Leics – of Leicester. And he hadn't order – he said, never mind, I'll do this for you beforehand, before *Shabbat* started. But he hadn't done that. So, the question was, how to get back to the station or to the bus station? And there were so – I said, right, I'll phone up, then. What? It's *Shabbat*. You can't phone up. Ruth, you can't use a phone. So, I thought, well, what are we going to do? He said, let Jürgen use the phone. I said, but Jürgen can't hear. So, there was a problem, and it was a problem not really overcome by him. At the end there was so much discussion about how we would get a car to take us back – of course he couldn't drive – we decided then the easiest way was to walk, to walk to the centre of Leicester and [laughs] then get back under our own steam somehow or other, and that's what we – he allowed that to happen.

J: Yeah. I found this inflexibility of putting ritual above reality and life and friendship and all this, you know, it was a friendly gesture for him to invite us but then, you know, he sort of opted out and said, well, I'm not allowed to use a phone and [laughs] – and so, well, he didn't actually say I'm not allowed to use a phone, he – we said, yeah, I can't do it, so yeah.
[03:50:14]

Same as a guy we paid for to come here from Berlin – Ella was her name – who had the place in Berlin where she runs summer courses. And anyway, she – what was I going to – oh, yes, the young boy who came here, Orthodox Jewish, came into this household which was really quite remarkable because we didn't do anything according to – we didn't keep our cutlery separate, nothing according to the Orthodox. And then my – I'm looking over there because

I've got a studio there with a wheel in and it arrived on a Saturday and it was very heavy, so I said to this young man, can you come and help Jürgen take that in? It's too heavy for him. He said no. I said – I was puzzled. I said why not? He said, well, it's Sabbath. And I said, but there's an old man, it's heavy. Please can you not help him? No. And then he disappeared upstairs, no doubt to have a word with God or somebody, and he came down. He said, sorry, I can't do it. Yeah. So, Jürgen achieved on his – in his own way.

J: But to add to his credit, we are still in touch with him, a very nice young man who lives actually still with his mother in Berlin. He told us that he had now abandoned Orthodox Judaism. He's very proud of his Jewish heritage, which is a very good thing, but he said, I have realised that I can't any longer. **[03:52:03]** So he's taken a journey and he's taken a journey, remaining a Jew but rejecting this kind of inflexible and –

But changing his name from Florence to Eliyahu, with a desire at that time when he changed, to go and live in Israel and to –

So just to come back to you, Jürgen, so in terms of your own identity, how would you define yourself? Because we talked quite a bit about belonging and identity with Ruth.

J: Well, I'm an atheist. I don't subscribe to the idea of a deity, so I'm neither Christian or anything else. I'm a humanist, I believe that –

What is your identity?

J: God is a human invention and that in the end the responsibility for our lives, lives – it stays with us as humans, how we organise society to our mutual benefit and maintain the planet in a state where life can continue [laughs]. So that is my main concern. I put religion long, long ago behind me.

Okay. And what about feeling German and British and any identity –

J: Well, clearly by descent and by early experience, I have a strongly sort of German part of character. But I feel as European as, you know, that the way of life in this country is something that suits me. I feel it is a freer atmosphere in which I live here than I feel I could live in Germany, though we often go back to Germany, we have many friends there and particularly this young, Jewish friend in Berlin is – it's very valuable to me to exchange views with him and –

We don't mean Josh, we mean Eliyahu – Florence. **[03:54:16]**

J: Yeah. So –

Okay. Is there anything else you want to – thank you so much for sharing your thoughts. Maybe last question to both of you. You've been married for a very long time. Is there –

How long have we been married for?

J: Well, we got married in '61.

Oh, that doesn't –

J: So, er, yeah.

Okay [laughs].

Any advice for anyone who will watch this?

Any advice? Advice about a good, happy [laughs] marriage.

J: Marriage has to be complementary, like any good friendship, you know, you each have to have something substantial to put into it and share and that is what we have, our past, our family, we – that's one of the good sides of Judaism, it values family. Family is very important. But not every human being has, so to speak, a family, and they are equally

important and we must not overdo it and say, well, family is everything. Family is a lot but not everything [laughs].

But in Judaism they say, go forth and multiply, so family is everything in the eyes of the Orthodox Jew, family is the be end – what is the – be all and end all.

Okay, thank you so much. I think our camera – our card is coming to an end.

[Laughs] You card. I'm not surprised, Frank. How do you feel? Good? Ready for a cup of –

[Break in recording]

Yes, Ruth. ***[03:56:02]*** *Can you tell us, please, about those paintings?*

J: This painting.

This is the Kristallnacht. It was a night that – it was a catalyst really to our family and the Kristallnacht was a decision that we decided – my parents decided they had no future whatsoever in the – in living in Germany or Austria and they had to leave. So, I felt this was a great- important for me in my artwork, yeah. And so, I got so many colours together and more or less you can see the lines there, I scratched the painting away – the paint away and used very heavy oil or acrylic and here in the middle you will see a house which was my parents' house and behind that you can see the synagogue which was burnt and went up in flames. And it is a picture which was really painted from my soul. It was a catalyst that exchange – that changed the whole of our family's existence. You might see this picture – I don't explain it to many people, but you might see this picture as being very colourful, it could be a party with fireworks, it could be a – any celebration, as a beautiful picture. But for me the Kristallnacht was the night of devastation, the night of hell for many Jews.

Thank you. ***[03:58:00]*** *[Pause] Okay. [Pause] Yes, please.*

Yeah. Well, this is a picture of fused glass and it really relates very much to the Kristallnacht when all Jews, given the possibility, which was not very great, of leaving the country. So, we've seen the Kristallnacht, now we go on to the Kindertransport. My mother was alone with three little children after my father was in Dachau, what to do with the children, and she got help to take Ruth – that's me – to an orphanage in Berlin, and from then to go with a group of children to England. And so, this is how I envisaged partly the Kindertransport at night. We left at – we went on a night boat and sailed across and there you see I put the moon and the – it's done very simply, although it's done in the kiln, took over – the background had to be done, that is twenty-four hours, and then the foreground of the boat, another twenty-four hours. So it wasn't that easy but I was determined to do it. And there you see at the back, the *menorah*. The *menorah*, I've used quite a lot in my pictures. **[04:00:01]** There's one upstairs that I'd like you to see of the *menorah* as pictures and set aflame. There then is the child who went over half on the boat and half off the boat, probably thinking, this is an adventure or probably crying and thinking, I want my mummy, I want my daddy.

Thank you.

I've got a newspaper cutting here. And here is a newspaper cutting. That's not what I – no, wanted to show you.

It's that one. Okay, start – yes.

It's not the right position, is it?

[Cameraman]: That's okay, you can – yes. Tell us about this picture.

Okay, this is a picture of the Kindertransport where a mother says goodbye to her daughter and not knowing whether she will ever see her daughter again. And the little girl is carrying a suitcase. Most of the children – all the children who came over on the Kindertransport were allowed one suitcase with regulated objects in it. And it must have been a very sad moment. It must have been a very sad moment when my mother and hundreds – probably I'd say thousands of mothers had to say goodbye to their children, not knowing whether they would

ever see their children again. **[04:02:03]** And here is the little suitcase I've – it's fused glass, so that piece of work must – might have taken a long time to do, going into the kiln twice at 800° – a minimum of 800 °C, waiting for it to cool down before you could even look at it. And then being relieved when it came out and you've got the right temperature, you programmed it correctly, out in one piece. The tree indicates the Tree of Life, the little girl is saved, saved from what the Kindertrans – by the Kindertransport, saved, as opposed to the statue in the Friedrichstraße in Berlin where there are two groups of children and one group of more children than the other group. And the one group I'm talking about are the children who didn't make it, who were annihilated in concentrations camps, separated from their parents. When my mother let me go to Berlin, that was the first she said goodbye to me. When I was in the foster home – no. Yes, the foster home, she was determined to get me back. She said, I don't want to lose my little girl twice, and she did get me back.

Thank you]. If we do it first. Okay, yeah. Sorry.

So, this is a picture of my father and his sister. **[04:04:03]** I don't know exactly where it was taken. It was taken in 1907 and that was a time when young boys wore these sailor suits, so it's not unusual to see my father in a sailor suit. He eventually came to England. His sister, Frieda, who had her whole life in front of her, she was barely forty, she had a – she was a *Kindergärtnerin* [nursery teacher] and apparently, according to a newspaper cutting, very good at her job. She was taken away then in the heyday of her life, with much in front of her. She then was taken to Theresienstadt, the concentration camp, where we don't have many details of her but then she managed to – they were taken on further and we're not sure where she ended up.

Thank you.

Yeah. Okay. This is a picture of my mother and her sister. We found out later on that my mother was indeed ten years older than her sister. Her sister, Margot, went eventually – my father met Margot at the university in Breslau where I think – I don't know – but he fell in love with her. Eventually though he got to know her sister, who was older, as mentioned, and he fell in love with her sister. And they got married together but Margot came over, managed

to come over to America a bit later on, and she was a doctor. **[04:06:03]** She succeeded in following her profession, whereas her husband I think must have – the trauma of the past must have been too much for him and they had to both take the renewed exams, medical exams, where Margot achieved well and she could then follow her profession. Her husband didn't and rumour has it – I don't know – that for a time he was in some kind of – and I say this in inverted commas – "mental institute". He managed to get out and he went back to Germany where he again could practise medicine.

So, this picture is a picture of my mother when she was around twenty years old. She worked in Breslau for a Doctor Freian [ph] and there she is. She was a beautiful young woman.

Yeah.

This is taken in Austria. It must have been some kind of party or gathering because looking at the hats and it is – I am the second from the left. And my brother, Michael, is the first one there.

At the farm?

At the farm in Austria. So, this was taken in Esdorf. My father, together with a group of young men.

Who were trained…?

I thought you didn't want me to say that. Okay, who were trained to – in agriculture to go to Palestine, which is now Israel.

Thank you.

This photograph here is [laughs] us children and probably taken in Schassbach, Austria. **[04:08:03]**

And the names of your siblings?

Oh, yes, Peter, the older one, and Michael and myself, twins.

Thank you.

Yeah, it is a picture of my brother and myself, possibly the last picture that was taken in Austria before I actually came to England on the Kindertransport.

Thank you.

So, this is a picture taken in England and it – you see my foster mother and my foster – standing at the back, and my foster sister and myself. And it was taken in London at the foster home. Yeah.

This is a photograph then of my mother on the boat over to England with the two boys, Peter and Michael, who were – when they came to England, the war started, they too were evacuated to the country.

Right, now, this is a photograph taken in England after we'd been in England for a number of years. We – and you see there on the right, my father, and then myself and my brother, Michael. Peter took the photograph then my mother. And behind my mother is a little girl from Berlin called Ilka [ph]. Her mother wrote to my mother and said, my child is starving, can you take her over to England and feed her up and look after her and pay for her trip over. My mother went to several Jewish – not Jewish but several religious organisations and nobody would help this little girl come over, so my parents got the money together and Ilka [ph] came and lived with us for some time. **[04:10:00]** And she was indeed starving. Her stomach was stolen – it was – not stolen, swollen, with lack of protein. And she came and she went to school with us and settled down in our family for some time.

Thank you.

Now, this is a picture of the marriage between Jürgen and myself. And Jürgen is at on the left [laughs] and then there I am as a bride. The next gentleman next to me was Jürgen's father and the one on the other side was Jürgen's brother-in-law – is Jürgen's brother-in-law. And it was taken in Hanover in the town hall.

Thank you. Yeah. The date?

1961.

Now, this is when we had the language school and it is me, holding our little Shetland pony and then Jürgen there as well. And it is taken here in Market Bosworth just outside the language school.

Thank you.

So, this was taken at about 2020 with myself and my daughter, Erica, and her son, Joshua, in Berlin.

E: So, this is a family picture of four generations, Ruth and Jürgen, three children, and multiple grandchildren and even two great-grandchildren, and it was Georgina's wedding on the 15th of September 2024.

Thank you.

A photograph of the Kindertransport when I – the visa – collected visa when I came over to England on the 3rd of February 1939. **[04:12:02]**

[Cameraman] Okay.

So, this was a poster advertised in the first exhibition I had in Nuneaton in the Midlands and it is a poster of my exhibition called The Bloodstone of the Star and it took place in the 16th of May 1984. A long time ago. Thank you.

[Cameraman] Okay.

So, this is a picture of a spice box. The spice box was left – not to me. It was left in the house when my parents died and we cleared the house out. And this is possibly one of the two things that I inherited that I got – I didn't actually inherit it but I took from their house when it was no longer used.

And you think it's from Breslau, or do you know where –

I have no idea where it's from but I assume it's from Breslau and I assume that they took it from Breslau to Schassbach, which is near Klagenfurt, and then, again I assume that it was taken then by my mother or indeed by my father to England, because they obviously treasured it as being a Jewish artefact.

And what's going to happen to this spice box?

There are two things that I would like to happen to that, is that one of the children who shows interest in it will get it and also the *menorah,* which is on my desk. Those are the two things that I value should be passed on to one of the children. Thank you.

Thank you.

So next to the spice box is the menorah. **[04:14:00]** Again, it was taken from my parents' house. It was – looked pretty old and rusty. Jürgen sprayed it with paint and again this is something that I really value. And how I got hold of it, I'm not sure but it was probably left in the house when the house was empty and I just took it as a – in my possession.

Thank you. Yes.

Okay. Now, this is a picture of chaos. And it was taken in 19 – it was, I thought of 1936 when my parents had to move the farm, had to leave the farm, and here it shows the house being

blown up in the air, the sailing boat, which I came on in the Kindertransport, and the bird. The bird was always very important to me, the bird of freedom, the bird of hope.

Ruth, thank you so much for sharing your story and your wonderful pieces of art and showing us your photographs.

Thank you.

Thank you again.

You're welcome, you're welcome. You've had a very tiring day here and thank you for coming, and thank Frank for his patience in photographing the picture. And also, we've enjoyed your company and hope that you have also got a little bit more- further forward with your work for the – AJR…?

Yeah, AJR Refugee Voices.

Yes.

Thank you, Ruth, and thank you for your hospitality.

Okay, thank you.

[04:15:46]

[End of transcript]