IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV289

NAME: Michael Heppner

DATE: 7 December 2023

LOCATION: London

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00]

Today is the 7th of December 2023 and we're conducting interview with Mr Michael Heppner. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London. Can you please tell me your name and where and when you were born?

My name is Michael Heppner. I was born in Breslau which is the German name of a town that's now called Wrocław and I was born in- 1st of April 1937.

Thank you, Michael. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Archive.

It’s a pleasure.

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

Well, we were a comfortable middle class family living in Breslau. My mother was born in Breslau, my father was born in Lissa, which was in the province of Posen, which was German when he was born there in 1907 but as a result of the recreation of Poland in 1920, the province of Posen became part of the new Poland. And a very great proportion of the German Jews living in that part of what was last, moved in to Germany itself, my father and

his family moved in to Breslau. The family business in Lissa was manufacture of *matzah* and they then re-established themselves as a *matzah* factory in Breslau and serving the whole country.

Was it your grandfather's company?

My grandfather, my great-grandfather- it goes back a while.

And what was it called? ***[00:02:00]***

Heppner.

Heppner Matzah…?

Yeah, Heppner Matzah. And I've even got some headed paper with the name on it.

Amazing. And they served the whole of Germany, you said?

Yes, but they were – there were many *matzah*-makers in Germany. Their basis was in Breslau but they supplied everywhere. But there was a lot of competition. They were not the biggest. Everybody says – everybody tells you that they were bigger than we were [laughs].

So, they moved to? How old was your father when he moved to Breslau?

Well, he was born in 1907 and in 1920 he had to change schools and – a huge upheaval, and rebuild a life in Breslau. And unfortunately, of course, that life in Breslau only went on for about eighteen, twenty years and the whole thing went – fell apart again.

And what about your mother?

My mother was born in Breslau. I've recently been looking at history of her family. They also came from Posen but they came long before the change. They came because the – there was a

general move after the liberalisation of life for the Jews. There was a tendency to move to the big towns. And for- I think economic – they were economic migrants and around 1900 the family had moved to Breslau, different from my father – who were refugees from the change of nationality. And her father had a business, a textile business, a comfortable, middle-class family. Lots of brothers all had businesses, fought in the war – well, they didn't fight in the war, they were in the army in the war. Photographs, the usual photographs [laughs] in army uniform. **[00:04:08]**

And do you know how you – how did your parents meet, do you know?

No. The youth got together. There was a big social life. Breslau was a very vibrant Jewish community and there was a very intense social life and people just met.

Yeah. Were they active in the Jewish community, your parents, or were they involved?

No, they were – they were normally – [laughs] they were normal people. They weren't exceptionally religious. They went to synagogue, like people did, but they were social.

Which synagogue? Because there were –

Well [ringing sound in background].

Yes?

So, Breslau, like other German communities was of the *Kultusgemeinde*, that is all the different shades of Jewish religion were all happily living together in one community and you belonged to the *Kultusgemeinde* but you also attended the synagogue of your choice. And the synagogue of my parents' choice was the Anger which was a relatively modern synagogue and it was Liberal, Liberal in the Continental sense.

Liberal?

Liberal, yes.

And that's where they both went to.

Yes.

And their families.

And that's where all their customers were [laughs]. You see, they were the *matzah* factory for the community and beyond.

Okay. And then which year, when did they marry, your parents?

They married in 1934.

So already when Hitler was in –

Yes, but I've been reading, I've got transcripts of interviews I did with them about what happened and nobody could imagine that things would get anything remotely like as bad as they did. **[00:06:21]** The attitude of a lot of people was 990 years of the 1000-year Reich is about as far as it'll go.

Yes, at that point they were not –

They only expected – the second 990 were not going to happen.

So did they get married in that synagogue?

Yes, yes. Yes.

Have you got photos from that?

I don't think so. Maybe they didn't take photos. I've got photographs of virtually everything.

Yeah, because you have all these photos [overtalking].

Yeah, yeah. That's an interesting point.

In 1934. And then they stayed – where did they move to in Breslau?

They got their own flat in Menzelstraße and that's where they lived, a quiet, normal, unspectacular life until 1938.

And in that time what did your father do, once he married?

Well, he was in the family *matzah* business. He was on the marketing side. He was the first member of the family in the *matzah* business who was not a baker. They were all *Meisterbäcker*. And in fact, I mean the family were *Meisterbäcker* because brothers of my grandfather, they had bakeries in other places, in Posen, the capital of the province.
[00:08:03]

So they were tradesmen? They had to learn their trade?

They – it was – yes. It was a deeply-rooted *matzah* and bakery family. In fact in the town of Lissa they were not only *Matzahbäcker* but they were also general bakers.

Yes, because you think it's a big [overtalking].

Yes, yes, they were both. They were both. They were a bakery and then behind the bakery was a factory and the factory made the *matzah.*

Right. But your father didn't become a –

My father took an apprenticeship in the timber business and became the manager of a branch of a timber business. He ran the Leipzig branch of a timber merchants and until 1929, when the great crash came and then the business had to close down, he was made redundant and he then went and joined the family *matzah* business and his brief was to modernise – to modernise the traditional business.

So he originally didn't want maybe to join the –

He never intended to be a *Matzahbäcker*.

Yeah. So, what happened to the matzah business then, after [overtalking]?

The *matzah* business was reasonable. It wasn't a huge success. There was all competition. But it was not affected by any of the aggression of the Nazis, there was no boycott, there was no destruction. The worst thing that happened in 1938 was that one of their vans was turned over by a Nazi gang at the station where it was delivering goods for transport elsewhere in Germany. **[00:10:07]** And my father in 1938 phoned up the police and complained that their van had been toppled over and it was no – and they never had any trouble again, which I thought was extraordinary that he had the nerve to tell the police to get on with their job [laughs] and that they ensured that his vans were safe thereafter. But from November 1938 there was no – the business closed down. There was no *matzah* for Passover in 1939. They hadn't started making, and they didn't make.

So obviously this is before you were born, or you were born – you were just very young, so did your parents talk about this time? And you said you interviewed them.

Yes, I know that a lot of people didn't want to talk about the experience. I interviewed my parents and they were willing to talk about it and I even transcribed one of the interviews, so that I have a pretty good idea of what they were thinking. And of course the question that we all ask is what took you so long? And that I think is the interesting part, the reluctance to uproot yourself, the reluctance to fail the rest of the family, by you leaving, you left them behind, particularly the elder people in my – and my father's sister was paralysed with polio

so she did not have good prospects. So you tried to stick it out and you never believed that things would get as bad as they did, until of course the November pogrom of 1938 where my father ended up in Buchwald and my mother realised that she had to get the paperwork to get him out. **[00:12:13]**

So that was the turning point for them?

Hmm-hmm. They said that they had contemplated emigration many times before but they never had pursued it with any sense of urgency ’cos they never thought it was necessary. And- their business was there, the family was there, and were they going to desert the rest of the family?

Did they have – did any of their siblings emigrate earlier? In their own family did anyone emigrate before?

Yes, well, the story is that my mother’s youngest sister came to England with the help of her best friend from Breslau who was an au pair in England, and the woman where she was the au pair, offered to bring my aunt and her husband to England in March 1939. That same lady then said to my mother’s sister, is there anybody else that I can help with the necessary paperwork, and my aunt says yes, there's my sister and her husband and their little kid. And so she said, well, we’ll do something for them. And that was a very interesting story because this woman was a very active volunteer at Glyndebourne and she had already helped a lot of musicians get permits to come to England. **[00:14:05]** And she and the au pair had run an operation bringing over musicians to England and this is why the woman then said, I’m bringing over all these musicians, is there anybody who’s not a musician that you have that I could help? And that’s how my parents came over. My –

Sorry. Do you remember any of the names of the musicians?

I tried to find this out because this was very, very interesting. And I only found out about Mrs McIntyre very late. My mother had stayed in contact with her and I didn't have any need to remain in contact with her. But when my mother died, she was still on sort of the address list

for things like Christmas cards so I did eventually go and see her and she told me that they had a filing cabinet full of all the paperwork for all these musicians. So I then wrote to Glyndebourne and I said I'd like to know more about Mrs McIntyre and the archivist says, we know nothing about her or anything to do with her, and I was completely amazed. And of course, by this time the au pair had died and there was no way of finding what happened to all those papers. And the fact that Glyndebourne knew nothing about it, I found completely bewildering.

So let's – for the record here, what was this lady's name?

Beryl McIntyre.

Beryl?

Beryl McIntyre. And when there was an exhibition recently at the Royal Society of Music, I said to the fellow who was taking us around there, I told him the story and he said he knew nothing about it either. **[00:16:02]**

Well, I've never heard about it either.

No. And to be honest, I have enough research projects [laughs] on my hands not to spend too much time digging into this but –

Maybe somebody who will listen to it will. So, Beryl McIntyre.

Beryl McIntyre.

And she helped musicians –

She had a filing cabinet full of the documents that brought over dozens of musicians.

Through the help of…? How did she manage it?

Well, she did the paperwork. She made the – well, there were applications or guarantees or arm-twisting had to be done. That was –

She herself? Or –

She herself. Her husband was a civil servant. Maybe that made a difference. And it's a complete –

[Both talking at once] Okay. Somebody has to do some research [inaudible].

And it's a complete mystery.

But where would that filing cabinet be? Where did she think it was?

Look, people threw papers away. I doubt – and if the filing cabinet was given to anybody, I wouldn't know who it was and I have no – I left it far too late ever to find out what happened to it.

Well, that's for somebody maybe to research.

The only thing I can tell you, and this is amazing, is that the stepson of Mrs McIntyre was John Birt who was the Director-General of the BBC. And I could have got in contact with him but I don't think there was a close relationship between John Birt and his stepmother 'cos I think it was, you know, he was on his mother's side. But he might have known.

Yeah. So, the au pair she had –

The au pair was – name was, er, Marianna Bass. **[00:18:01]** She was from Breslau. She was fortunately in England and she got – she was helping Beryl McIntyre because of course she did – she spoke German and the two of them made a team, and we were the beneficiaries of this team.

So first your aunt was helped by them.

Yeah, yeah.

And then your family.

Yes, first – yes.

Okay. What was the name of the au pair again? Just repeat it.

Marianna Bass.

Bass. Marianna Bass.

And she then married an Englishman, whose name – her name was Bringeman in the end.

Marianna Bringeman.

Yes, yeah.

Okay. Well, maybe somebody can find something on the –

Yeah. Well, the two fellows who did that exhibition, they might be able to find something but I have to admit, my in-basket is completely full [laughs].

Okay, so let's go back to your story. So obviously you were born in 1937.

Yes.

So you probably don't have any memories –

Nothing at all.

Of Germany, of Breslau, no.

No. So we came over as – well, the story is that obviously my father was in – collected to go to a concentration camp on the 10th of November 1938. While he was in the concentration camp it was known that the only way to get out was to get proof of emigration. My mother then, like hundreds, thousands of other Jewish women, went to Berlin, went all around all the consulates, trying to find somebody who would give the necessary paperwork. There's a book about this. **[00:20:01]** You probably know about Foley, right?

Frank Foley?

Frank Foley. And she managed to get a letter promising – from the Uruguayan embassy, promising them a visa to Montevideo. That letter, which was not a visa itself, was apparently sufficient to get my father released but it required a second element and that was that they had to have a ticket proving that there was a – that he had arranged to leave the country. And he got a ticket – or she arranged or bought a ticket to Montevideo in Uruguay. And I have that ticket, or a copy of it, and that was issued in- end of November 1938 and he was released on the 6th of December and –

So, he had a month more or less.

No, it was only – it was within ten days of the ticket. And then they realised that they- this was worthless except that it had done the business getting him out. She then wrote to her mother's nephew, in other words, her grandmother – her mother's cousin. Her mother's cousin had gone to America in 18 – in the mid-1800s. Her gran – my mother's grandmother's sister had gone to America in 1860s, 1870s and there was therefore family in America. **[00:22:00]** And that family in America was very much in contact and the next generation born in America came over to Germany visiting family and it was very successful in San Francisco, owned a department store. And my mother took this uncle of hers around for weeks in Germany as his assistant and interpreter. And she wrote to him in 1938, my

husband's in Buchenwald, we need an affidavit, would you help us? And astonishing as it sounds, he wrote back and said things are very bad in America, you're better off in Germany, I'm not sending you an affidavit, which was a terrible letdown a) because things were very, very bad in Germany and however bad they were in America, he obviously had absolutely no understanding of it. And she was obviously stunned but this is where Marianne Bass came in because Eva had got to England in March. Marianne Bass' employer had said to Marianne, is there anybody else that I can help? She then said there's the sister. And Beryl McIntyre who did not know my mother and was not related to her, did more for my mother than her own family did. And that is an extraordinary – and this is the – was a start of a chain, a chain of English people who out of the goodness of their hearts and the luck of my mother held our hand multiple occasions and determined our life, because Beryl McIntyre got us over here and then the chain went further. **[00:24:15]**

So the lady, the au pair, knew her sister from Breslau?

Yes, they were school friends. They were school friends.

And where was this Mrs McIntyre? Where was she based? Where did she –

She was based in Ditchling.

Right. So did your mother's –

No, Hassocks, Ditchling, they're all next to each other, near Brighton, yeah.

Right. And so, did your mother's sister live there?

She got a job as a domestic with a family in Ditchling. And it's true, Marianne and Mrs McIntyre, they lived in Hassocks.

Right. Because she obviously didn't need another domestic because she had one. I mean she had Marianne already.

She didn't need her and – but she got a domestic permit for Eva and her husband, Leo. They went to Bloomsbury House to the Domestic Bureau and they were hired by Mrs Cleary [ph] in Ditchling. So once they were hired by Mrs Cleary [ph] in Ditchling then Mrs McIntyre [ph] said is there anyone else, my mother's sister said yes, there's my sister, and we were brought over and went to a domestic agency and my mother got a job there. And then I believe Mrs McIntyre said is there anybody else, and my parents had hoped to bring over their parents but there wasn't time. **[00:26:03]** Apart from which, it was much easier for the domestic agencies to help people in their thirties rather than in their sixties.

And your aunt, did they have children or she came just with her husband?

She came with her husband but they had a son in England.

The son was already in England?

No, their son was born in 1944.

Right, so later. So, when they came, it was just the two of them.

They were just a couple, yes.

So, tell us a little bit about the journey and what were your parents able to take with them and–

Right, well, they took the train from Breslau on the 4th [music begins playing in background]. They took the train from Breslau on the 4th of July [music begins playing in background]. They took the train from Breslau [laughs] on the 4th of July and said goodbye to the parents and at the station as they got on the train, or just before they got on the train, my mother's father handed my mother a gift which was for me, two years old. It was the watch, the adult watch that he wanted my mother to give me on my *bar mitzvah* in eleven years' time. So he had a premonition that he would not be there for the *bar mitzvah*. I still have that watch and I

wear it on special occasions. [Gets upset] And I wore it for my exams and I got through my exams. **[00:28:03]** So that was the farewell. They then went to Hamburg, they got on the boat on the 5th, the MS Roosevelt which went to Southampton and they arrived in Southampton on the 7th. And the only money they had was the money that they were allowed to take on ship, which was to pay for their ship's expenses, because they arrived with £7, which was money in those days but not a very great deal. Their goods were shipped in what would now be called containers. Some of it arrived, some of it didn't. The piano – and they'd been advised what to send as goods which could then be sold in England to make money. So, they brought over a Blüthner piano, they – which arrived, camera, radio, all good quality things. They also sent over a large container or box of linen and clothing and suitcases of clothes and they all arrived. But the container with their furniture never arrived. But some of their goods did arrive. And one of the things that they sent over was seven years of clothing for me, seven years of sizes. And that led to another part of the chain as – so they arrived in Southampton, they took the train to London, they immediately booked in at Bloomsbury House as they were required to do. **[00:30:01]** Bloomsbury House arranged for them to have a bed and breakfast at 22 Torrington Square which is one of the few houses in Torrington Square that's still standing because the SOAS has taken most of the area and I have a photograph of that house [laughs]. And I – we lived there for a week, where we were visiting Bloomsbury House every day and my mother was interviewed by people who were seeking domestic servants because the domestic servants had all been- many of them had been called up to – in the war effort. And her good fortune was that a lady who interviewed her, Mrs Isabel Colvin had a house in Wiltshire, needed a cook and a butler. My mother had trained as a cook, six months' intensive training. My father had trained as a butler.

In Breslau?

In Breslau. And she liked the look of my mother and she hired her. She was – she made a good choice. So, we then ended – so we then – they then ended up in this country house in Wiltshire and my mother was absolutely stunned when she found that they were staying in the hunting lodge of King John in Tollard Royal [music plays in background]. My mother was amazed when she was picked up at Salisbury by a liveried chauffeur and taken to this house in Tollard Royal, which was a medieval hunting lodge, and I've got a picture of it.

[00:32:06] You imagine the refugee being told that that's where she's going to live and she was going to be the cook in this household. She had no idea what this really involved but she found out that the staff at this house consisted of two maids, two gardeners, a chauffeur and a woman who came in to do the cleaning. And she was in charge of the household because she was the cook.

And what about your father?

He was the butler. So, he served at table and she cooked. And there was a first maid and a second maid. And she then had to deal with the fact that she had to cook English. So, she had taken six months' intensive training in cookery. Before that, she had not done much cooking at all but she obviously had a talent for cooking but she didn't know how to cook for English tastes. So, for example, when she was given roast beef to cook, she did a *Schmorbraten [braised meat]*, which the people- the lady of the house thought was absolutely wonderful [laughs] and much better than roast beef. So she immediately won them over to continental cooking. But there were certain things she had trouble with. She didn't know what to do with bacon. She was going to serve it cold but one of the maids, the first maid, who became a lifelong friend of hers, she showed her how to cook English. **[00:34:06]** She didn't know how to deal with kippers, so the maid helped her to get to grips with English cookery and she was very successful. And the extraordinary thing was that she was actually in charge of the household, which was not what she was expecting.

How did she manage with her English?

She had learnt some English. They'd all done the right thing. And- so hold on.

What about you?

So every – and there was a routine. Every meal had to be planned with Mrs Colvin, who – the lady of the house. So, the cook had to go and discuss and read her [ph] the menu every day and there was a weekly plan [laughs] and she had to implement the weekly plan. And they got on very, very well together. Mrs Colvin really liked her, really respected her and treated

her as an equal. And she was known as Mrs Heppner and the maids were known as May and Gladys, and they always talked to her as Mrs Heppner and they wouldn't allow her – they wouldn't agree to calling her Alice. She was called Mrs Heppner and she was the head of the household and it was –

So she didn't feel in a bad position? I mean [overtalking].

She didn't feel bad but she was very anxious. She was not expecting this level of responsibility but she received such support from Mrs Colvin, from Mrs Colvin's daughter-in-law, who also lived in the house. **[00:36:00]** And it was extraordinary. For example, when Mrs Colvin used to go into Salisbury to the hairdresser, she took my mother with her so that she could also go to the hairdresser. This was extraordinary behaviour. When Mrs Felix, who was the daughter-in-law, went into town she almost always brought back a toy for me. But there was a problem, and the problem was when my mother felt that she would not be able to do the job of cook and look after me, so Mrs – so she arranged with her sister, Eva, in Ditchling to put me into a children's home near where Eva lived so that Eva could visit often, and she would not have me under her feet. And she earned 25 shillings a week as the cook and my father earned 15 shillings a week as the butler. And the fee for me being in the children's home was 25 shillings, so the 25 shillings that she earned as the cook went straight to the children's home and they lived on the 15 shillings that my father earned. And so I never went to – down with them to Wiltshire, even though when they got to Wiltshire they found there was a cot and everything ready for me because she felt – my mother felt she couldn't handle the situation. After a while, Mrs Colvin said to her, I can see you're pining for the boy. **[00:38:00]** Everything is here for him, why don't we fetch him? So, the lady gardener and my father drove down to Ditchling and picked me up [dogs barks in background]. I'm sorry. Oh, yes. So, they – right. So my father went by car with the lady gardener and picked me up and brought me to Tollard Royal and I was shown my playroom. And also, Mrs Colvin had arranged for the girl in the village to be retained to take me for walks and everything seemed fine. I was a very – had learnt to speak English in the meantime. This was- about two months or so later. And I was very, very energetic and they didn't mind that. And when they had guests, I would wander into the room and the guests didn't mind but my mother was very worried about it. So everybody thought I was a sweet

little boy but my mother said, this is not going to work, and they eventually sent me back to the children's home.

But again, can you remember any of it?

None of it. I only – well, I do remember it because I've seen photographs and I'm sure it's the photographs that I remember. **[00:40:03]** Anyway, then there was a series of letters. Every week, Mrs Edmonds who ran the children's home –

What sort of home was it?

It was a – I think it was a nursery school.

It wasn't Jewish?

No, no, no, a nursery school. And I – apparently. I got on very, very well with other children there and my mother kept getting letters from her saying, he's doing very nicely, he's very happy here, everything is fine. And then I started getting ill and there was a letter saying, the little chap is really struggling a bit, and that had a big impact on my mother and gave notice to Mrs Colvin, who was very, very sorry to see her go. And in December she left, and with my father, because Eva had found her another situation in Hassocks with a doctor, with the village doctor.

So this was December '39?

Yes.

So they stayed there for about half a year.

Yes, yes. And my mother then went and worked for this doctor but she got a very, very different reception there. The woman was – did not treat her well, did not treat her with respect and was very demanding in unreasonable ways and my mother was not very happy

there, but she was near me. And then my father was sent to the Isle of Man and so was Eva's husband sent to the Isle of Man. **[00:42:10]** Eva then negotiated that my mother would take Leo's place at her house in Ditchling. So from being the cook in this grand house, she became the assistant to her sister [laughs] in Ditchling but at least she was out of the firing line and she was near me.

And they were together, the sisters.

Yes. And that looked as if it was all right. And then- there was this problem with the aliens living near the sea. Now, this actually happened while my mother was still at Hassocks and a very extraordinary thing happened. A policeman said to my mother, I have to tell you there are rumours going around the town, spread by the lady – the doctor's wife – that she was a spy and that she was going to blow up the railway bridge in Hassocks. And the policeman said to my mother, don't worry, we know this isn't true and there's nothing for you to worry about. But that atmosphere, of a spy in her household, was poisonous. And – but for the policeman to go to the trouble – you imagine it today – the policeman going to the trouble and saying, don't worry, we understand your situation, it's not going to happen. So eventually she did – Eva did get her out. **[00:44:00]** And then both sisters were told that they had to leave the area because it was too near the sea.

And they were considered enemy agents?

Yes. And they didn't know what to do and they didn't know where to go and they had no time to do it. All my mother knew was that she had to get me out of the children's home and we'd have to go to Bloomsbury House and see what they could do for us. So, my mother went – walked from Hassocks to Ditchling, which was not far in country days – you walked a lot in the country – to tell Mrs Edmonds that she had to take me out the next day. And she was walking back from Ditchling to Hassocks, crying because her husband was in – interned, which was another concentration camp, she'd lost her job, she'd lost her home, she didn't know where to live, and the car pulls up next to her and says, what's the matter? And it's the doctor's – the assistant doctor at the surgery where she was having such grief. And this lady doctor was an American who was a locum and was working there and she was actually the

doctor who was assigned to the children's home, so my mother knew her and she knew me. And she said to my mother, you look as if you're in a state, what's the matter? And the whole story came pouring out. And she said – well, she said, that's very interesting. **[00:46:01]** I wonder whether you might be able to help me. I have a house in Wimbledon and I need to find somebody to live there because it's uninhabited and if it is uninhabited, there is a strong chance it'll be requisitioned, so I am looking for somebody to go into that house. Would you be willing? So, the answer was yes. And in the next couple of days or so my mother packed everything up, picked me up. The doctor came in her car and drove us to Wimbledon to her house. Now, we drove to Wimbledon and my mother was expecting a nice, comfortable house, like the house where the doctor lived in, in Ditchling. And we pulled up against and there was this mansion, this enormous mansion. It had sixteen rooms, in the right part of Wimbledon, and that was where she was going to be the housekeeper. A garden of an acre, with a gardener and all these rooms. And the doctor was a very interesting person. She was – she had – she was the first woman medical graduate from Yale University. Her father was a professor at Yale University. **[00:48:00]** And she had applied to the- to go to university there to study medicine and the university did not take women for medical reasons. And the reason they didn't [laughs] take women students, were there were no women's toilets. So, Professor Wilson – sorry, Professor Farnham said there were no women's toilets. So Professor Farnham gave a donation to finance the construction of women's toilets and once those women's toilets were established, they took women students in and she was the first one.

And what was she doing in England?

And she graduated as top of the class. She then went as a missionary to China where Yale had an offshoot and she spent years in China and became quite well-known until the communists took over and she then – meanwhile had met an Englishman and they got married and they bought the house in Wimbledon and they needed somebody to look after it. And they treated my mother with the most enormous respect and understanding, to the extent that the two children of the Wilsons both thought that the house in Wimbledon was ours. They were living in Ditchling and they – and I am still friends with these two. They were always told, we are going to see the Heppners in London, because they went to see how the

house was doing and everybody thought that it was our house. **[00:50:06]** It was – and it was a wonderful relationship. We lived in this enormous place until after the war.

So can you remember [overtalking].

Oh, definitely. And that house shaped my childhood. Of course, one of the most important features of the situation was there were absolutely no Jewish people in Wimbledon, so I was brought up in a totally, totally different world from *Finchleystraße*. It was the absolute opposite of *Finchleystraße.* And my mother, for example, would – was taking me for a walk one day in the road and she bumped into another woman who had a little boy who turned out to be ten days younger than I was. His name was Richard. And the two mothers became friendly and the two children played together. And this woman was the wife of the – a teacher at King's College, Wimbledon and she took over my education. She told my mother where to send me to school, she arranged for me to go to the same school as Richard. She shaped my education. We played together, I learnt my English from them, I learnt a love of cricket from them [laughs] and the friends of the Macombers [ph] became our friends. And the family of the Macombers [ph], two brothers, were both in the army, they were both – we were part of their social circle. **[00:52:00]** And when it came to – when I came to five and Richard went to the nursery school, I went to the same nursery school because my mother was paid as a housekeeper and she was able to afford the fee from the housekeeper – and when Richard went on to the next stage, she told me she- she found a school for me to go to the next stage. So, we were completely shaped by that experience. Another thing, an interesting thing that happened in Wimbledon, this house was a big house, and there were other big houses and the next-door house around the corner with a garden abutting ours belonged to a family called Chubb. Now, you may have heard of Chubb as a safe and key and lockmaker. Well, this was the Chubb family, and the Chubbs lived around the corner. One day apparently, I was in the garden and I was coughing a lot and Mrs Chubb heard me coughing and she came around to our house to talk to my mother. She said, I think your son has got whooping cough. I'm going to send you to my doctor. So [laughs] we were introduced to this doctor. I did have whooping cough, and we had a doctor. And then they got very friendly, Mrs Chubb and my mother. And Mrs Chubb – it came out in the conversation that my mother had brought seven years of clothing for me from Germany and Mrs Chubb said, would I be able to buy some of this

clothing off you for my grandson, Christopher? **[00:54:06]** And the deal was done and Mrs Chubb clothed her son [laughs] with my clothes from Germany [laughs]. And when her [inaudible], Christopher, came around to play in the school holidays, when he was six and when he was seven, I was invited around to the Chubbs, which was a mansion like that one, to play with Christopher, and Christopher and I became friends. And my mother tells the most extraordinary story, that she came round one day to fetch me from playing and was about to leave when Mrs Chubb – Mary Chubb – called out to her husband who was upstairs, Archibald, Michael Heppner is leaving. And Mr Chubb [laughs] had to come downstairs to say goodbye to me. It's – isn't it ridiculous? Not long after, my mother came – my mother found out that Mr Chubb's father had died and that they were now members of the House of Lords. She had become Lady Hayter and he was Lady Hayter and we were no longer living next to the Chubbs [laughs] we were living next to the Hayters. And again, this was another family which went out of their way to be friendly and helpful and positive, which was extraordinary. So, we had this chain of Beryl McIntyre, the Colvins, the Wilsons, the Macombers, the teacher, the Chubbs, the next-door neighbour, every one of them had made a point of looking after these refugees. **[00:56:13]** What's more, while we were in Hassocks – it must have been the period when my mother was in Hassocks and I was in the – they got – they were befriended by a couple of ladies who were Quakers and who obviously wanted to be nice to people. And I've got still here the books that they gave me for my birthday and for Christmas. They made sure I had a Christmas present and they went to enormous trouble. They bought me Bible stories which were part of a series of twelve from the Christian Publishing Company or whatever it was called. But there were – only three of those twelve Bible stories were about Old Testament and I got a book about Moses and I got a book about Samuel and I got a book about Elijah. So two birthday presents and a Christmas present, and I still have those books. Why were these people – what luck we had. And when we hear today about how badly people are treated, you realise how extraordinarily well we were treated and how that affected us in our behaviour, in the way we relate to people and the type of people we became, and our attitudes. And of course, it was a two-way process because obviously they warmed to my mother and my mother put out the right vibes naturally. **[00:58:07]**

Yes, it sounds she was a sociable person. She could make these connections.

Yes, yes. It was extraordinary.

Was it more your mother than your father?

Yes, yes, it was my mother. Meanwhile, my father was sent to internment. He stayed there for about a year.

In which camp, do you know?

I could find out but I –

Douglas, I should think.

Oh, it was – I think it was in Douglas. It was in a boarding house in Douglas. Nothing amazing happened there. My uncle – Eva's husband – opted to join the Pioneer Corps and therefore – that was his way out of that. My father did not because he had a child and he didn't feel that going into the army was the right thing to do. And he came out of the Isle of Man and trained to – to have training as an instrument-maker, a six-month training course, a government training course, and he then got to work in an aircraft factory making parts for aircraft and he spent the whole of the war in that factory, making parts.

Did he live with you in Wimbledon?

He lived in Wimbledon. He had his – they both brought their bicycles over from Germany and they arrived and he bicycled every day in warm weather and in cold weather, in the snow, from Wimbledon to Mitcham, and from Mitcham back to Wimbledon, to go to work. And on Sunday – Saturdays and Sundays, he was part of a shift of fire-watching. The factory was closed. **[01:00:01]** He worked Saturday mornings but sometimes the various people in the factory were on shifts on firewatch and he was on firewatch and I would go with him fire-watching all the way to Mitcham. So, he worked there and then after the war – and my mother looked after the house. And there was no synagogue in Wimbledon.

Yes, I was going to say, did they have any contact with any other refugees?

Yes, there was – there were various refugees living in semi-isolation in Wimbledon and she got to know some of them. One of them was a family called Tiger [ph] and they were very Orthodox. And the nearest synagogue was in Clapham Junction which is two or three stops on the train. Mr Tiger [ph] would walk to Clapham Junction every *Shabbat* and back again. We didn't [laughs]. We went to *Shabbat* – we went to *Yom Kippur* and *Rosh Hashanah* and we went by train. So there were a few German Jews there and they did make contact with them. And after the – when the war ended – well, then in 1944, 1944, the flying bombs came over, the doodlebugs, and we had – there had been air raids during the war and we had been in the shelter ’cos our house had a basement and the basement had been reinforced with large columns to form a safe place and we lived in that shelter during many of the bombing raids. My aunt lived in one part of the shelter and my mother and I lived in the other part.

Did your aunt also come with you?

She came – she also lived there. **[01:02:00]** My mother – I should have mentioned this. My mother said to Mrs Wilson, can I bring my sister? ’Cos she also had nowhere to live.

So the two of them were there.

The two of them were there, yes, yeah. And incidentally, incidentally, Mrs Chubb [laughs] – it’s crazy. Mrs Chubb came around, said to my mother one day – ’cos they were friends, they were friends – she said, what's your air-raid shelter like? And my mother said, well, we're in the basement, where we're all got these great posts. She says, can I have a look? Maybe we might need to ask you if we could come to the – come – and she came down and they were discussing how we would fit the Chubbs into our air-raid shelter [laughs]. And Mrs Chubb eventually said, no, I don't think this is exactly right. Because I think the Chubbs’ house did not have a basement. Our house was that bit older and you know that when damp courses came in, people no longer had basements in their houses and I think their house was built that bit later. And she said, well, I have a choice between coming to stay in your basement. But of course the Chubbs were in the safe business and they had a safe room in their house, like you

would have in a bank. But the thing that worried them was that they might asphyxiate in the safe because it was airtight. [Laughs] And that was the reason why Mrs Chubb came to the refugees next door to see whether she could borrow their basement [laughs]. Anyway, when the flying bombs came that was worse than the Blitz because there were not many, not many bombs dropped on Wimbledon. They tried to bomb Clapham Junction railway junction and there were bombs in South Wimbledon but we were relatively clear. **[01:04:07]** But then the flying bombs came in 1944 and it was a lottery and flying bombs did drop near us, one at the bottom of our garden in the next big house but didn't go off, one around the corner where the house was completely shattered. And my mother remembered Mrs Colvin, with whom she was still in touch, Mrs Colvin had said if ever you need help, call me. And my mother wrote to Mrs Colvin and said is there any chance that you could find a place for us in the village where we could stay for a couple of months while these bombs are dropping. And Mrs Colvin said I'm so glad you came along [ph]. You're not staying in the village, you're moving in with us as our guests. So I went down with Mother in whatever it was, May or June '44 and we went and we stayed in King John's house. And Mrs Colvin said, right, we've got to work out – you're back in charge of the kitchen, [laughs] you're the cook. I, Mrs Colvin, will do the breakfasts, you can do the lunches and May, the kitchen maid, can do a high tea, but you are our guests. And she got me into the village school. Now, the village school – I had come from the prep school [laughs]. The village school was for the schoolchildren, the local farm workers' children and the school was from five to fourteen. There were two classes, there were two teachers, and it was a multi-grade school. **[01:06:02]** And I went to school and I was, you know, I was a bit lost at the place but I joined in and I fitted in. But Mrs Colvin was a bit worried. She said to Mother, we can't keep Michael there for long 'cos I have a feeling he might pick up some bad language and some bad habits [laughs]. But that actually never got any further because I stayed there for the summer term 1944. Whether I learned anything, I don't know. I learnt a lot about life. And then the worst of the bombing was over and we went back to Wimbledon. My father came down at the weekends to King John's house and he was given the spare room, which was King John's bedroom, so he used to sleep in King John's bedroom [laughs] in this house. And we were part of the village life and it was an extraordinary story. And then when – and whenever Mrs Colvin went into Salisbury, because that was the only way to get in, she took us in for the day to the – to town. And then we went home and spent the rest of the war there. And after the war Mrs Colvin moved to somewhere

else in Shaftesbury, near Tollard Royal. She and I my mother stayed in contact till the day she – till the day Mrs Colvin died. May, the first maid, and my mother stayed in contact forever. And when – and in the summer holidays I went down to Dorset, where May had now married, and I was – took my summer holidays living with the maid in her house in a village on a farm in Dorset and I went down there many times. **[01:08:10]** And –

So your mother maintained these relationships, which is amazing.

Yes. And the – the twist in this story was that May had a dog, and the husband [laughs] – and the husband and the dog were very much together and they had a springer spaniel called Penny. Decades later, I end up with a springer spaniel, not because I asked for it but because my granddaughter foolishly bought a dog, found that, like all granddaughters do, that she couldn't cope and we ended up with a springer spaniel [laughs] just like Penny.

Michael, I was going to ask you two things. First of all, what language did you speak to your parents? And secondly, were you aware that your parents were refugees? Were you aware of being different?

Yes, yes.

How did that manifest itself?

I was aware that various – well, first of all, they did – I realised they were German and they spoke German. There was no secret about it. Also, they talked about what was happening and I knew my grandfather – my mother's parents had gone to Shanghai, had escaped to Shanghai and we talked about it. And, you know, we said we hope we all – everything – after the war we'll get together with the grandparents and all the rest.

So two – only the two grandparents went to Shanghai or other family?

Seventeen members of my family were in Shanghai, by one accident or another. So I knew – and I knew my parents spoke German with each other but they did try to speak English

because they wanted to improve their English and they did – they never spoke German in public ’cos that was not right. **[01:10:00]** But when they wanted to say something secret to each other they spoke in German. But I actually understood more German than they realised because it was – I absorbed it with the air. But when they were speaking to each other – and they didn't speak Yiddish ’cos they were from Germany but they knew some Yiddish. And apparently – the only words of Yiddish that I know is that if you're trying to say to somebody something like not in front of the children, the phrase is [foreign dialect] [laughs]. Do you know that word?

Yes.

And when they said [laughs] [foreign dialect], I knew it was something important [laughs]. So I knew they were German and when my mother’s cousins, who also got to England, and my father’s cousins who also got to England, came to stay, they did all speak German to each other. And when I –

So, you know what it means, diber nisht comes from Hebrew “le-daber”, it’s Yiddish?

Yeah.

It’s from – it’s Hebrew, from le-daber. It’s Yiddish, so the [diber] is [overtalking].

It says – don't say it.

Don't speak.

Yeah, don't speak. When I – eventually when I went to – at eleven when I went to Haberdasher’s – I jumped a grade- there were three streams of children in my age group and I was in the stream that was given German as his language. Other streams were given French and Spanish. So, I ended up by being taught German at school and I already had in my mind the sound of German, the music of the language and actually, quite a lot of the language and

it was an extraordinary coincidence that I was going to be taught German when I could easily have been Spanish or French.

So was there correspondence also between your – the relatives in Shanghai and your parents in –

Yes. In fact, I have got an enormous pile of letters that I can't read and I keep promising myself that I must find a way to do this. **[01:12:18]** We did find in Germany a family who helped us translate a few of the letters but there are – there's a whole archive that needs to be dealt with.

Another project [laughs].

Well, yes. Basically, I think all I can do is photocopy the lot and give them – maybe the University of Sussex, I don't know whether they're interested or a university in Germany. It's a job that needs to be done. But we thought we had solved it because we had this family in Germany who translated about six or eight letters and they're very, very interesting because my grandparents left Germany in 1940 by train across Russia to Shanghai. And that was the most horrendous experience, which is a story on its own.

And also, the experience in Shanghai wasn't so [overtalking].

Well, they both died there. My grandmother died. She had never been strong. Her health had always been questionable and she just died from the conditions. My grandfather died after the war but my mother never found out that he was dead for three months and we were kept hoping that we could get him over here and he was al – but he did outlast the war.

And so they're buried there?

They're buried there. And I have a strong connection with Shanghai because I did a lot of – I went to – I did a lot of business in Shanghai. **[01:14:00]** I went to Shanghai, to China, many times in the 1990s.

So did you find their graves there? Are there graves?

And I went to Shanghai. And my uncle – my father's brother – also was in Shanghai during the war and he had written the history of the Jews in Shanghai and he gave me the contact – his contact in Shanghai, a Mr Wong, and I went to Shanghai and as usual I fell into this project of the Chinese Shanghai Jews. And my parents [sic] were buried in Shanghai but the –

Grandparents?

The cemetery where they were buried in Shanghai – they died in Shanghai – that was vandalised in the Cultural Revolution and all the graves were trashed. But the – by this time I was no longer doing much business in the Czech Republic and I was – my business was concentrated in Shanghai and I became involved in the Shanghai Refugee Museum [laughs] which was a very great problem. And since then I have actually been working with the Shanghai Chinese Museum – Jewish Museum and they have a lot of information from me and I went over and spent a week there working with them on the new exhibition over there.

We have a few interviewees in our archives who went to Shanghai. And it's an interesting story because obviously they were helped by the Iraqi Jews.

Yes, well, the story is a story of extraordinary – the biggest loophole of all time, you know, that they were able to get there. But the terrible conditions in which they survived, the extent of – to which there was help, the extent to which there was lack of help, particularly after Pearl Harbor, and the way that some people made it, you know, some people will always survive, some people struggle badly. **[01:16:16]** It's a – I've given lectures on Shanghai.

And it took a long time after the war to be able to leave, so –

Yes, yeah, and my father's brother documented the thing so that together with him, we worked up a whole presentation.

What's your brother's –

His name was Ernest Heppner. And if you look Ernest Heppner up on Google, on Amazon, you'll find his book.

Okay. So those are your father's parents who were in Shanghai?

No, my mother's parents. My father's father – my father's mother died when he was young, my father's father was killed. He was deported to the East under the most appalling circumstances imaginable, and I hope he died on the train. I hope he never got there. And my father's sister was deported to Theresienstadt. She was paralysed and I'm surprised that she survived there, but she survived there. I don't know how much you know about the detail of Theresienstadt but in October 1944 there was a mass evacuation of Theresienstadt, all the people who survived there for years and years, there were eleven transports and I was involved in documenting them and I found my father's sister in that. And she had survived until 19 – from 1942 to 1944 Theresienstadt, only to be one of those who was part of the mass extermination of October 1944. **[01:18:03]**

So deported to Auschwitz from Theresienstadt.

Yes, yes, yeah. And as the director of the Memorial Scrolls Trust, this whole thing is a deeply – I was deeply involved in all the involvement of that issue.

Okay, we'll get back to that. So, you said you were aware of the history that you were [overtalking] your parents?

Yes, I – and also, I was bullied at school because although I spoke English, I had difficulty with my Rs. I had [demonstrates]. But I cured myself. I cured my – as a nine-year-old – I had no trouble in the infants, in the primary school, but when I was nine – when I was ten or eleven, I had trouble with my Rs and I managed to give myself tuition to get rid of my Rs. I learnt the [demonstrates R sound].

So you remember that people gave you a hard time?

And I remember teaching myself to say Richard not Richard [demonstrates].

Yeah. So, your – I wanted to ask you also about your father, about the internment. How was he feeling about it? Because he'd been in Buchenwald, he came here as a refugee and for that generation it was not easy then to be told you have to go to another concentration camp, at the internment camp.

Well, I don't know what his feelings would have been on being told that he's going to be interned because I suspect there was dread. I would – if there wasn't dread, I would want to know why there wasn't dread, because he didn't know that the British treated prisoners humanely and that extermination was not on the agenda in any way. **[01:20:08]** Also, I mean we know that it was the way that the British treated prisoners of war, and the Germans treated prisoners of war. So, they didn't know what to expect but they did – but if you go into the Isle of Man situation, it was still pretty stupid and the people were – well, they weren't badly treated but they were disrupted and they were made to feel inadequate. And they made a life for themselves because they were such resourceful people but it was a deeply unfair and prejudiced situation based on the sort of crazy talk that we have these days, of the danger of foreigners and the suspicion of anybody that isn't like you. But in the end of course, my father helped win the war in his own very small way.

And if you – looking at your parents and the way they talked about this time, it sounds they managed to adapt themselves to the situation, which was very difficult for many refugees coming from a middle class life to be in domestic service.

Yes, I really wonder – you know, I know very well that people of their generation said that they didn't want to talk about their pre-war experience, they didn't want to talk about their – the fate of their family and all the rest of it. My parents didn't enjoy talking about it but they didn't refuse to talk about it. And I still believe that it was partly maybe their character but I think partly it's still because *Finchleystraße* made you feel more refugee than Wimbledon

did. **[01:22:05]** They were definitely German and they were – people still came up to them and said, where do you come from, you know, and in this case they often treated it as a compliment, they didn't treat it as a slur. They had an attitude, when it came [laughs] – I mean, for example, there were people who would refuse after the war to buy a German car. Well, my parents didn't refuse to buy a German car, they didn't buy a German car but they didn't refuse to buy a German car, [laughs] you know. And they went on holiday to Germany. They wanted to see what Germany was like. They did not have a closed mind.

And did they go back to Breslau after the war or did –

Yes. We went to Breslau. I took my mother and father and my wife and my cousin, who was born in Berlin. We went back there in about 1985 or something, in communist times. And I was shown all around Breslau, shown the bakery, shown where we lived, where my father lived, the synagogue and everything. Then in 1997 for my father's ninetieth birthday, when my mother was already dead, I went with my younger daughter and my father to Breslau, in free Breslau. And we – and I introduced my granddaughter – my daughter to it and we went and had a good look around there. And then in 2014 my grandson did something which really surprised me. **[01:24:07]** He was only sixteen or something and usually at sixteen, children are not interested in genealogy. He wanted to go to Breslau. It was not my suggestion, it was not my daughter, my elder daughter's suggestion – he's the son of my elder daughter. So, I took my daughter and my twin grandsons and all four of us went to Breslau. So, we've all been to Breslau. And what's more, we found the town in Poland where the Heppner family had spent the 200 years until the 1850s – because they went to Poland in the 1500s – we found that town and we've even been there. So, we've traced our roots.

But your parents after the war, there was no plan – I mean anyway, Breslau then was Poland, so did they think of re-emigrating or going elsewhere?

Never. No, no, no. They – England was their home, very much. But my father, you see, he then when the timber business went – changed because no longer was the timber cut in England, the timber was being cut in the – where it came from, you know, and the timber business changed completely. My father bought an engineering tool business. Remember, he

was a toolmaker. And he went to Germany, to communist Germany, and got contracts from the state tool and engineering corporation and he became – and he went to Germany every year, two, three, four times on business and he said if I can make money out of the Germans, I'm not going to stop myself. **[01:26:08]** And it was his business. And then he also did the same in Czechoslovakia. So he had a substantial interest in Eastern Europe. And then I joined in the company and I then got involved with Czech jewellery. So [laughs].

Just wait, we will get there, we will get there.

No, we don't have to get there [laughs].

We'll get there. No, I was going to ask you, so how long were you allowed to stay in that house in Wimbledon or did you stay there?

We stayed in the house in Wimbledon till 1948. Good point. After the war – let's do a quick reversal. The Wilsons had bought the house in Wimbledon as their home. They had not expected the war. Well, they had not counted on the war. And when the war came, they did not sell the house, they rented a house in Ditchling to get away from the bombs and then we looked after the house. When the war was over they came back to Wimbledon. So, my mother said, well, what do you want us to do? She said – oh, she said, the house is big enough for all of us, so the Wilsons and the Heppners lived together in that huge house. The master bedroom had never been – it had all been kept for the Wilsons, so they had their master bedroom back. The children's bedroom had always been kept for the children and they were there. I lived in the nursery, my mother lived in the nanny's bedroom. So there was no shortage of space. **[01:28:00]** They brought with them a couple of servants and there was plenty of servants' quarters in the house. And the two families lived side by side, with my mother still running the household. And at Christmas we had the most enormous Christmas together. And after 1947 Christmas, they moved house down to Sussex, where they bought a farm, by which time Dr Wilson had become very ill with cancer and she actually didn't have long to live and she died in Sussex, in the new house. And we were left to rattle around in the house, and the house was eventually sold in 1948. And we moved to Harrow because that's where my father's work was. The timber business that he eventually was running was in

Willesden, so we moved to Harrow and the house was sold. And the house had a very sad story then. It was too big to be used. No family would want to live there. It was abused. It was used as a hostel and all various things. Eventually it was taken over by Bupa and converted into a care home and the house was split up into segments and some new accommodation was built in part of the garden. And the twist in the story is that when my aunt became ill and needed to have somewhere to live, she moved back into the house in Wimbledon [laughs] in one of the purpose-made- purpose-built apartments. **[01:30:11]** And we went to visit her and we were – and went to the matron of the place and said, we used to live here, could we be shown – could we have a look? She said, by all means. She told everybody, I'm bringing around the people who used to live here, and we went around the entire house and I went back into my nursery and I went back into all the rooms in the house which were now in a completely new condition. And at the bottom of the garden – and this garden was on three – it was on a hill. It was terraced, one terrace, two terrace, four terraces, a steep hill. And on the top terrace there was a vineyard. It was a very, very extreme situation. And at the bottom of the garden was an enormous, great holly tree. And I said to my wife, I used to be frightened of that holly tree because when you went around the back it was very, very dark. And I said, I wonder whether the holly tree is still there. And it was still there. And we – but it's a very odd thing to go back to a place that's been completely converted.

Yeah, and you spent many years there. I mean –

I spent from 1940 to '48. My formative years, 'give me a child until they're seven'. And that really I think is the – this issue of the first seven years. The first seven years were very fortunate and we know that we were fortunate and we know that most people were not fortunate. But still, if there is good fortune, I think it should be known and we should be grateful for it.

So then you moved in to a much more Jewish milieu or [overtalking].

Well, Harrow was not particularly – I was bar mitzvahed in Kingsbury Orthodox Synagogue. **[01:32:10]** There were – I went to Haberdashers' where there were a lot of Jewish boys and a lot of rumours about, well, how many Jewish boys [laughs] were allowed to be there. And I

always felt Jewish but I always felt English. I don't even say British. I felt English because those first seven years had been English years. I’m very proud to be Jewish, I’m very involved in Jewish things, particularly Jewish historical things, up to my neck in it. I’m up to my neck in Jewish heritage. I recently was in Czecho, working on a website, a Jewish website, you know, I’m – so I’m hopelessly Jewish, rather secular, definitely heritage, definitely – I don't know what to say on forms when they say, oh, are you white, British, European [laughs]. Do I say I’m British? I always say I’m white because funnily enough, I have a very strong English inclination but I still don't feel entitled to call myself English.

British?

British, yes. I do not feel entitled to call myself English. But my sons are members of the MCC and I have a very English state of mind.

And you lived here for most of your life.

I've lived here all my life. **[01:34:01]** But I must be one of the last batch of AJR members who was born in Germany, you know, the last one, turn out the light [laughs].

Well, there's still a few, there's still a few.

Yes, the Summerfields. They're friends of mine. And I belong to the –

We've just interviewed.

You’ve done another one?

Just interviewed the –

Which one?

We interviewed Peter last year. Now, we've recently interviewed George. And we've recently interviewed Marianne.

Oh, well, yes, that's – 'cos of course he's – he did the right thing and married – well, which one did he marry- die you interview? Peter's wife?

Peter's wife.

Yes, she's another – she's from Breslau.

Yes, she is.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I just interviewed her a few weeks ago.

Yeah. Well, I knew them well. But when George was running a tour company, I was one of his tour leaders. And where did I go back to? [Laughs] Well, I went to Salzburg [laughs]. Because I spoke German. Yeah.

So just to come back. You said when you met English Jews and you felt more English and Jewish, so in your mind, the British Jewish experience is slightly different then from your experience, when you met English Jews?

I don't understand the –

You attended Haberdashers' when there were many other Jewish boys.

Yes. Well, we –

Did you feel different from those Jewish boys?

No.

No.

No. No, where I feel different, but not badly different, I'm just – I don't even think I'm aware of it. I never lived in *Finchleystraße*, I never had neighbours who were Jewish, I never had society that was Jewish, I did never – that's it, I never lived in a Jewish society. **[01:36:05]** And when I joined the B'nai B'rith as an eighteen or nineteen-year-old or whatever I was, that was the first time that I had actually been in Jewish society. And I am an outsider. I am an outsider among Jews.

Because of…?

Because of my orientation. I am – I have this strong English background.

That's what I mean. So English, in contradiction to being Jewish?

Yes, yes. But you see, I've got the other contradiction. I've got the other contradiction, I went and married a German which is ridiculous but I'm sorry to say, once I had met her and once she had met me, we were – we were doomed [laughs]. But my – concerning my poor parents, they had wanted me to marry a Jewish girl. They certainly had not expected me to marry a German. They were very, very welcoming. They treated her very, very well. And when I – and of course we had the security, we could speak to each other in German, she cooks like a German [laughs]. I said to her, I married you for your cooking. When – but – and she's been in England now since she was sixteen or eighteen, as an au pair. And we both say when we go to Germany, we feel British, and when we are in England, we feel Continental. We live in both worlds and we're comfortable in both but we don't belong to either.

Yeah. So how would you describe yourself today, in terms of your identity? ***[01:38:06]***

Hmm, well, I – obviously I'm British, strongly British, probably more British than some British are. I entirely embrace the British mentality, the British sense of fairness, the British

sense of not being over-organised, the decency. And I am appalled by the number of English people who are not decent. I am old-style English. I have English values. I don't have German values. But I have some German standards but not German values. I have English values.

What standards, for example? What do you mean?

Well, I like things to be done properly. I like things to be, you know, done properly, *Ordnung* [laughs].

Yeah. And do you find it has changed over time? Like getting older, you're [overtalking].

What, me getting – me changing or society changing?

Well, society.

Well, society has changed enormously. The British Empire is responsible for society.

Yeah, but I mean you and how you feel about your identity.

No, I think it's- I have embraced English attitudes, English values, the English sense of fair play. I may not be – I may not be a decent person but I know what decency is, I know what's – and I don't want to be over-organised. **[01:40:01]**

You said before that your parents – that you had a bar mitzvah in Kingsbury, so did you get the watch, then? Did your mother give you the watch? Do you remember [overtalking].

Oh, yes. On my –

She waited for that.

On my *bar mitzvah*, yes. Yeah. Yeah. And what I suggest we do once you finish the tape, that we do look at some more of these things so that you know in the back of your mind if there's

anything that you want to make of them, whether it's an interview or whatever else it is, you have a resource there, not only who to pass it on to but how to make use of it right now.

You also said your parents then joined West London Synagogue.

My parents joined West London Synagogue I – well, I think they were members of Belsize Square all the time I think. I think they also joined West London when I was about eighteen, because when I left Haberdashers' and they wanted me to have a social life, they knew from friends that the best social life was with the West London Synagogue, where I became chairman of their younger members' group in the end, one of a very long line [laughs] of people who did.

They joined Belsize Square before that?

They were – I think they were part of – I remember going to services in Belsize Square when it was a in a room at St John's Wood, the LJS.

Oh, really? So that is quite a –

Yes. Oh, yes, I remember. I remember going to *Yom Kippur* there because I remember the choir always sang behind a row of rubber trees [laughs]. Very, very, very, very – they cordoned off the choir with a row of rubber trees and that must have been a child of ten, twelve, fourteen, whatever it was.

But did you have your bar mitzvah there?

I had my – no, I had my *bar mitzvah* in the local synagogue, which – Kingsbury where I could catch the bus every Saturday to go to Hebrew classes. **[01:42:08]** But I rebelled against Orthodoxy. It did not win me over.

So did you meet – were there any other young people in Belsize Square Synagogue who you met?

Oh, yes, because I joined the – well, yeah, but I did not – I wasn't – I was not a member of Belsize Square, you see, I was a member of West London, I then went to university in London, I never joined Belsize Square. And then while – and then I went to America and I studied in America and that broke my link. And my parents I think then joined Belsize Square when I came back. And then I went my own way. I still was involved a bit with West London because I was – I got – was friendly with Hugo Gryn in relation to my work in the Czech Republic [laughs]. It's very confusing.

Okay, let's – so just tell us. So you studied, you – what were your options once you finished school? What did you think you wanted to do?

My father, who had never been to university, said that you need to get a job. I didn't know what job to get. And I took my A-levels. Oh, I think he wanted me to become an accountant, yes. I took my A-levels and I did quite well in my A-levels and I thought to myself, with A-levels like that, you should be going to university [laughs]. **[01:44:01]** [Laughs] So I phoned up LSE [laughs] and I said that I've just had my results in, any chance of going to the LSE? And they said no, we're full up but we'll take you next year. And I phoned up University College and they said yes, we could take you. And for some reason I thought to myself, LSE is better than UCL. And I then left – I then did an extra term at Haberdashers' doing economics O-level and then I went and got a job for nine months or so and then I went to LSE.

To study –

My father, I mean he didn't want me to go to university. It wasn't necessary, you should [ph] get one with a job.

And then America, you went to do –

Then I decided that it'd be good to get an MBA. There were no MBAs in England. MBAs did not exist in England.

And did you have an idea of what you wanted to do afterwards or –

Well, the curious thing is, I came back from – well, first of all I went to Tulane on a scholarship, a two-year scholarship to get a master's degree. Within two weeks the dean of the business school at Tulane said, you are not first-year master's material, you are second-year master's material. In other words, the LSE was – so they took away one year of my scholarship [laughs]. **[01:46:00]** I got my master's degree in one year and I came back to England a year earlier than I expected and wasn't really – I hadn't really – furthermore, I expected to go into the army but while I was in America, National Service was discontinued, so I came back a year early, not knowing what to do, totally confused. But I had done – I discovered market research at Tulane and I said I want to do research, so I then started working for a market research company. And I stayed in market research for- fifteen, twenty years in various positions until I found that big business was so – I got so senior at so young in big business, I found the pressure unbearable. And my father said, well, I've just got this new – big, new contract in Czecho and I can't take it unless I find somebody to do it with me, and I left.

And joined your father?

I joined my father, even though it was not a marketing job and I was not an engineer, I was a – I had a very, very successful career in marketing but I found that it was driving me mad.

But was he happy for you to join?

Hmm?

Was he happy, your father, that you joined?

Well, it suited him and it suited me. It gave me a way out. I didn't actually see a way out because I was so senior. You see, I was a director of a big company at the age of about thirty-one or thirty-two and there were no other directors on the board who were within fifteen

years of me. **[01:48:11]** I was – it was a mistake. I didn't apply for the job, I was put into it, I was over-promoted and I hated it. I don't know what they saw in me [laughs].

So you joined your father.

I joined my father.

And is that then how you got to the Czech school [ph]?

Yeah, yeah.

Through the – so tell us now, how you get to the Czech Torah School.

Right. *Yom Kippur*, 1978. I was a member of Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue, which was the nearest synagogue to where we were living with the two girls in Buckinghamshire.

So you got married, when?

Married in Nottingham in 1968.

And had two daughters?

Two daughters, born in 1969 and 1971. Terrific girls. And I was in the synagogue in *Yom Kippur* 1978 and the rabbi gave a sermon and he said, I'm going to do something different this year, he said, I'm going to talk about our *Torah* scroll. I found out that it comes from a town called Kolín, I found out a bit about it and I think we should all know something about it. And he talked about this little town then called Kolín and at the end of his sermon he said – and of course, it was deep, deep communist time, 1978. He said, I don't know anything about the space, I'm only seeing what God in the Jewish Encyclopaedia – if anybody were ever – wouldn't it be wonderful if anybody ever went there and could actually find where this place is and find out something about the place. **[01:50:08]** And I was due to go there in

March for a business meeting. I didn't know the rabbi. He was just the chap who sat at the front and spoke, a young rabbi, his name was Andrew Goldstein. Have you heard of Andrew Goldstein? So I went up to him and said I'm going to Prague in March, do you want me to find Kolín? He said yes, you go, go for it. And he and I became very close friends. And I went there and I knew that I had done a stupid thing because in communism you didn't go where you weren't supposed to be. And we had two scrolls, two Czech scrolls. One was from Třeboň – you may not have heard of Třeboň – and Kolín. And I said I will take my life in my hands, they can't – nothing bad will happen, and I will go to one of them. I went to the railway station. Do you know Prague railway station? And they have – in those days they had cylindrical timetables and I went to see which had the best train service from Prague, [laughs] Kolín or Třeboň, and I found out that Třeboň had a bad train service, Kolín had – so I decided to go to Kolín. Otherwise, I would have gone to Třeboň. And I went to Kolín one Saturday and I went to the Jewish community headquarters in Prague, talked to Dr Bass and said I'm going to Kolín, is there anything I should know? He said there's nothing in Kolín, don't – I wouldn't even bother going. And I said, okay. He said there's only a cemetery. So okay, so I then asked somebody what the word for cemetery was – *hřbitov*, all right? **[01:52:08]** So I – and I wrote that, *hřbitov, židovský [Jewish] hřbitov*, and I went to – took the train and I got out of the station and I – the station was right on the edge of town and I saw the spires of the church and I walked in and I got – really got frightened. I felt terribly, terribly alone but I kept going and I got to the centre of town and I tried to ask people where the cemetery was and nobody would speak to me. And I wandered around the town, listening to my footsteps and eventually I went to have lunch in a little café and I came out – and I asked the waiter, please where's the *hřbitov*? Nobody would talk to me. And outside was a little sort of man, old man, sunning himself on the [inaudible], where's the *hřbitov*, and he said, it's down that way. So I trotted off and I didn't know what to do and eventually I had to ask somebody else, where's the *hřbitov*? I talked to this person standing outside this building and he spoke English – or he spoke German and he said, further down, first on the right. It was the secret police headquarters [laughs]. The former Gestapo headquarters. But I had no idea. Went down, took a picture. The cemetery was locked of course. I took a picture of the jungle in the cemetery, walked around the cemetery and took another picture there, went down a str – went down a – oh, no, I'd gone down a street, saying maybe somebody at the church – it was a Sunday – somebody at the church will know where the cemetery is. **[01:54:05]** I went down

this street, went to the church, the church was closed, it was Sunday, and I accidentally walked through the ghetto, accidentally and unknowingly. I'd taken a few pictures, saw a Jewish sign on the wall and took a picture, came back to England, said to the rabbi- no, I came back to England, found a message for me – the rabbi had gone on holiday – I hope this reaches you before you go to Prague. Here is the name of the last Jewish person living in Kolín, and their address. And I said, what are you doing to me [laughs]. You send me all the way there, you give me the fright of my life, I've had a really tough experience, I can't find anything, I find a cemetery and now you're telling me to go back and I have this – so I went back in May and I found this lady and she hooked me. She took me around the town, she showed me everything, she took me to the derelict synagogue, she took me to the cemetery, she told me the story. I took thousands of photographs. I went – she took me to this cemetery, chapel. In the chapel, which was derelict, was a huge wooden *aron hakodesh* [Holy Ark]. I took a picture of that. I showed this to the people in the synagogue in London. They said, can you get the *aron hakodesh*? So, my next job was to get the *aron hakodesh* to London. And one thing led to the next, led to the next, and we then had a seminar for all the synagogues that were willing to come that had a scroll, we told them about our experience, we told them that the scroll is the last representative of a large group of people, etc, etc, etc, etc.

Michael, just tell us about this scroll, what it is, because people who are watching the Czech Memorial Scroll Trust, what is it and how come – how did these scrolls come to England? ***[01:56:13]*** *Just very briefly because we're not here for that really, but it is –*

No, no. In fact, I wasn't even talking to the camera then. In 1964 – no, in 1963 the Czech Ministry for Works of Art realised or thought they realised, deluded them into realising, that the collection of scrolls, Czech *Torah* scrolls, being the sacred scroll that there is in each synagogue containing the first five books of the Old Testament, that about 2000 Czech scrolls were in a damp warehouse in Prague, having survived the destruction of the war, miraculously, extraordinary, exclusively.

Collected by the Germans, is it? Or – sorry, okay, you tell.

Had survived. And they got the impression that they were worth a lot of money, so they decided to try and sell them. And there was an English art dealer called Eric Estorick and they came to him and they said, can you – would you have a customer? And he said I might. I'm shortening this thing very much. And he had a customer called Ralph Yablon. Ralph Yablon belonged to Westminster Synagogue. Ralph Yablon said to Rabbi Harold Reinhart, who was the rabbi of the West London Synagogue, I've got this Estorick man saying I've got this scroll. **[01:58:04]** They decided to buy them. Yablon bought them. And in 1964, 1963, Chimen Abramsky, a famous man, went there and said they're genuine, they're horrifically genuine, [laughs] they're heartbreakingly genuine. They came over in 1964, February, fortieth – seventieth – sixtieth anniversary or so, whatever it is, in February 4th, they came over and they started then to sort them and classify them and to respond to requests to have them out on loan.

Sixtieth anniversary coming up next, on the 4th.

Yes, yes, '64, '74, '84, '94, '04, '14.

Sixtieth.

Sixtieth anniversary. And that's being celebrated on the 4th of February at Westminster –

In London?

Yes, yes, yes. And one of those scrolls – so the scrolls went everywhere. A thousand of them went to the USA, 1564 scrolls came back to England. So, I was then – we received one from Kolín, I then went to town on Kolín. I was invited to lecture in America on what happened, to spread the idea in America.

So you became involved with the Trust?

Mrs [Ruth] Shaffer played all her cards very, very close to her chest. She didn't want too much going on. I retired from my business, I managed to sell my business in 19 – in 2002 and

Mrs Shaffer wanted to move on. She needed to- she was – it was – she had done her stint. Evelyn Friedlander took over as the chairman and Rabbi Tommy Salamon came to me 'cos he knew about Kolín. **[02:00:06]** He said would you like to help with the Trust and I said I'd love to. And then I came there as a research director and I said the first thing we have to do is we have to do a census and find out where they all are. I then recruited a friend of mine in Los Angeles 'cos America was the most important place and we did a census of all the- and we realised that nobody knew what they had or even that they had it and nobody knew the significance of what they had. And I then embarked on a project with Susan Boyer to awaken the hundreds of synagogues here and also in Australia and South Africa.

And UK too?

And that was my task and from 2002 to 2010 it absolutely took my life over. I was up there twice a week. My study is still full of correspondence and stuff. I went to – I gave workshops in Philadelphia, in Miami, in Minnesota, all the places.

Can I just ask you one question? When the Czech government – the Czechoslovak government sold it, so were they all – I mean how did anyone know which city each scroll came from? Sorry, that was [overtalking].

It's a lecture.

Fundamental.

Yeah, yeah. Okay, okay, okay. Cut the cackle [laughs]. The Jews in Prague, and I know them by name, decided that they wanted, if at all possible, to preserve the heritage of their thousand-year-old community and to do what they could to protect the artefacts of the communities where – which were in the synagogues of Bohemian Moravia, not Slovakia and were exposed to looting and vandalism. **[02:02:29]** And by a series of complicated coincidences which I cannot go into, and thus peculiar circumstances which affected Bohemian Moravia and nowhere else, not even Slovakia, they were able to manipulate the situation, that these items were not only not destroyed and looted but they were collected in

Prague, books, artefacts, *Torah* scrolls, silver, records, documentation, 100,000 pieces. And the little museum in Prague with its 800 pieces became the nucleus of something a thousand times bigger. And I'm working on this right now. I'm working on this right – I'm working on a video for this right now. And they then engineered the situation that the Nazis who were very, very casual in Bohemian Moravia – they were not casual anywhere else – they manipulated the situation that they turned the Jewish Museum in Prague, which was a subsidiary of the communist – of the Nazi *Zentralstelle* they manipulated the situation to bring everything in and they documented everything absolutely minutely in a totally Germanic fashion because Josef Polák who was a Czech of very German orientation and was a museum director installed a most rigorous system. **[02:04:23]** And every piece was labelled, every piece was catalogued and if you are very, very good and you go to Prague and you talk to the right people, they will show you the enormous catalogue that they have of the 100,000 pieces. Nearly every one of the catalogues has died, very few survived, two particular survived. Everybody was catalogued. Then the deal was done to bring the scrolls to England. Nearly all the scrolls still had their labels attached, 200 did not have. I call them orphan scrolls. I also know the names of the places which do not have a scroll, so I know that by a impossible miracle you could theoretically – but I then introduced a situation of adoption. I say, you adopt for your scroll one of the synagogues which doesn't have any scrolls. All right? This was all –

Okay, so there is a lot more to talk about anyway. So, you were very involved in it and are still involved in it.

I'm – I gave up in 2010. I got very tired and I had a personality clash. Maybe you can understand that. And the synagogue took on a new life under Jeffrey Orenstein who has done a very big public relations job. **[02:06:04]** I did no public relations. My job was awakening. His job is promulgation. But I have written an article which I am about to go public on, called The Myth of the Museum. And the myth is that it was a German project. It was not. The Jews manipulated the situation to collect it and the myth is the museum of the extinct race – do you know where the museum of the extinct race phrase comes from? It was – it grew out of the reaction of the returning Jews in 1945 when the Germans had been defeated, and their horror at what they found. They found everybody dead and everything that belonged to them alive

[sic]. And starting with a famous journalist called Egon Erwin Kisch, who came up and said they built a mausoleum for their museum, for their victims, to Jiří Weil who wrote Mendelssohn is on the Roof, they all tinkered with the idea. And HG Adler who tried to figure out why the Germans should have a museum to an extinct race when the Germans didn't have a [inaudible] museum to an extinct race, he thought they must have had.

Okay. So, when is your article coming out?

I'm just working on the last phase of it.

And where is it going to be published?

Well, I'm just going to put in on the Internet. If you want it – if the AJR want, they can certainly have it. It's a long, long article.

Okay. Maybe you can do a short version [overtalking].

Well, I'll give you the first sight of it. Okay. Because I – the trouble is, every time I think I've finished with it, another thing lands on my desk. **[02:08:06]** And only two or three weeks ago the last piece of the jigsaw landed on my desk. I'm having to rewrite part of a chapter. Okay, so the phrase was coined in 1965, twenty years after the war, by the communist director of the museum as a publicity stunt. That phrase did not exist before then. And then there was an exhibition called 'Precious Legacy', three years in the United States and it was in the catalogue of the 'Precious Legacy' and that's where the phrase went viral. The Germans knew nothing about it.

Okay. Let's come back to your life, Michael. I mean obviously you've been involved very much in heritage, not only that –

Czech heritage.

Czech heritage. Why is this whole – why do you think for yourself is heritage so important? And is it related to your own immigration history at all?

It is- I suppose I'm a sentimentalist. I think that these – I think that it's very important to know why things are the way they are. That's my phrase with my grandchildren. Always ask why things are the way they are, be curious. And there's always a reason for everything and typified by the scrolls being everywhere, the people need to know why things are the way they are. And if you ask that question with regard to the Kolín scroll, you unearth the entire heritage. **[02:10:02]** And as I've said before, the people behind the scroll do not deserve to be lost in the anonymity of the 6 million and the scrolls are the way for the people to ensure that the Jews are not lost in the anonymity of the 6 million because somebody knows the name of all of them because every scroll has its Jews and we know them all.

I just wonder also because we are going to look at your own archive that's very extensive. So, your parents also, you know, had a sense of how important their papers and things are and your mother has this [overtalking].

Well, they were – neither of them were historians. I think it was sentimentality. I think it was sentimentality. My father was the opposite of an historian. He was a practical businessman, you know, do what makes money, [laughs] you know, you get things right first time. He said the way to succeed in business is to get it right first time and you can be sure you'll have lots of help in that because most people get it right second time.

So do you think is it your mother who collected all these things?

My father collected it but he didn't know why he was collecting it. But I got my parents to write their stories and as I say, I was reading them again last night, I knew them all because I typed them, and they wrote them in the 1980s.

So you record – you [overtalking].

I have some tape recordings somewhere but the crux of it, it was – basically the question that we all have is why the hell did you wait till 1939? **[02:12:00]** Any fool – no, only the fools went out [laughs]. Everybody thought it would work out. It had always worked out before.

But what made you interview them in the ’80s? What made you feel –

Because I am a historian. I’m a – I did history A-level, I am a natural, instinctive historian. I look at everything. I look at everything. I – if I had the time, I would write the history of my road ’cos my road is a very, very interesting road, the architecture of this road, the bricks they’ve used. Do you know, the bricks are so important. Every time I walk down the road I say, I must take a photograph of all these houses. They're all special and they’ve all got a story. A house in our time. I am that person. I am a house in that time.

You want to know the story of –

I want to know. And this house has got no story. Well, it has actually [laughs]. It was built on the grounds of [inaudible] [laughs]. And why is it called Radcliffe Road, you know, and all the rest of it. But I want to know why things are the way they are. It’s deep, deep in my DNA and I will never know it all. I will go to my grave saying what Cecil Rhodes said, so much to do and so little time to do it.

Yeah, I just wonder whether, because you, you know, came as a young person here, that there is something about finding out things, the history, which is related to that.

Yeah, it probably is. Where do I come from, where does everything come from, and why are people so hopelessly ignorant of the – of what they're looking at and what they're seeing and what's affecting them, that they have no idea why it’s affecting them. Why, you know. **[02:14:00]** Everything is here for a reason.

Well, if you try and unearth the interviews with your parents we can maybe digitise it and put it somewhere, if you have it

Yes, yes, I – it's only audio.

It doesn't matter. We're starting a new project where we're collecting certain things.

My dear friend, this – if you speak to my wife she will tell me, she is being driven insane by my projects because the trouble is I never – no, I have great difficulty in finishing one of them because they are actually un-finish-able. There's always something and they're always coming up. I mean I've got a family tree of 1600 people. Three or four weeks ago, a cousin of mine from San Francisco comes up and says I'm going to Breslau, tell me about it [laughs]. I then have to give them a complete – well, I don't have to. I then decide that he's going to be fully briefed and that took about two weeks of digging up, writing – [addressing pet dog] yes, Pip, you are such a good boy. It's my turn. Yeah. So. And meanwhile, last Friday, a chap comes from Minnesota to film me on the business of the myth of the museum and then you're here. And I mean poor me, I'm eighty-six years old, I'm supposed to be having a quiet life [laughs].

But Michael, how do you feel about- let's say, the representation of German Jewish refugees through your Holocaust history in general, you know, in the UK? Have you got any –

I don't know the question. **[02:16:01]**

The, you know, because you're so involved in history, do you feel that the history of the refugees in this country got enough attention?

Of course it's important.

Got enough attention?

I think the AJR is irreplaceable and I think the idea like *Finchleystraß*e and the AJR monthly document is terrifically important. I have no idea what's going down on the University of Sussex. I just haven't – I haven't got the time to get involved with other things. And I get

Chinese people coming on to me all the time as well and saying, what about Shanghai and I'm not doing Shanghai, I'm doing- [laughs].

But do you feel it's important to protect the history [overtalking].

I think the German – I'm aware – I am aware that the German Jewish contribution to Jewish society in England and to British society in England has been significant and I just – and I think its significance is out of all proportion to its numbers but then it was in Germany out of all proportion to its numbers. And I think it's important that it should be documented. I am a hoarder, I am a documenter, I am an explainer. Everything's got to – every – everything's–

What about your children? Are they interested in history, like you? Or [overtalking].

They think Grandpa's a bit mad. But let's face it, I take my hat off to Zack. Zack said in 2014, let's go to Breslau. Now, my experience is that people don't usually get interested in their family till their forties. He was interested as a teenager. Well done, him [laughs]. And he's not the slightest bit academic. He's into cricket.

But he wanted to know.

He wanted to go to Breslau. **[02:18:00]** And the reason why Jake from San Francisco contacted me three weeks ago – I hadn't spoken to him for years – he said Grace, his seventeen-year-old daughter, said, I want to go to Breslau. Exactly the same thing. Exact. They're there now, there now in Breslau, with photographs and maps and – he didn't even know about his grandparents.

And Michael, so when you go to Breslau, how do you feel being there? Do you feel a connection or –

I feel a deep connection. I like to know where I come from. And of course, I mean- I have been – I took the gang, the boys and Gabby [ph] and- we found my grandparents' house which is still standing. We've been to the *matzah* factory which is still there.

Not as a matzah factory [laughs].

No, no. We wandered around, we – it’s my town. And as my cousin, Kim, who is slightly younger than I am, said to me as we were walking in Berlin – and he lives in New Zealand and I live here – he said, if it wasn’t for that madman, he said, we’d be walking here as citizens together [laughs]. He wouldn't be in New Zealand.

That's what I actually wanted to ask you. Do you sometimes think about what would have happened to you and your parents? ***[02:20:00]***

Well, my grandchildren have a grandpa and they make a very great fuss of me. I’m very lucky. I had no grandfather. And I write a great deal down, saying I wish my grandfather had written down so much. [Gets upset] I want them to – I want it to be there and it is there and I have got the story of many of the branches of our family as I have – and I have managed to get back a long way. I've managed to get back to 1700.

So you are a sort of story-keeper. Do you think you are the link?

Yes. Yeah, yeah. So, I've got my mother was a Schönwald, I've got as far as I can find out about the Schönwalds. My mother’s mother was a Lissner, I've got what's happened to the Lissners, I've got the Heppners. And because I got the Heppners, I've got the- other side of the family [laughs]. This is ’76, Goldstücker because Goldstücker was a cousin marrying in, so we've got a closed circuit there. And I've got a cousin living in Muswell Hill who I only discovered because I gave a lecture on the scrolls in West London Synagogue and she came up to me and said, my mother was called Heppner, do you think we're related? **[02:22:14]** This was forty years ago. No, thirty years ago. And I said, well, are you Jewish? Yes [laughs]. Does your family come from Posen? Yes. She's a cousin of mine. She lives in Muswell Hill. I lived in Muswell Hill. And we didn't even know each other existed. Her father, her grandfather wrote a history of the family. [Laughs] Somebody’s working up there.

You said that you didn't have grandparents, so as a child were you aware that you were [overtalking]?

Yes, I didn't have a grandfather, I didn't have a grandmother. Other people did. My mother had grandparents, my children, my grandchildren have grandparents, and they're landed with me [laughs]. And my study – you're not looking at my study, my study is a bomb shelter. And I'm – my next project is a website. I've got to put my material on a website 'cos most of it's typed, most of it is online but I might not have time. I was – my daughter says to me all the time, you can hire people to do this, a sort of a – 'cos when I was a director of the big company I was in, I had two secretaries working for me full time. But I just don't know how I'd explain all this to a secretary. What's your – how would you go about dealing with this if you have a lifetime of paper? **[02:24:05]**

I'll tell you after this interview 'cos –

Yeah. Because basically –

Unique situation, yeah, where you're sitting on so many things.

I've got a Czech library, I've got a family library, I've got the scroll of particular places and the whole Czech thing. I've even got – I've got a skeleton of the website. It's basically a big filing cabinet with about ten drawers in it, and it needs to be done. Okay. Let's have a look.

Well, not yet, not yet. We're almost finished, almost finished.

You've got a lot of cutting to do, haven't you?

Michael, is there anything else which we haven't covered, which you want to add?

Probably.

I mean it seems to me so interesting that you are the keeper of all the stories and that you know your parents' story also in that much detail, you know, that you know –

'Cos I bothered. But I think there's a great deal I don't know, an enormous – I probably know 15% of what there is to know, and some of it is unknowable. There was a question I – you know, of course I can't ask my mother or father. A question came up only the other- why did – how did that happen? I'll never know.

That was something I was going to ask you, we didn't – you didn't talk about it, when your father was arrested, did he ever talk about his stay in Buchenwald?

Yes.

I know there was some [overtalking].

It's all written down. How much –

Did he talk to you about it?

Well, [sighs] [laughs] this is the story. He was – he had been to prayers for the deceased wife of a friend of his and he came out of the house on the 9th of November and somebody says there's something big going on and they're arresting the Jews. **[02:26:19]** His brother, who ended up in Shanghai, for some reason – who lived in Gleiwitz – for some reason was in Breslau and Heinz and Ernest decided that they had to get out, so they got in his car and they drove to Berlin, towards Berlin, and halfway along the road to Berlin, or partway, my father said, what am I doing? I've left behind my wife and the baby. Why am I – where am I fleeing to? What am I going to do? And what's going to happen to them? So he turned round and he went back. And my mother had been visited by the Gestapo and where's Heinz? I don't know. He's not here. If he's not here by tomorrow, we take you in instead of him, and the baby. My father of course didn't know this was happening, and whether they would have done it, I don't know. Anyway, when he got back he realised that he had to brace himself for this. And the next morning at seven o'clock he was collected. Now, the normal story is how awful that was.

He said – in fact my father has written two versions of this story. One is the story that people expect to hear and one is the story that people did here. He said he was not collected by the Gestapo, he was collected by a policeman, who apologised on the way to the collecting point about what was happening. **[02:28:10]** That's not the normal story. His other story, which was written for the B'nai B'rith, was he was collected by the Gestapo. He wasn't. He was collected by the police and the policeman said they were very sorry that this was happening. He get [sic] to the police station, the local police station, he stayed – kept there for a while then he was taken on to the central police headquarters which was central not only for Breslau but for the area. And a cousin of his from fifty miles away was also there and they stood around for a long time and they were – eventually they were marched to the goods station and they had to get on to the train, all these men, hundreds of them. And there was no platform, they had to climb up onto the train somehow and the old people had a lot of trouble and the young ones helped the old ones and they went off and they didn't know where they were going. And I think they were on the train for two days and eventually they realised that they were in Weimar. And they got off – it was in November of course – and they got off and then the brutality started. They were then chased by the SA through the station with whips, like cattle and then they were boarded onto trucks and taken to Buchenwald where they were processed. And they had their hair cut off and they then were – and they had to endure the next period which was basically without event unless you were unlucky. **[02:30:14]** And if – and the guards felt entitled to do whatever they felt like with any of the people that they did. And I remember talking to John Rayner about his father who was very badly beaten. And my father learnt one trick which was when they were paraded – and they were paraded for long periods – you avoid being in the front row, you avoid being in the back row, you are in the middle. It's like being in a – don't ever go to a theatre show with a conjurer and sit in the front row, you know, [laughs] you're going to be taken on board as a victim. And, you know, but there was casual brutality and total disrespect for people. And then he wrote his postcards when my mother went to Berlin. His sister said she shouldn't bother to go to Berlin, she wouldn't get anywhere anyway, and this thing was bound to blow over, and she was the one that died in Auschwitz in the end. And so she was – also she knew she couldn't go anywhere, she was paralysed from the waist down, was on crutches. So, my mother went in and interestingly enough, my mother has never agreed to talk about what she did in Berlin. She clammed up completely. I have no idea. I can't begin to suspect what she got up in Berlin.

It's the one absolutely closed door. But she came back with a piece of paper from the Uruguayan embassy and it worked and that's all that mattered. **[02:32:01]** I don't know, what was I talking about?

You know, because I asked you about Buchenwald [overtalking].

Yeah, and so he wrote and she eventually got the permission and he was let out. But he had his hair cut for the last time the day he went out, so that when he got out, he was immediately recognisable as a – a criminal haircut. They were given their tickets and went to Leipzig where the Joint – what's it – the Joint committee, whatever it was called – greeted them with warm clothing and gave them a meal and put them on the train back to their hometown. And then the work started to get the hell out, packing and all the rest of it. Interesting thing about the packing, my mother was doing packing – my father was away for some reason – and she was being supervised by a policeman. The policeman said to her, I'm going to go out for an hour or two, I need a break. I'll be back in two hours. And she realised that he said that you can pack what you like, but she didn't do it because she thought it was a trap, and I don't actually think it was because there were plenty of decent people around.

So that's what she packed, all the clothing for you?

Yeah. My father's uncle – Kim's grandfather – Kim in New Zealand – my grandfather's brother – he was a pawnbroker in Berlin and he filled the hollow candlesticks with gold and packed them and took them to New Zealand and had money. **[02:34:03]** My mother was given the chance, not to do that, but to do more than she could do, and she thought it's a trick, I'll do this and they'll say, ah, what have I found here, you know, and we would have been in very, very serious trouble. But there were the good Germans, even in the police force. Oh, my mother's sister, Eva – Leo was Eva's – no, no, forget Leo. He – he didn't – my grandfather – neither of my grandfathers went to Buchenwald. My – Eva's husband didn't go to Buchenwald. Ernest – it was an inefficient system. The November pogrom occurred and there was great looting. Eva's boyfriend – oh, this is where you're going to say – who was in the Hitler Youth [laughs] – how can this possibly be true – or was in the SS – he was – it's unbelievable. He came round that night and said, for God's sake, your father must not go into

work tomorrow, and then ran off. He just simply said tell your father not to go to work tomorrow, and ran off. And he didn't go in and his place had been utterly trashed.

But you said that the matzah factory was closed after [inaudible].

It was closed for- I think economic circumstances. The point was it was in the middle of renov – in those days, whether Rakusens do this now, I don't know – in those days you rebuilt your oven every year and they were still rebuilding the oven in November. I think they started baking in January and the conditions were just not right to continue. **[02:36:01]**

Okay. The other thing I was going to ask you was about citizenship. Did you ever consider taking German citizenship?

I've taken it.

You have taken it?

I have taken it, Carrie has taken it, Zack's has taken it, Josie's taken it, Gideon's taken it, Callum's taken it and Hattie's taken it. We've – we're a German – we've all got a little button now [laughs]. And –

Why did you take it? Why did you take it?

Because I'm a European. I'm not a German, I am a European and England is part of Europe and I am not going to go and be a little Englander like Rees-Mogg. I am a European and this is my way of showing it, plus the fact that I can travel freely in Europe whenever I want to, plus the fact that I can go with my wife whenever I want to because she's a German citizen. She never took English citizenship. And it's a statement, I am a European.

Think about- with your history, about British immigration policies today.

Well, I am an asylum-seeker and I therefore have to be honest and say that I am very grateful for what Britain did for me and I don't feel that I can refuse genuine asylum. However, I do know that all institutions and all mechanisms are subject to abuse and the abuse is the thing which brings down a perfectly good system, and certainly the system is being abused. **[02:38:05]** On the other hand, I have to say that England is – Britain is getting what it deserves because we got an empire and we said to the empire, you're all welcome, and we never thought they'd believe it, and we're reaping the harvest that we sowed. But as so often happens, the people who reap the harvest don't like the harvest and they try to renege on their ancestors. So I'm aware that Britain is going to change utterly as a result of its empire and it is going to become a non-white country. I don't particularly enjoy the prospect. I wasn't one of the empire-builders that started this process. But you can see in Holland what's happening. You – the people come in and what can you do about it? And you also have these – the economic migration now is very much a matter of climate and geography. The fact is that the whole world is going to have to change because a great part of the world is going to become uninhabitable, and wars usually result as a result of water and land. And water and land are the two – and this is the economist coming out, you see – water and land are the two determinants of war and population. The people in Africa, on the one hand we're encouraging them to breed by helping them with medicine, on the other hand they've nowhere to go when their land is running out. **[02:40:06]** There's going to be the most enormous sort of situation like Joseph coming up from – into Egypt, they're going to come to the land of plenty, and the land of plenty is not going to be able to resist them.

And what do you think about the British immigration policy in the '30s? I mean your parents came because somebody was willing to help them on a domestic visa.

Yes, but it was a confused policy. There was negativism as well and the world was shutting its doors on the Jews and in the end, there was only Shanghai left. So, although the – I'm extremely grateful to the British [phone ringing, dog barking in background] –

[Break in recording]

You were just interrupted. We were talking about British immigration policy in the '30s.

Well, the British immigration policy is two issues. The first thing is control and the second thing is quantity. I believe that there should be a well-organised system of asylum-seeking.

Michael, sorry to disturb you but we're talking about not now, we were talking about – I asked you about the '30s.

Oh, the '30s, sorry, sorry. Well, the situation was that the world was closing its doors to the Jews, Britain appears to have been much more tolerant than others but not necessarily on purpose. I think we were lucky because there was a strong element in British society that was suspicious of foreigners and England for the English and all the rest of it, and I am surprised how tolerant and reasonable the English people were to the Jews because from what I have seen, there was a very strong element in British politics which was anti-Semitic and anti-foreigner. **[02:42:25]**

And do you think – I mean listening to your story, your parents were lucky and had found very good people. Do you think from your perspective, or from their perspective, it was representative of – do you feel – how did they see it?

Well, [sighs] I consider that we were lucky and [sighs] I don't know, why was it that there were so many people that we met that were untypical of the British? In other words, whether we met the people who actually saved us, that the big savers, like Beryl McIntyre, the Wilsons, the Colvins, or the small savers, like the Battens who gave me the storybooks, you know.

The Quakers?

The Quakers, you know. And all the way down the line there were nice people. Were those nice people typically English or were we just unbelievably fortunate? And did we ourselves in some way affect the way that people dealt with us? Because we were outgoing, we were not inclusive, we were not tribalistic. I really don't know the answer but I do realise that we were extremely lucky. **[02:44:05]** And I also realise that the Jews that came here from

Germany and Czechoslovakia and Austria were not a cross-section of the Jews from those countries either. They were the ones with a bit of get-up-and-go about them, a bit of initiative, the confidence that they could make a go of it, the ones that were proactive rather than passive, though we were passive [laughs] until we were kicked into being proactive. I think we were unusual as well.

Yeah, because at times I know many people were very unhappy in these domestic situations and the fact actually the history of the –

What do you mean by the domestic –

You know, the domestic – the people who worked in domestic service, [inaudible] a very hard time and also, they feel their history is not so known and we know about 20,000 women who came as domestics, so it feels to me from your story that your mother accepted the role and managed to run with it and to –

Yes, yes, yes. Well, I can tell you this, that down the road in Tollard Royal there was another big house, and it was owned by a very famous designer, Cecil Beaton. Cecil Beaton lived down the road in a house that later on Madonna lived in. And Cecil Beaton had German domestics as well and they hated it and they did not get on well. But my parents got friendly with them because they were down the road, and I didn't like them either. So, do you create your own situation? **[02:46:02]** But on the other hand, when she went down to Hassocks, my mother encountered the doctor's wife who thought she was going to blow up the bridge. So, she didn't have a completely clear run but she was unhappy there too. But certainly the – we did come across – and the people – so that's – so we had the – Cecil Beaton's people, we had the situation in Hassocks and the third situation was when my mother said goodbye to the Honourable Mrs Isabel Colvin, the daughter of the Irish nobleman, the wife of a top-ranking army officer in a family that was riddled with colonels, she kissed my mother. You didn't kiss people in 1938 [laughs]. You didn't kiss foreign, Jewish refugees in 1938. Hugging was not in. And she – so there was something – what was there? And she said to my mother, a) if ever you need help – and eventually she did. And also, please go to Bloomsbury House and tell them that we need somebody else and see whether you can get them somebody that's okay.

The person – the couple that came up was no good. The man wouldn't shave in the morning and was generally messy and dirty, and the wife was a lousy cook, and she fired them. **[02:48:05]** So did – who was to blame? If they had behaved the right way, they would have got the same treatment as Alice but they decided either that they were victims. If you go into a situation in a victim mode, you may very well be treated as a victim. So, you have these three or four little cameos and only one of them was successful. So, I think you – you make your history. But you can also have very bad luck and however good you are, the world is totally against you and every turn you make is no good. Let's face it, the only people that get assassinated are the good people. I don't know whether you've noticed that. But bad people don't get assassinated [laughs].

So Michael, what – do you have a message for anyone who might watch this video, interview, in the future, based on your experiences?

What shall I be- claiming? Why should I be telling people anything to do?

Because we're talking and I'm interviewing you.

Yes, yeah. Yeah.

I mean you have already some pretty good things to say about history, that's definitely a very good message.

Well, no, I – the only message I have, you've got to behave to people the way that either you have been treated, if you've been treated well, or you'd like to be treated. But my basic message – which is not the one you're asking for – to my children, is be curious and find out why things are the way they are. **[02:50:06]**

I think that's a very good message. Don't just accept something.

Hmm, understand it.

Look beyond [ph].

Yeah. I said to Gideon the other day – Gideon is a very, very gutsy guy. He's very, very outgoing. And I was in Covent Garden with him, waiting for his sister who was at dancing lessons 'cos she's a dancer of some consequence, and I – and we were somewhere in Covent Garden and I said, why do you think that road there is called Nine Dials? Or is it Seven Dials? Seven Dials, Seven Dials. He said, I don't know. I said, well, you ought to know. If you see a thing which says Seven Dials, you've got to say, why is it Seven Dials? [Sighs] I said, well, I don't know, Grandpa [laughs]. I said, "well, we've got to look it up. Get out your telephone and put in Seven Dials." "All right, Grandpa." He's a lovely boy, he's a lovely boy. And he got it out and he said, "oh, he says, hey, there's a roundabout around Cambridge Circus", he says, "and it's got seven roads going into it and it's called Seven Dials." I said, "now you know why things are the way they are." That's my message.

Okay, Michael. Well, thank you so much for sharing your life history with us.

Okay, okay.

Just wait for a little bit. Don't get up yet. Thank you so much and we're going to just look at your very, very extensive archive.

Well, I'm surprised you consider it extensive. I thought it was pretty normal.

I don't think so but we will show the few of your – some of your things soon. But now –

Okay. Well, I've enjoyed this. **[02:52:06]** It's taken me back a lot. And of course, to be honest with you, it's covered a tenth of what there is. And I know this because I've read – I've made a point yesterday rereading what's there and I thought to myself – I said to Ursula, I can't possibly read this but it's hilarious and it's good and I'm going to do one thing. My younger daughter is – has considerable theatrical talent, she hasn't used it, and her daughter is using it and it shows. And I want her to read into either a video or an audio, my mother's story told by my mother because it is terrific.

Well, maybe you can read a little bit out of it for us.

Yes, but I think it has to be done by a woman.

Okay.

I'll read it to you.

One second. We just have to sit quiet for one moment and then we'll finish.

This is…

[Pause from 02:53:24 – 02:54:29]

A bit like this?

This –

Wait. Not yet, not yet.

This is –

Not yet, not yet. Yeah? Okay.

This is the last act of my mother's father at the station in Breslau as we were getting on the train to leave Germany. He gave my mother this watch. Not the one – not in the box but the watch. And she said – he said, this is for the boy's *bar mitzvah*. And she kept it and she showed it to me periodically and I got it on my *bar mitzvah* and I've worn it on special occasions, on my wedding and when I did my exams at school and when I did my exams at university, but I didn't take it to America and I didn't have it there with me for my master's degree. And it still works and it's – it's his last act for me.

What are you going to do with it?

Well, one of my daughters is going to receive it. There's a lot of stuff to divide. **[02:56:00]**

And it's still working?

Oh, yes. It needs to be wound up every day.

So do you still wear it sometimes?

I have worn it on one or two occasions when my watch has broken down because it is always there. It's always there.

Just tip the watch-face towards me.

Yeah, then we can – yeah. Thank you. Michael, please tell us what you are holding in your hand and what you're going to read first now?

Well, my mother wrote down her story, Alice Heppner wrote down her story, how they came to England from Germany on the basis that they would become domestic servants, which was the only way that people could get in to the country at that time. And she wrote out her story and I've come across it and it really is – it's charming and it's also very revealing.

So please read a bit.

It's so – this is what she said: 'We came to England on a domestic permit to wait for our US visas. It became too dangerous to wait in Germany. We thought that we would have to wait only a few months. It was not to be only a few months. We arrived in England with our two-year-old son, Michael, on the 7th of July 1939 on a fictitious domestic permit. This permit we received through the kindness of an employer of a friend of my sister, who was in England in a domestic job since March. **[02:58:00]** The Home Office [inaudible] it was issued on the

understanding that we would get in touch with Bloomsbury House after our arrival, and this we did. We came from Hamburg by boat on a first-class ticket and all the money we had was £7 which we were able to save from the board money. Bloomsbury House allocated a room for us in a boarding house in Tavistock Square which was run by a couple. The man was white or English and the wife was black. It was the first black person Michael had ever seen and he was frightened. The situation was very strange anyway. The place was primitive, suitable for only a few days. After settling in this room, we went back to Bloomsbury House to attend their domestic agency. There we were introduced to a very charming, kind lady who after questioning us about our background and domestic knowledge, engaged us as a so-called married couple with immediate – and immediately offered us to bring the child. I was employed as a cook at 25 shillings a week and my husband as a butler at 15 shillings a week. She explained that her staff consisted of two maids, a chauffeur and two gardeners, plus a kitchen maid who would come in daily. I was frightened but we accepted of course.
[03:00:04] The lady was most encouraging and kind and we were told by the ladies who staffed Bloomsbury House how extremely lucky we were. The Honourable Mrs Colvin lived in a beautiful 12th Century country house, King John's house, the hunting lodge of King John in Tollard Royal near Salisbury. The house was beautifully converted into a modern country house without losing the old style. There was a large, beautiful lounge and [dog barks in background] – there was a large, beautiful lounge and a dining room – hold on. There was a large, beautiful lounge. The dining room had a stone floor with Persian rugs and a huge fireplace, a cosy morning room. Not surprisingly, I felt doubtful that I'd be able to cope with the job and we were very worried that I might not be able to cope with Michael as well in the beginning. We decided after consulting with my sister, who was with my brother-in-law in a job as a married couple, that I should leave Michael in a very good *Kinderheim* near Hassocks where they were employed. My sister had made enquiries about this house and seen it. The charge of the house was 25 shillings a week which we could afford, having still got Heinz' 15 shillings a week. Leaving Michael in this home was heartbreaking but we did not think that it would be a long time and my sister would visit him three times a week, also get visits by my brother-in-law's mother who also lived nearby. **[03:02:19]** She would also go often. However, when we arrived with Michael at the beautiful house, he joined the other children immediately in play and seemed quite happy. He was two and a quarter years old and had no English. We were told to sneak away. In any case, I consoled myself that I would

always fetch him should he be unhappy and it won't be for long anyway. Arriving at Salisbury station –

Michael, just to interrupt you, how do you feel reading those lines?

I'm happy.

No, how do you feel about the content of what [overtalking]?

Oh, it's good. I think it's right. I think it –

About leaving you there in that home.

I think it was – it was – it would not be recommended. It's not good practice and I did rather baulk at it. But the fact was, that I was apparently very happy there and that comes out later. Let me just read you the next little bit. Now, you remember this is a couple of refugees with great apprehension arriving in Salisbury, a town they didn't know, wondering what the future held for them. They were going to be – what sort of house would it be, what sort of conditions would it be? 'Arriving at Salisbury station, we were collected by a chauffeur in uniform who was extremely nice and chatty. We had a feeling that the lady had well-prepared him. **[03:04:03]** She must also have explained the situation to the staff. On arrival at King John's house, Tollard Royal, we were quite astonished at the beauty of this country place and very nervous and feeling very apprehensive. Mrs Colvin, a widow of about seventy, a beautifully preserved [laughs] and smart, elegant lady, introduced us to the assembled staff most kindly. I know now that it was a proper upstairs-downstairs affair. The housemaids met wearing in the morning a blue and white striped dress and a white cap and apron, and in the afternoon, a black dress, lace apron and a white headdress. There was a first and second gardener, a first and second housemaid, a chauffeur and the gardener had a –' Oh, I'll start that again. 'There was a first and second housemaid, there was a chauffeur, and the two gardeners, one gardener and one lady gardener. The other, a kindly old man with a friendly wife who lived in a nice cottage in the grounds and they often asked us to tea. The table was beautifully laid out and we were most interested to see how comfortable and peacefully they

lived. Something like this, we could not have imagined in Germany. **[03:06:04]** There was also Mrs Hunt who came in from the village. She cleaned the large kitchen floor, scrubbed and prepared the vegetables and did the washing up after dinner, scrubbed the wooden kitchen table, therefore Mrs Colvin employed kindly Mrs Hunt. The first housemaid, May, was also doing duty as the lady's maid. The second housemaid, Gladys, did the bedrooms, also our bedroom and we have two connecting rooms and one had a cot prepared for Michael. We were shown the servants' hall, a nice dining room with a large table always laid by a maid. I had to sit at the head of the table [laughs] but it was all made easy for us by May, who is still a good friend and still would not call me otherwise than Mrs Heppner, while I called the maids by their first names.' Even later on May always called her Mrs Heppner, never got out of the habit. 'There was also a settee and armchairs in either part of the room where I had plenty of time to sit and read journals House & Garden, Tatler, etc' [laughs]. Extraordinary. 'My duty was cooking breakfast, lunch and dinner. Tea was done by May. I cooked on an Aga cooker which was attended to by the kindly gardener. I cooked continental and I had no complaints. Out of beautiful roasts I made *Schmorbraten*. In the morning after breakfast I had to go and see Mrs Colvin to discuss the menu. **[03:08:02]** The daily menu was written on a slate and rubbed out the next day but the week's menu was prepared on a writing pad. I went to a cookery school for six months before we came to England, a reference was required for my domestic permit and Heinz went to butler school. He also had to have a reference. I was always a bit nervous when I went to see Mrs Colvin for the menus but she always told me how pleased she was with my cooking. I once made mayonnaise and filled it into a Heinz bottle. Mrs Colvin said that she would not allow a beautiful mayonnaise in a Heinz bottle and gave me a crystal bowl in a silver pot for the mayonnaise. But what was left of the Sunday *Schmorbraten* had to be minced and made into shepherd's pie with potatoes mashed on top. Even this seemed a success. It was served a dish which was put into a silver dish. Toad in the hole was also served in silver. It really looked good. The gardener always brought in every morning a big bunch of parsley for decorating the vegetables, also served in silver. The menu was never changed when visitors came. It was Monday, it was shepherd's pie. Whoever came, and very aristocratic neighbours and visitors did come, quite often Mrs Colvin brought a visitor to the kitchen and introduced me. **[03:10:06]** The *Schokoladentorte* and the egg custard were sometimes the reason. Breakfast was my greatest problem but there was always

my darling May who prevented me from sending in bacon uncooked or kippers uncooked or sausages –'

Michael, we need to step back. You need to go back a bit, we can't hear you on here. Yeah, thank you. Start again.

'Breakfast was always my greatest problem but there was always the darling May who prevented me from sending in the bacon uncooked, the kippers uncooked and who cooked the sausages for me and showed me how to cook English sausages. One learns very fast.'

Thank you.

It's crazy. I mean bringing the guests into the kitchen [laughs] to meet the foreign – to meet the refugee, I mean it's – what can I say? It's very ladylike.

So now you could show us this and also that she wrote in it and open the front page. But you need to show it. Frank, you need to instruct how to –

Right, well, I found this book among the papers collected by my parents. They kept everything. And it's called *Wie koche ich in England*. It's – translated it means 'How should I cook in England' and it's a German publication from 1938 and I believe it was given to the students at the cookery school where Alice learnt for six months. **[03:12:13]** And it's got inside it all sorts of little notes, like how to lay a table, how to serve, from which side and who to serve first and the correct etiquette and protocol for serving. And then she's got handwritten notes here, how to make pastry and these are obviously written in England when she got here, pastry for tarts, chocolate cream, and everything in English, the notes. And then there's a dictionary which says all the words you need to know in a house, like, front door is *Eingangstor* and- now this is word I never knew: cloakroom, [Ablageraum- sic]. So everything you need to know here, furniture. Oh, my goodness, page after page. Here's the food. Here's the food. Now, I bet you didn't know what the German for saveloy is. The German for saveloy [laughs] is *Knackwurst* [laughs]. I didn't realise that was a translation. Pease pudding, *Erbsenpüree*. Right here are all – a complete dictionary and then it starts with

weights and measures. **[03:14:04]** And here are some recipes, scrambled eggs, fried eggs, poached eggs, scotch eggs – none of those you'd make in Germany. Creamed eggs, carrot soup, celery soup, onion soup.

Michael, can you turn around and show us the page? Yeah.

Barley soup, vegetable soup, giblet soup.

Can you show us the first page then turn it around?

First page.

Yeah, the first one, with your mother's writing.

Right.

And just show it to us, yeah.

Those are my mother's notes.

Just hold it there for a second. 'Wie koche ich in England", Kitty Köberle. And on the left we can see that she noted how to serve, where to put the plates and cutlery.

Who to serve first.

And who to serve, which is slightly different.

That's really butler training. And then – oh, gosh, it's falling apart. Oh, I haven't – this is sad. It hadn't been like that before.

Okay, thank you.

And then these are – this is the dictionary with all the words that you might possibly – the types of room, the types of food, including some curious translations, and here the conversions- temperature, volume, and here start the recipes. I think she got this book at the cookery school. **[03:16:01]**

You think?

Yes. The book that she got in England was a small book saying how to behave in England [laughs].

Yes, please.

Okay, this book is called 'Helpful Information and Guidance for Every Refugee While You Are in England'. Helpful guidance [laughs]. How kind [laughs]. And it was given to the refugees when they came and registered at Bloomsbury House which they were required to do, to be legitimate in England.

And just give us an example, what does it say?

Right. Well, first of all, it tells you about – and it's in German and in English – so it tells you about the organisations which are useful to visitors, such as the German Jewish Aid Committee and the departments in Bloomsbury House and then all sorts of other organisations, the Society of Friends, the Catholic Committee for Refugees from Germany and the Church of England Committee and the Trades Union Congress and then there are other organisations like embassies and the Czech Centre and the Jewish Board of Guardians and that's in German again, that's right. And then it says how to register with your local police. It is most important for your own welfare and for the welfare of the whole of the Jewish community that you should read and carry out faithfully all the regulations printed in your identity book. **[03:18:04]** Immediately on your arrival you should register with the German Jewish Aid Committee at Bloomsbury House, Bloomsbury Street, London WC1, as a refugee coming from Greater Germany.'

Incidentally, the Bloomsbury House was a former Palace Hotel and I have eventually tracked it down. It's at Number 21 Bloomsbury Street. You will then be given a registration number. It will help you to obtain particular kind of help you need from the right department. At any time, you write to Bloomsbury House, please quote this number. The refugee organisations are overwhelmed with work these days, so avoid calling there after your first interview. If, however, you are sure that further personal interview is essential, please write to the department you wish to consult and ask for an interview. It's very interesting if you look at the translation here, how many words it takes to do in German, what a small number of words [laughs] will do in English.

Okay, just read us one or two pieces of dos or don'ts, what should they – what advice was given?

I haven't got – well, now we get on to a thing called loyalty, tolerance and sympathy of Britain and the British Commonwealth. The traditional tolerance and sympathy of Britain and the British Commonwealth towards the Jews is something which every British Jew appreciates profoundly. On his part, he does all in his power to express his loyalty to Britain and the British Commonwealth in word and in deed, by personal service and by communal effort. This loyalty comes first and foremost and every refugee can realise how deeply it is felt. **[03:20:05]** And then come a list; the Jewish community in Britain will do its very utmost to welcome and maintain all refugees, to educate their children, to care for the aged and sick, to assist in every possible way in creating new homes for them, a great many Christians in all walks of life have spontaneously associated themselves with this work. All that we ask from you in return is to carry out to your utmost the following lines of conduct, regard them please as duties to which you are honour-bound:
Number one, spend your spare time immediately in learning the English language and its correct pronunciation, refrain from speaking German in the streets and in public conveyances and in public places, such as restaurants. Talk halting English rather than fluent German and do not talk in a loud voice. Do not read German newspapers in public. Do not criticise any government regulation, nor the way that things are done over here. Do not speak of how much better that is done in Germany. It may be true in some matters but it weighs as nothing against the sympathy and freedom and liberty of England, which is now given to you. Never

forget that point. **[03:22:01]** Do not join any political organisations and do not take part in any political activities.

Thank you, Michael. What are your thoughts, then, reading this today?

I think it was very necessary, I think that many of the Germans would not have thought of some of the points that they're making, such as speaking loudly. I remember my father always used to speak loudly on long-distance telephone calls [laughs] because he thought his voice had to travel further.

Okay. Thank you, Michael. I think that's all we need for now. Thank you.

It's a pleasure.

[03:22:51]

End of part 1

Part 2

[00:00:00] Well, the Heppner family before the First World War was located in the province, Posen, which is the eastern extremity of what was then Germany and that province, Posen, became part of the new Poland after 1920 when Poland was recreated and my family had to leave Lissa which was where they lived, and relocated to Breslau. This photograph is taken in 1913 while they were still in Posen and it is a family photo of the Heppner clan at some major family event. The lady in the big hat in the front row with the little child next to her is my grandmother, Betty Heppner. And next to her is her daughter, Elsa, who was my father's sister. And next to her is Ada [ph] which was a cousin of my father. And interesting enough, in another photograph which was the last photograph taken in 1941, Ada [ph] is in that picture as well with my grandfather and Elsa. So that – those two appear next to each other twice.

Thank you.

This is the photo taken in 1916 in Lissa in what was then Germany and it's a picture of my grandfather, Isidor, and his wife, Betty, and their two children, Heinz, which was my father on the right, and his sister, Elsa, who was a year or two older than him. **[00:02:07]** Betty died in 1918 in the influenza epidemic and my grandfather, Isidor, was killed by the Germans after being deported from Breslau in 1942. And Elsa was in Theresienstadt until very late in the war when the mass liquidation of the – of Theresienstadt took place and she was killed in Auschwitz.

This is a picture that was taken in the summer of 1938. I think I was about fifteen months old or so, and with my aunt – my father's sister – and my grandfather, Isidor in *Kürassierstraße* in Breslau which was where my grandfather and his daughter lived. I've got a nice head of hair there [laughs].

[Break in recording]

Did I say '38 or '39 on that picture?

[Cameraman] Yes, please. Yes, please.

This is a picture taken in 1938 and once again it's with my aunt, who doted on me. I was definitely her favourite [laughs]. And the other lady in the picture is my nanny, Marta Bauer. I must have been about, I don't know, fifteen months old or so. **[00:04:03]**

This was the last picture taken of us before we left Germany and it was for my grandparents to have a record, a sentimental record of us before we left. The interesting thing about this picture is that my father's hair has recovered because of when he left concentration camp in November – in December 1938 he had been shorn and had a prison haircut. By the time this picture had – was taken, which must have been probably June or July 1939, his hair had recovered.

This is a photo taken on the ship MS Roosevelt which we took from Bremen on the – oh, from Hamburg I think, on the 4th of July 1939. We were first class passengers, which is why I'm sitting in that rather grand deckchair. And the reason that we were first class passengers was that we got more spending money – were allowed to have more spending money as a result and therefore we arrived in England with £7.

Well, here we are again on the trip from Hamburg to Southampton. We stopped at Le Havre and obviously we got off and had a look around, and there I am with my father, and this is July 4th or 5th, er, 1939.

[Cameraman] Yes, please, Michael.

All right? My parents were taken on as domestics by the Colvin family in Tollard Royal in Wiltshire, where my mother became the head of the household as the cook. **[00:06:06]** And this is King John's House, the mansion [laughs] where the Colvins lived. She was the cook in charge of everybody and my father was the butler.

This photo was taken in October 1939 on a picnic in Tollard Royal in Wiltshire, where my mother was the cook at King John's House. And the interesting thing about it is that I'm in this picture because when they started working there in July, they boarded me at a children's home in Ditchling, Sussex, 'cos they did not feel that they could do the job properly with having to look after me in Tollard Royal. However, Mrs Colvin, who was the employer, realised that my mother was missing me and so they sent for me in October to see whether I could stay there and live with my parents. This must have been in that short spell in October. But I became very disruptive and they had to send me back to the children's home [laughs]. So, this was the interlude when I was there with my mother and father.

This is a picture taken of me obviously in a very happy situation at the children's home in Ditchling and the house was called The Almonds and I was very happy there. I got on very well with the other children, though I couldn't speak any English when I went there in July but by the time I came back to my parents, I was speaking English and not any German. **[00:08:06]**

August 1939, I must have been, oh, two and a quarter. This is me with the lady who ran the children's home. Her name was Miss Edmonds [ph] at The Almonds in Ditchling, where I was very happy even though I was out of contact with my parents, though Miss Edmonds [ph] wrote a letter every week to my mother, you know, with a report on how I was getting on.

[Cameraman] This page.

Yeah.

Although my mother and father were very much appreciated at King John's House in Tollard Royal in Wiltshire, it was simply not viable that they worked there and I was in the children's home in Ditchling, so in December of 1939 my mother got a new job in Hassocks which was near Ditchling and the five pictures there are taken of me visiting my mother from the children's home while she was working as the cook at Hassocks Lodge.

Thank you.

In December 1940 my mother and I were required to leave Sussex because we were too near the coach – the coast, and by a stroke – an extraordinary stroke of luck Dr Louise Farnam Wilson offered my mother the job as housekeeper in her empty mansion in Wimbledon and we moved in, my mother and I. **[00:10:03]** My father by that time was interned on the Isle of Man and it was not until 1941, April I think, when he came back from the Isle of Man and moved back in to – moved in to the house in Wimbledon where we lived. And this picture was obviously taken in the summer of 1941 in the very large garden of this very large house where the three of us lived together with my aunt and we had sixteen rooms and umpteen bathrooms. And it was [laughs] just an extraordinary situation but it's prevented – because it was occupied it prevented the house from being requisitioned, which was what the owners were concerned about.

[Cameraman] Yes, please, Michael.

Well, this is rather a tragic photo. It's the last photograph of my grandfather, Isidor. And on the right-hand side of the picture is my aunt, Elsa. And on the left-hand side is my grandfather's cousin, Ada [ph]. And this was taken in Breslau before they were deported. That's the last picture we have of them. My grandfather was deported in April '42 in the most horrific circumstances and deported to the Kolomea ghetto [present-day Kolomyia, Ukraine] in eastern Poland or Lithuania or somewhere like that. Horrific journey and everybody was killed on arrival. My aunt, Elsa, was deported to Theresienstadt where she lived, survived there until October 1944 when she was part of the liquidation, the mass liquidation. **[00:12:06]** And I think Ada [ph] was there as well and was part of that same terrible massacre when they cleared Theresienstadt as they knew they were losing the war.

This picture was taken at the front door of the house in Arterberry Road, Wimbledon, where my mother was house-sitter, housekeeper. And I'm there on the right, in the front with my father and my mother. And they were visited by friends from my father's childhood. Fred Aronson []ph was also from Lissa, where my father was born. And an interesting thing is that whereas our family came to England and stayed there, they were caught in transit to America when they arrived in England and they stayed in England until the end of the war. And this picture was taken shortly before they continued their journey to Pennsylvania, where they settled as originally planned.

This is April 1945 when I had my eighth birthday and my present was a bicycle. This bicycle is extremely significant because it was made by my father. You could not get bicycles, and certainly not brand new ones, even second-hand ones, at this time and after the war. And my father had to create that bicycle from spare parts. **[00:14:02]** Not only was that a considerable achievement, the remarkable thing was that when he came to England from Germany in 1939, he was in no way a practical man, with no technical or engineering experience. But because he was then trained as a toolmaker in order to be engaged in war work in the armaments industry, he became an engineer and had the confidence and the understanding to be able to create a bicycle, including for example, the complicated work of assembling ball bearings, because this bicycle had – was a complete wreck and he had to

rebuild it from nothing. And he showed himself to be a good engineer, to everybody's surprise, including his own.

This is taken in Devon when we were on holiday in 1950. We went there by car, a small Austin car. And Devon is very hilly. We were in Lynton. And we had to get out of the car because it [laughs] – it wouldn't climb the hill with all the luggage and all three of us in there. So, I'm wearing also my school blazer to show that I've got into Haberdasher's. Obviously, my mother wanted to make a good impression.

This picture was taken in the town of Kolín in the Czech Republic, where we have been on a memorial project for forty years with the town, memorialising the Jewish community there. **[00:16:03]** It' s my project really. And this is me with the scroll in the synagogue. I had retired by then as the research director of the Memorial Scrolls Trust but my interest in Kolín was continuing.

And for how many years were you the research director?

I was the research director for eight years, from 2002 to 2010.

Thank you.

This is the family, the Heppner family at the celebration of my daughter, Carrie's, fiftieth birthday in 2021. There we are, my wife, Sue, and I am there on the left. And then there are the two children, Gaby in the blue top and Carrie on the far right, with their husbands and the five grandchildren, the two boys, Callum and Zach, Gideon, Josie and Hattie.

Thank you.

Right.

[Cameraman] Yes, please.

I was born on the 1st of April 1937 and this is my birth certificate which I see is dated the 5th of April 1937. However, I can see also that this must be a duplicate or a copy because the actual document is dated the 25th of August 1938. Of special interest is the additional endorsement in the top left-hand corner. Like all other Jews, I was required to add the name Israel to my name, and this endorsement on the 6th of February 1939 formalises the fact that I am now Michael Israel Heppner. **[00:18:12]**

[Cameraman] Yes, please.

This is one of two postcards that my father sent to my mother from Buchenwald concentration camp. Curiously, they're both of – given the same date, of 18th of November 1938. They were required to report that they were happy and well and they were not – there were considerable restriction on what they could say. In the second postcard he actually asked for her to send him certain items of clothing because it was very cold. So, this – this letter, or this postcard says virtually nothing. It says that he's well and happy and sends his love to his wife and to the little boy. And most importantly, he cannot receive any mail, he has *"Postsperre"* ["mail ban"].

This is – this is the second postcard from Heinz Heppner number 27901 in Buchenwald. **[00:20:07]** For some reason it's the same date as the previous letter but it is more specific in its content. This postcard, so first of all, it says it's pointless making any reply. However, it is requesting a packet, a parcel, containing some socks and boots and, and trousers, sports trousers because it's cold. Then he says it's, don't send any letter with the parcel and you must address it exactly as stated on the card. So, he's asking for clothes because it's cold there and he hasn't got the right clothes.

This is the receipt from the American consul in Berlin confirming that my father is now on the waiting list for a visa to go to the United States. This document is dated the 18th of January 1939, which was very late and there's absolutely no chance of number 29,339 getting processed in any – as they say, any time soon. **[00:22:12]** And this is why they decided that they also had to take the opportunity to try and get to England. Incidentally, you will see that it is made up that it – my father's on the Polish waiting list and I am on the Polish waiting list

as well as his son, but he was in fact born in Germany in a town which became Polish in 1920. But although he has been a German citizen all his life, he is down on the Polish list as far as the Americans are concerned. My mother, being born in Breslau in indisputably Germany, she was on a separate list, the German waiting list.

This is the bill of sale confirming that jewellery and silver, which had to be surrendered, had been taken and I think the value was 71 Marks, which is probably less than 10% of its actual value. And you will see that the donor [laughs] is Heinz Israel Heppner, who is obviously a Jew.

[Cameraman] Yes, please.

This is the exit advice dated the 4th of July 1939. It's actually dated the 3rd of July 1939 for an event on the 4th of July 1939 when we were certified as having left Breslau and our destination is given as Ditchling in Sussex. **[00:24:10]** This is the town in which our guarantor was living and we actually never went to Ditchling at that point. We went straight to London where we then were interviewed and my parents got the job in Wiltshire.

This is the identity card that was issued for me on the 9th of June 1939 as part of the bureaucratic chain of documentation for leaving the country because it was issued on the 9th of June and we left on the – shortly afterwards on the 3rd of July, sailing on the 4th of July. This –

One moment, one moment.

The importance of this identity document for my father, its importance to me, is that it shows him with his prison haircut. When the men arrived in Buchenwald the first thing that happened, was they were shorn. And this photo was obviously taken a week or two later when his hair started to grow back. But it certainly isn't a very flattering hairstyle and not typical of how he [laughs] actually looked. **[00:26:08]**

This is my mother's passport which also mentions me. I think it's import – it is dated the 6th of June 1939, obviously just prior to being – our leaving the country. And it was extended twice in England by the Swiss embassy that was acting for Germany but after the second extension we became stateless.

So here you see on the 6th of No – on the 31st of January the passport was extended till the 6th of November by the Swiss legation acting on behalf of the German government.

[Cameraman] Yes, please, Michael.

This shows for my mother's passport the departure date of the 4th of July, the arrival date in Southampton on the 7th of July and the visa they granted in Berlin for a single journey only [laughs].

[Cameraman] Yes, please.

My mother's sister, Eva Josek, was sponsored to come to Britain in March 1939 and then her sponsor suggested that she could also bring over Eva's sister, who was my mother.
[00:28:16] So this letter came from the Jewish – German Jewish Aid Committee in London to Eva who was there by that time living and working in Clayton, which was next to Ditchling in Sussex. And it referred to your friends, who in fact are my mother and father and me, and this is the letter which tells them how to go about giving the undertaking that would enable us to get domestic permits to come to England, which we managed to do in July and arrived just in time to beat the deadline of the war being declared.

When my mother eventually arrived in Wimbledon, which was the third place that she'd stayed in first – she had worked in Tollard Royal in Wiltshire then she had worked in Hassocks and then she was required to leave Hassocks because it was too near the coast and was – had the extreme good fortune to be asked to house-sit in Wimbledon. So she registered with the Domestic Bureau in – with her address in Wimbledon and then had to report weekly to the Labour Exchange where I think she collected £1 seven and sixpence which comes to

about just over £5 a month, which was reasonable money in those days. **[00:30:02]** She was employed by the Domestic Bureau at Bloomsbury House as a domestic servant.

So, my mother had to report weekly to the Labour Exchange to renew her permit as a domestic, and I believe to collect some money, which went from £1 seven and sixpence apparently to £1.10 which was £1.50 by our – today's money. And that was from 19 – November 1940 to March 1941, on that card.

My mother qualified as a cook after a six-month training course in Breslau and one of the support documents that she received was this thin book about how one cooks in England [laughs]. And it contains not only a lot of hints on how to behave, including how to serve a table and all the conversions and translations into English, but also twenty-four pages of English recipes, spelt out in German, including such favourites that Germans had never heard of, such as toad in the hole and Irish stew and bread and butter pudding, all of which were faithfully translated [laughs] into German with the instructions. **[00:32:02]** She also had a much better cookbook which she received from the cookery school in Breslau, which she used for the rest of her life. The interesting thing was that in the big house in Tollard Royal the first thing she did was serve them Continentally-cooked beef, [laughs] *Schmorbraten* instead of roast beef, and the English people found that they preferred *Schmorbraten* to roast beef [laughs].

Thank you.

This is the inside of the slim cookery book which was interesting for various reasons. First of all, on the left you can see she has written in how to serve a table, that you serve on one side and you collect on the other side. And also, there are some extra recipes which I suspect she picked up in England, probably from the other house staff at the big house, who showed her how to cook chocolate cream and she scribbled that on. She's incidentally writing in English, not in German.

This page is rather amusing because it shows that my mother had marked two favourites from the family, the Colvin family. And one is toad in the hole [laughs] which translated into

German is *Kröte in der Höhle* and shepherd's pie which is translated more literally as *Schäferpastete*. **[00:34:01]** So she had to learn liver and bacon, silverside and dumplings, all completely foreign to any German but essential food if you're serving an English household.

I believe that this book was given out to the refugees probably at Bloomsbury House and it's designed to help them avoid making mistakes in dealing with English people, both simple points about etiquette and the peculiar way that English people behave compared with the way that Germans behave.

So here are some examples of hints on how to be a German in England during the war [laughs]. Well, the first hint says learn the English language and its correct pronunciation, which is a tall order because most of the Jews – Jewish refugees spoke their English with a very strong accent. My mother was often – she had a soft accent but people were always curious to know where she came from and they all thought she came from France. During the war you were advised strongly to refrain from speaking German in the streets or in public and also to notice that the English do not speak in a loud voice, which is the opposite of the Germans, and [laughs] do not read German newspapers in public. I don't know which German newspapers they were referring to, probably the refugee papers that were created for the refugees. **[00:36:06]** Do not criticise the government, do not speak of how much better things are [laughs] in – are in Germany, and do not join in any political activity and do not make yourself conspicuous by speaking loudly, nor your manner or dress. The British – the English greatly dislike ostentation, loudness of dress or manner or unconventionality of dress or manner. That's a very useful piece of information.

Thank you.

One of the last acts that took place on the platform at Breslau station on the 3rd of July 1939 as my parents left Breslau with me and said goodbye to their parents. My mother's father brought out a small package and it contained a watch that my grandfather had had the foresight to buy and to give to his daughter so that she would have a *bar mitzvah* present for the little boy, who was aged two at the time, when he was thirteen. And this watch was the last gift and the last act of father and daughter on that station and she kept that watch

carefully for the next eleven years and gave it to me at my *bar mitzvah*. **[00:38:15]** There was only one occasion when she let me wear it before I was thirteen and that was to take the entrance exam for Haberdasher's and it brought me good luck and I got in to Haberdasher's. That watch became a totem for me and I wore it on every special occasion, such as again every exam I took at university I wore that watch, and every special occasion in my life, including occasions even now, I will wear that watch.

Thank you.

These are the keys to Heinz's first car which he bought in 1936. He got married in 1934 and he bought his first car in 1936 and it was a DKW, *D-K-W* [pronounced in German]. Interestingly, he saved the cost of delivering the car by travelling to the works at Zwickau in the south of the country and collecting the car there himself. **[00:40:15]** After 19 – after November 1938 Jews were not allowed to own or drive a car, so Isidor, my father's father, had to sell Heinz's car while Heinz was in concentration camp at Buchenwald. Somehow they kept the keys and he treasured the key even though he no longer had the car. It was a symbol of what he had achieved with his first car.

In Germany my father, Heinz was in no way involved in engineering or even what we would call DIY [laughs]. He was not a practical person at all. But when he came to England and he was in the Isle of Man in internment, he opted – instead of going into the army, he opted to be trained as a toolmaker and to work then in a factory making aircraft parts. As part of his six-month training as a toolmaker he had to pass various tests to show his skill and making precision items. **[00:42:02]** And this is one of his test pieces which he had to create out of just pure, plain, sheet brass. And it's a working model of a wheel which drives a cog and it works perfectly. He discovered that he was very capable of doing engineering work. His notebooks from the training centre are testament to the thoroughness and diligence with which he addressed his challenge. And the curious long-term result was that although after the war he was released from the factory making aircraft parts and he went back to the timber business which was where he had served his apprenticeship, when he later became redundant as the timber business changed considerably, he bought an engineering tool distributorship.

And of course, he put into practice what he had learnt all those years back as a toolmaker. And he was selling the tools that he had used for the first time as a trainee.

Michael, thank you so much for sharing your story and also your very, very extensive archive of documents, photographs and artefacts. Thank you so much.

It’s a pleasure.

[00:43:47]

[End of transcript]

[4:06:34]