IMPORTANT

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

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee POB:	Budapest, Hungary

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV232

NAME: George Donath

DATE: 28th February 2019

LOCATION: London, UK

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Jana Buresova

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

The interview is with George Donath, in London, on the 28th of February 2019.

Thank you very much indeed for kindly agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Thank you. May we start please by your giving us your name, and where you were born and when?

Well, it's- that is classified information, but I will tell you anyway. My name is George Donath. I was born in Budapest in Hungary on the 13th of October 1930. And I was born - and I think I still am- how should I put it - a Hungarian of the Jewish faith - which is unusual because I've been living here for seventy years. But one doesn't change, some people try. I don't know if I tried- I may have tried but I didn't succeed and I don't really want to succeed anymore. So that is where I am now.

Could we go right back to your parents?

By all means.

If you could give us your names - their names?

I mean, my- parents, my father was called Gyula Donath, and my mother, Livia Donath. Livia Donath. Her maiden name was Vigodny. They lived- they were married and they lived- in the beginning of the lives - their first, I don't know, forty years, fifty years of their lives - in a suburb of Budapest. An industrial suburb north of Budapest called Ujpest, which in a way doesn't exist anymore. It was amalgamated into- into Budapest. It had- it was a suburb. It had about 60,000 inhabitants. Of which round about 15,000 were in fact Jews. We don't know the exact numbers and it varies- varies with time. My grandparents, all four of them, lived in- in- in Ujpest. Ujpest, the history of Ujpest to touch on that very quickly, was a township established as a village originally, in about the 1840s, by the Count Karolyi, who had this land which was really useless for agriculture, and they started- they wanted to build houses and they did. And they attracted people and they attracted factories, particularly tanneries, particularly leather factories, because the river was there, there was water, the effluent could be got rid of. So that was a useful place to- to, to have it. The first inhabitants were about fifty-fifty Jews and non-Jew. Most of the Jews came from northern Hungary, and starting with my paternal grandfather, he came of a town called Varín in the county of Nitra in- in what is now Slovakia, it was Hungary at that time. He was a- an engineer. I mean, not an engineer in the sense that he went to university. He could fix things, and he was- he was very good with his hands and he could repair things. He- he was sent by his parents, with two friends from the same village, in- in- in Varín - it was a small town actually - to Vienna as an apprentice. To describe their financial conditions, they had one pair of proper trousers amongst the three of them, so they could go out every third Sunday. The one thing that did happen I think to all three of them - one of them actually was not Jewish - that they learnt- that they became bilingual. Nobody in our family spoke Yidd- well that's not true, my grandfather- my maternal grandfather spoke a certain amount of Yiddish. But the rest of us, no.

[0:05:02]

We were more- mostly bilingual in Hungarian and German, and this grandfather particularly so. And he was very Viennese. Very full- [coughs] very full of humour. Played- played jokes, told jokes and I'm told I look like him. I always sort of think… I am foolish enough to act like him. Anyway, he was- once he finished his apprenticeship he was offered a job in Ujpest

in a factory manufacturing various kinds of alcoholic drinks, where he became chief engineer. And his job was to walk around, and if anything stopped, or anything was wrong, he would then put on his overalls and fix it. He had a machine shop where he had- he built various parts. And- and- and- and he did that. He was entertained and looked after by a family of goose merchants who were dealing in- in geese, who happened to have a daughter who I'm afraid wasn't particularly good looking, but I'm sure was a very nice girl. Anyway, cut a long story short, the daughter's family managed to talk my grandfather into marrying her and he did. And they had three children. A daughter who was the oldest and two sons, of whom my father was the youngest. My father was born in Ujpest in 1896. And was brought up there. In relat- well, in comfort. What actually happened in the- just at the- just- just at the very beginning of the war, my father finished high school in Ujpest, went to university, wanted to study to be a doctor. He was accepted. He started. Then he was called up into the Hungarian Army and stayed there for the rest of the war.

This would be the First World War.

[0:07:39]

That's the First- I'm afraid yes.

Yes.

I- I haven't got any further yet, but I'm working on it. Don't worry. And during that time, I'm not quite sure which year, but probably 1913 or 1914, the owner of the factory where my grandfather worked, was discovered as being gay. And that was a terrible thing in those days. He was haunted, and eventually liquidated the factory. And upon liquidation, he made a present of the workshop to my grandfather, who then set up business in that workshop doing repairs for all the other manufacturing industries - primarily the tanneries, but some textile factories as well - in Ujpest. And, you know, he was doing that. And during the war of course that was quite- quite easy- quite easy to do. When my father came out of the army, it's not absolutely clear why he didn't continue his studies. I think part of the reason was his father who needed assistance, and was not a businessman, he- he needed somebody to run the business for him. And also it had something to do with Numerus Clausus, with the first Jewish legislation in 1919. In theory, he should have been allowed to go back. In practise,

looking at his- his books and his- his study books, he interrupted his studies quite unwillingly. Anyway. So he went in with his father. They developed this machine factory, added a foundry, and prospered reasonably. They never became very wealthy, but he was comfortable.

May I just interrupt you just for one moment, please? What were your grandparents' names?

[0:09:43]

Names? My grandfather was Josef, Josef Donath. And- and my grandmother was Berta- Berta Goldstein. Goldstein [English pronunciation]. I couldn't tell you exactly which year they were born, but you know they were born quite- quite soon. On the other side of my family, my- my grandmother came from a very old Hungarian family, from also in a, in a, in a town in- in northern Hungary, in Slovakia, called Privigye, which you may or may not have heard of. He, as a, as a wedding present was given a vinegar factory, which was a monopoly in those days in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, so he never had to work. He and his wife, and oddly enough his wife's maiden name was 'Donath'. Was 'Sarah Donath'. But we are not relatives as far as we know and I can tell you about the name of Donath afterwards if you're interested. They produced ten daughters, would you believe? My grandmother being number eight. After this great feat, my grandfather fell in, I think with card sharps, but that may not be true, and lost everything. He lost his vinegar factory. He lost his house. He had some land. He lost his horses, he had four in hand. And he was- he was a handsome looking gentleman, but never worked. So he couldn't stay in Privigye, and they decided- he decided with his ten daughters to go to Budapest, where he couldn't work either - he didn't know how to work. And the daughters couldn't find any work either. Two of them managed to get married, the two oldest ones. So then he decided he will go to New York. That was the nearest place that he could think of. He went there with eight daughters. There his problems – at least the financial problems - were solved, because the eight girls were just at the right age, and found work on the Lower East Side in the sweat shops, sewing. And they all became very good seamstresses. Cut a long story short, three of them got married in the States. And one, who stayed in- in- in Ujpest, met this young man who just arrived from Poland, and worked in a tannery. Was a handsome looking chap. And he said, "This is for my sister Antonia" - she was called Antonia Krisztina, would you believe? Sent for her. And she came back, and they

were- they were- they were married. They got a grocery shop, which used to belong to the sister but the sister and her husband found it hard work.

[0:13:00]

My grandfather didn't mind hard work and ran that grocery shop for about five years and made a lot of money in it. I mean, he did incredible things. He was cheating people by giving them one grade better flour and- than it said on the box, and everybody thought he was an idiot. But they bought everything else from him as well. So anyway, they, they- they- they did- they did very well. My grandfather got to Budapest also for a very odd reason. He had a grandmother as most people do. The grandmother didn't have any sons, but he needed somebody. [becomes emotional] I had to say *Kaddish* for her. So, I don't think he bought, but he got my grandfather from his parents. And the grandma said to him, "Look, you be a good boy. You say *Kaddish* for me, and I will make certain of your future. I will give you an envelope and that will look after you for the rest of your life." What was in the envelope? I mean, she died eventually. He did say *Kaddish.* He- he was actually a- he was selling beer on the streets of Warsaw at five o'clock in the morning when the people were going into work. He was- he was sort of buying barrels of beer, and putting it into bottles and selling it to the workers and that's how he kept his grandmother. And he got this envelope and what was in the envelope? An address, in Budapest of an uncle or a cousin of the grandmother's or a nephew of the grandmother's, who was a tanner. And it said, "You go there." And he went there, and he got a job. And he learned the trade, and got married and then he made his money on- in- in the shop, in the grocery shop. And then he established a tannery. He was incredibly successful. I mean, he really made a lot of money. He was very different from my other grandfather. My other grandfather was a gentleman. Was- was- was well-respected, active in the community. He was- he was treasurer, apart from the Jewish community, in another seven communities, because people trusted him. I'm not saying that nobody trusted my other grandfather, but he certainly wasn't asked to be treasurer nor was he interested in any community activity. My grandmother was. As I say, he was very successful. They lived in Ujpest. And their two children met. There was a large age difference between my parents. Twelve years. My father was twelve years older than my mother. They got married in 1928. They had, as far as I understand and the stories I heard, a very big wedding, because my maternal grandfather wanted to show everybody who he was. And to give you an idea, and I'm showing off slightly, they had twelve bridesmaids and twelve groomsmen. And they

were sort of parading and so on, in the- in the Ujpest synagogue, which was fairly new at that time.

[0:17:04]

And the- the- the- the security man happened- was the fireman, fire service man at my father's factory. So, you know…so, they were married. I think they lived fairly happily and- and, and in prosperity. As I say, my father never was rich. He was comfortable. He operated a business, he was respected. And he carried on like that. My grand- my other grandfather was extremely ambitious, wanted to make money. In the height of the depression 1933, he bought a very large tannery, and as well in- in- in Budapest. Everybody said, "He's going to go broke." Instead he prospered and he made a- made a big success of it. They moved away from Ujpest, from the- from the small town, which was not a very pleasant place, really, and into Budapest. I was born in 1930. We lived in a house which was to some extent odd in those days because people- well, it was a house but it had two additional flats for a housekeeper, for a housekeeper and- and- and whatever. Which was given to- to my parents by my maternal grandfather, which was the accepted practice in those days. My sister was born in 1932. And we lived quite happily.

What was her name please?

Anne Judit. Anna Judit. Anne Judit. We went to Jewish elementary school in- in- in Ujpest. And- and there were- there were- [overcome with emotion] That is tough. There were forty kids in our- our class. Well, in my class. And another forty in my sister's class. I have a photograph which you can have if you want to, showing the forty kids, and one teacher, in 1940. Five survivors. [upset] I'm sorry.

Take your time; it's all right.

[0:20:14]

I am one. There is another one in Israel with whom we keep in touch. And to this day we don't understand why it's us. Anyway, things went along quite happily. There was- I never felt any anti-Semitism. I never felt any- I was never called a "dirty Jew" in the street. I don't

think my father ever was, because my father was respected. He was at school with the- with the Protestant minister and they were friends. And my grandfather had this non-Jewish friend who established a- a copper foundry next-door to him, and they played cards together. There was no- harm. My- my grand- my paternal grandfather was a bit of a character in a way, because he used to go- in the factory, he would only work when there was a problem. Then they came to him and he had to solve it. If at three o'clock in the afternoon there was no problem, he went to play cards at the club, and he went on the tram. But he would send a message down to the porter to stop the tram for him. The porter stopped the tram, and the tram had to- this was a single line thing and it had a bypass just outside the factory. Two trams had to stop, and they stopped. And nobody ever protested because- because- because- because!

Looking back to your childhood, would you say that it was very comfortable, very privileged or not?

Very privileged, very happy. I mean, you know things that were done which today would be unacceptable. For example, my sister and I shared a bedroom. And every morning at six o'clock a workman came in to light a- to lay and light a fire in a- in a- in an oven, only in the winter, I'm afraid. We didn't have any air conditioning, so there we are. So it was a very comfortable, very happy childhood. The first, I mean, we- we were Jewish. We went to synagogue. There were services for- for students every Saturday afternoon. But I also went Friday nights. And on the High Holidays, my grandfather had a very close friend who manufactured salami, and he used to bring a large packet of salami for the family on the one day- there's one day in the year which is special for salami, it's called Yom Kippur and then he brought a large salami in the- in the synagogue. Everybody knew he was arriving with his salami.

[0:23:12]

But salami is usually pork.

Well, it was pork salami but on Yom Kippur you're allowed- you know, you're not allowed to eat anything anyway. He made- he made pork sausage, he made- you know. And that's what he brought. That's what he had.

Did you feel very religious as a child?

No. No.

Or did you rebel at all?

No, I didn't rebel. None of us rebelled. We were conformist we were, we were secular. You know, in Hungary you had the Orthodox and the so-called Neolog Jews. We were Neolog. We observed what we wanted to observe. We didn't have a kosher kitchen. My- my father was active on a Saturday, so was my mother. They went- even my father used to go to synagogue on a Saturday morning for a couple of hours. And he was on the- my- my grandfather was of course a treasurer and my father was on the, what I think could be called the Board of Deputies. I mean, you know, the population was not as large as here, neither was the Board of Deputies, but they were respected members of the community, if not particularly religious. The first time it came home to me, being Jewish, there was, as I mentioned Numerus Clausus. And in the local grammar school, there was a six percent limit on accepting Jews. Well, the number in Jews in Ujpest was rather larger than six percent. And for some reason or other, my father, who went to the same school in his day, wanted me to go there. And was moving heaven and earth, talking to everybody that he should, that we should go there. It so happens that a lot of other kids my age, coming from the same Jewish school and also from other schools, didn't get in. And there was a Jewish *Gimnázium*, a Jewish secondary school in Budapest which was a much better school I think. And they went there but they had to go on the tram every morning and come back. And my father had this ambition. I remember two things, the first was that when my father went to the- went talking to the assistant headmaster, this man, who was- who taught him in his day, as a young man, apologised to him that he has to come and- and- and beg. That he should- that I should be accepted. Anyway, I was accepted. The first day at school, they say, "Well, we have to have officers of the class. Who is going to be the president, so they name a president. Now they name a- a secretary or something. Come to treasurer, "Oh, treasurer has to be Jewish. Jews, stand up." So there were five of us. You know the six percent became five. So we stood up. And we were singled out. This was the first time this happened.

[0:26:25]

How did you feel about that?

I felt awful. I must admit, I felt better because I was made the treasurer. And I knew that my grandfather was a treasurer in various places before me, so that was a slight compensation. But, I felt, for the very first time, truly and really different. And we used to live not too far away from the school. The kids used to come in after school and play. We had a fairly large yard at the back of the house and we used to play football there. So you know it was a very happy- my parents I think were much more conscious of things. They were conscious of legislation. My father had to employ additional white-collar staff to make up the numbers in the factory, which turned out to be very fortunate. He employed two gentlemen from Transylvania who turned out to be very nice, and very helpful. And, well, I- I- think that's that I learned afterwards, their principle was: anything we can fix with money we don't worry about. And there was nothing in those days that you couldn't fix with money in Hungary. I had an uncle, my mother's brother, who emig- well, didn't actually emigrate, but he established a tannery in England in- in Cumberland. And my father considered together with a son of this salami manufacturer, to move to England because of conditions, and set up a salami factory because there was a very great shortage of salami in England in those days. And there was also a shortage of leather, that's why we set up the tannery. But that's a totally separate story. Anyway, they agreed and they went back. And they told their fathers this is what they're going to do. And the fathers were horrified. Said, "How can you do that to us? Leave us here? Old people, all by ourselves? What are we going to do with the business?" They said, "Fine. Don't worry about anything. Everything is going to be alright. You don't have to worry. You know we've been living here. Two-hundred people…" - I mean, for my father's case. I mean, the salami factory had probably less people. "People working for- you know, they love you. You are good to them." And that is very true, cause that is another difference between my two grandfathers. My maternal grandfather was a very hard taskmaster. Was very tough, very rough with his workers. My paternal grandfather was just the opposite. He would go around every morning, the factory, and hand out cigarettes to- to all the workers who smoked. And that was only about ninety-five percent. So he handed out, I don't know, a hundred cigarettes a day. Maybe more. Mind you he smoked- he smoked another hundred, so- and he smoked very expensive cigarettes that I remember. Anyway, we were really oblivious of being discriminated against. We- my sister and I as- as children, and our friends. And our friends- we had Jewish friends but they were not exclusively Jewish. I

had very good, very close friends in the- in- in- in the grammar school I went to. You know, with whom I played football, or with whom, you know, we went to matches and saw each other.

[0:30:28]

May I ask the name of your schools?

Yes, Könyves Kálmán –

I'll get that later. [both half-laugh]

Sorry. K O-

Oh, don't worry. I'll check the spelling later. Please, if you could just repeat the names?

Könyves Kálmán. Könyves Kálmán. He was a king of Hungary, who was supposed to be a very enlightened king, who- who- who could read and write. That's why *Könyves* means "bookish". And Kalman is Kalman is the- is the name. And he was the one who declared, in 1200-and-something, that there are no witches. And he was the first one in Europe to do so. But he wasn't Jewish either, you know. And anyhow-

And the other school?

Venetianer Lajos. And I mean, Venetianer Lajos was a very well-known and very respected rabbi in Ujpest who died just before my parents wedding. And his- his- he's also a theologian and he published and- and- and lectured both in Budapest and in Vienna. I mean he was also bilingual like- like most of them. He was - by all accounts - I didn't know him - an exceptional individual. And the school was named after him. And a street- before that, a street was named after him in- in- in Ujpest. So you see, we were not- we were not bothered.

No. You mentioned earlier that you also spoke German. Was there an ethnic minority of Germans in Hungary?

Oh, yes.

Or was it because it was a useful language at the time?

[0:32:22]

Yes, there was an ethnic minority, but that was not the reason. No. We- we spoke what we called *Hochdeutsch*. And- and the- and the ethnic minority were Saxons and they spoke Swabian. And we understood each other, but only just. But they were totally, you know, we had no- we had no problem and there was no …They were- they were very hard-working people, but sort of not as clever as the Jews. And they- they didn't establish- yes, they established some industries. Not as much- not as many as the- the Jews. I don't want to bore you with the history of the Jews in Hungary and why that- why that happened. Why this- this entrepreneurship happened. I don't know whether you want me to tell you about that.

That they were- well perhaps that they were very enterprising.

They were very enterprising, but they had the opportunity. And how the opportunity arose. Well, now that you mention it, I will tell you very, very quickly. In- in- in 1867, there was something called the *Ausgleich* [compensation] in German. There's no English translation for the word. It was an agreement between Austria and Hungary, establishing the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Hungarians, in the Hungarian sections, all of a sudden realised that they were not over fifty percent. They were not in the majority. But, there were a million Jews sitting around the place all wanting to be Hungarian. We were all very Hungarian- well, not me, I wasn't there. But to give you an example, this great-grandfather I mentioned was born in 1849, and his father never saw him because he was killed in the Hungarian War of Liberation. So they said, "We will emancipate them." And they emancipated them, and all of a sudden everything opened up. And that coincided with the Hungarian version of the industrial revolution, with a financial revolution, establishment of banks, insurance companies, factories and incredible prosperity, of which the Jews took part and in which they were instrumental, and where they collaborated with the aristocracy primarily, rather than with anybody else. I don't think in the long run that helped anti-Semitism. I mean, but, so what can you do? But that was the reason. And in a way, my grandparents came at the end of this. Being entrepreneurs, starting their businesses in the 1910s… the whole thing, the whole

prosperity – I mean, prosperity wasn't finished but the- the- emancipation finished in 1919, when Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory, the Hungarians became a vast majority in Hungary and they said, "We don't need the Jews." So, they started with anti-Semitic legislation the first one being Numerus Clausus. You know, we had- Mr. Horthy was the first fascist ruler in- in Europe and now we are lucky enough to have one in the person of Mr. Orban, whom you may have heard about. Just as fascist as Mr. Horthy was. Anyway, that's digressing. Getting back to our life in the 1940s, we were, you know, we were fine. The war was going on, but we were on the side of the Allies - but we didn't tell anybody. My father listened to the- to the BBC every evening, and discussed the war with his friends on his way home from work and- and he used to go to the club where my grandfather was. But my father didn't play so much cards; he just went for the- for the gossip. And-

Did he trust the friends, because-

[0:36:26]

Well, those were- those friends, I think, were in the majority Jewish anyway. But- but he did trust the friends. The- the people-

Because this could be very dangerous-

You see, whilst there was a dictatorship under Horthy, we never felt threatened. People did speak their mind. Today, they talk about horrible things that have happened, and they may have done. The Communist Party was outlawed, definitely, the Social Democrats were outlawed, yes. But, you know, Horthy had two bridge partners, had two bridge games a week. One with a family by the name of Goldberger who were not Irish, would you believe? And they had the largest textile factory in Hungary. And, and the other one was [Dr. Ferenc] Chorin, who was- who was the grandson [-in-law] of Manfred Weiss who was a big industrialist, heavy industrialist, also Jewish. They were friends. They were together. So, you know, it was unimaginable that we would be threatened and we could- I don't think my father ran around the street telling people that he- he wanted the Allies to win. But- but he wasn't terribly worried about that. We- the one thing that I knew worried them and they talked about- you see, there was conscription in Hungary, and I'm not quite sure, they were in 1940 or '41 when this- when they declared, that Jews are not trustworthy enough to go into the

army. They have to go into special labour forces. But, they have to serve the conscription. Now, this was a separation of a sizeable portion of a very valuable part of the Jewish population. But, you know, people accept anything. And initially, these boys went and they dug ditches and what have you, until war- until Hungary entered the war with Soviet Union, at which time they were- started to be taken as- as cannon fodder.

And which year was that please?

[0:39:22]

Hungary entered the war in '41. They started in- in- in '41 and it came to 1942. It entered the war- the son of Mr. Horthy was killed in strange circumstances, shot down in an, an aeroplane, probably by the Germans pretending to be Russians, which then made- made them enter the war. There's another interesting anecdote connected with that. In 1919, the Numerus Clausus rule was sponsored in a Hungarian Parliament by somebody called Count Paul Teleki, who argued, and it was valid argument, that we don't need all those lawyers and doctors and what have you. We have to limit them. So this is why we have to have Numerus Clausus. He was considered an anti-Semite, because he was against the Jews. Come 1941, he is Prime Minister at that- at that point, he is being forced, or being persuaded, forcibly, to declare war on the Russians, and refuses. And one fine night commits suicide in order to protest. That was a dichotomy among- he hated- he disliked the Jews on the one hand, on the other hand, he wasn't going to go to war with- on the side of the Germans. What is the explanation? I don't know. There was another Prime Minister by the name of Karolyi who- who was- who we are told used to dance the *Csardas* - two to the left, two to the right. Two to the Russians, two to the Germans. But I mean that was the way Hungarians tried to live. One thing happened in 1943. My maternal grandfather, the tanner, was accused of industrial sabotage in his own factory where he was- he had a- he had about 15,000 hides. And there were a hundred soldiers which had a portion the hides which belonged to the army, which went wrong. Went bad. And he said, "Oh, don't tell anybody. I'll replace it with my own. Forget it." Because he didn't have such good relations with his workers, he was denounced. He was sentenced in a military court for two, three years' imprisonment, which as it happened saved his life, but there we are. And he was put in jail. And he was in jail. He became ill. Was transferred to a hospital. I became a bookseller, because the- his jailer was a philologist, wrote books on the history of the Hungarian language, which my father

published. And he was delighted. And then we realised that the books weren't selling, that the books were rubbish. So, I was sent round to all the bookshops in Budapest and Ujpest, buying up these books. Taking them home. [laughing] And I remember we had hundreds of these damn books at home, all piled up. His name was Zsuffa. He was a- he was a colonel. Anyway. So, my grandfather was in- was in jail.

What were you doing, in terms of studies, in this interim period?

[0:43:13]

I - I was studying at a normal secondary school. I went from the secondary school in 1941 and 1941-42, and 42-43, and 43-44, I was- I was in- in- in secondary school. And we lived a normal life. I mean it is- it was uneventful. The few events that I mention to you, that I bored you with, may or may not have any importance whatsoever. But we had a comfortable middle-class existence. Respected by not only Jewish community, by the Hungarians. There were undertones of anti-Semitism, I'm sure. We didn't note- I didn't notice it. I was a kid. My father may have done. He never complained of it afterwards. My mother- again, it's an anecdote. There was, when she- when she was still at- at high school, she went to- she finished high school in '26. This must have been in about '24, '23, there was a national competition to write a prayer to the God of Hungarians. You see, there was a special God of Hungarians. There still is, you know? Ask Mr. Orban; he'll tell you. Competition to write a prayer to save us from the aftereffects of Trianon or, or reverse the Peace Treaty. And lo and behold my mother won the national prize, in- I think it was the year '25. Because we were - and this is why I think I still am - Hungarians of the Jewish faith, and more nationalistic, more xenophobic, if you like, definitely more patriotic than anybody else. To some extent, it was our downfall. Because we stayed. We were there. We were right, in a way, until the 18th of March 1944. And during the night of the 18th of March to the 19th of March, the Germans occupied Hungary. It was from a The 18th was a Saturday, the 19th was a Sunday. And in the morning my father woke up, listened to the radio and heard that the Germans have entered.

[0:46:12]

Did he discuss all these things with [inaudible]?

Sorry?

Did he discuss all these things with you?

I don't know about "discussing".

Or did you hear them?

I think I really heard them, rather than discussing. Look, I was thirteen years old. I was- I had no contribution to make, but I listened. I- I- was- you know, it sounds very, very presumptuous, but I was a reasonably intelligent child. I heard. I understood. I- I- I knew I was lucky, because some of my classmates in the- in the elementary school did have anti-Semitic incidents in the- in the outskirts or in the, in the poorer neighbourhoods, but nothing where we lived. On the morning of 19th of March, I heard the radio also, I mean, you know it was in Hungarian. And it was announced that the Prime Minister resigned. The German ambassador was made- was the new prime minster. The Germans have occupied Hungary to be protecting it against the uprising of- of… I don't know, nasty individuals, or left-wing individuals of whom the Mr. Horthy was all of a sudden one. We didn't know what was going to happen. We used to go every Sunday to my grandparents for lunch. Of course my grandfather wasn't there anymore, he was in the hospital. But we went anyway. And my grandmother was there and presided over the lunch. My uncle of course wasn't there. My aunt was there and- and we were there. And we lived in quite a nice street. They lived in quite a nice street in Budapest. And all of a sudden we see these Mercedes - black Mercedes - drawing up in front of the houses, and black uniformed soldiers getting out. I don't think we realised they were Gestapo, but I now know that they were Gestapo. Went into a couple of houses, dragged out three people. One was this Mr. [Dr Ferenc] Chorin whom I mentioned, who lived there. The other one, oddly enough, was an Esterházy. Esterházys were the number one family in Hungary. Nothing to do with Jews, but they lived there, and they made a mistake. Apparently there was- there was another gentleman - whose name I don't know if I ever knew, but I certainly don't know now - who was also taken away. Esterházy was let out, because he managed to tell them who he was. Apparently, they came into the house where my grandparents lived and asked the concierge, "Which is his flat?" And he says, "Don't look for him, he's in jail. They took care of him already. Don't worry about him." And they left. I mean, you know, what- what the concierge said was true. I think if they would have

taken my grandfather, he would not have survived. As it was, he- he did survive. Anyway, there was not a lot we could do. We saw this. Took just- just to fill in the cameo about Chorin. Chorin was an extremely wealthy man, and he controlled this very large industrial complex. And there was rivalry between the SS and the Hungarians to get Jewish assets. They were not all taken away from us, that is a fallacy. They weren't. There was a man by the name of [Kurt] Becher, who was an assistant of Eichmann's about whom I will tell you a little bit later, if you still have the time for me. It's going on for a long time, I'm sorry.

That's perfectly fine and it's not at all boring.

[0:50:33]

Well, you're very kind. Becher wanted this industrial complex, and not to have it in Hungarian control. So he brought back … Chorin from Mauthausen, and did a deal with him, which gave him a twenty-five year lease on the plant. Not ownership. A twenty-five year lease. And gave Chorin a train, on which to- he- he could take sixty people, sixty members of his family to Turkey. And they went! And this was- I mean, a lot of money changed hands and- and- and jewellery and I don't know what else. Chorin - Chorin then ended up in New York. He must have had a certain amount of money, but he made another fortune. And what does he do? He finances Horthy in Prague- in Portugal, because he was his friend. And he said he owed him one. Maybe not- he didn't finance him a hundred percent, but he gave him a, you know, standard, steady income. Anyway, so we are now on 19th of March. We go home. Jewish legislation starts coming in. First thing is Yellow Stars. So we all put on the Yellow Star. More people have to go into forced labour, so my father who was under fifty, is called up and is taken- taken- taken away. We have to move into a certain district of Ujpest. Not in- there was no actual ghetto. There, there was an area where there were certain houses. It so happened that my father's factory was in that area. And my grandparents had their flat and lived in the factory, which was quite usual in- in those days. We moved in there and we put a big Yellow Star on the entrance to the flat. And the- and the workers take- took no notice. Respected us. Respected my mother. My grandfather was already dead. My grandmother was there. My aunt, who was also a widow-

What was your aunt's name, please?

[0:53:20]

Eszter Donath. Mrs. Kértesz. We all lived there, and you know, we were still the owners and they looked- they treated us as such. And- and we needed money, we went to the- went to the office and we got money. And those two Transylvanian employees whom I mentioned, behaved incredibly well. They looked after us, helped us, and- and for a long time afterwards. I'll tell a little bit about them, maybe. One of them was a Catholic priest who fell in love with a lady, resigned the priesthood, married, and had a son and moved from Transylvania when Transylvania was annexed - re-annexed - to Hungary, to Budapest and got employment from my father. He had a son. He was an incredibly nice man. You know, the- the opposite of everything you hear about the Catholic church- clergy these days. But in every way. And I knew him for a number of years afterwards, but also at that time. The other one was a lawyer, had a very nice wife, who became very friendly with my mother. And they had two children. They, especially she, was an extremely religious Catholic person, who gave everything to the Catholic church. My mother used to send her parcels, you know, after we were already here in England. Most of the parcels went to the- went to the church. In the end she ended up in a, in a monastery and where she was very ill - a place called Emmaus, where you and I… went to see her in the- I think it was in the early seventies, and she was on her deathbed. I'm not sure if she even recognised us. I mean, we'd been in touch, but- and I've been in touch a number of years. Her daughter died quite young, and with a- the son was a- a weight lifter and an Olympic weight lifter and then he became manager of the Hungarian team. I'm sorry, this has nothing to do with what you want to hear.

But clearly, these people- you're very attached to these people and-

Oh, yes!

And they're part of your life-

[0:56:09]

Oh, yes, oh, yes, very much so. I mean, look, they come- they'll come in to the story again a bit later. Anyway, to go back to March, April – '44. My mother was a Zionist activist. She believed in Zionism. My father tolerated it. He- he- he made my mother belong to the type of

Zionist who want other people to emigrate on other people's money, to other peoples' land. But my- my mother worked. Looked after refugees. Went to the border where there were Polish refugees, and heard a lot about what was going on quite early on. Actually that was going on - (Is it alright? My leg? A beautiful leg.) – before March '44. And they were re-exported eventually. A terrible thing. Anyway, but, my- my mother was always in touch with WIZO and with- with the Zionist activity. She founded WIZO in Ujpest and- and- and would you believe, was treasurer? So we, we heard about Zionist activities. Her sister worked in a- in a- something called the a "social organisation"-

When you- when you say sister, was this Eszter or…?

No, that was my mother's sister I'm talking about now. I'm sorry, I'm- I'm mixing you up. I'm also mixed up, believe you me.

OK. What was your mother's sister's name?

Márta Vigodny. And it is- it is during this activity that- that she met her husband. And- and they were married. They were married in- in May 1944.

With your mother's activities, she must have been very aware of the problems in Poland which had started much earlier?

[0:58:52]

Oh, very much so. Very much- but my father wouldn't believe it! He believed it, but he said, "Yeah. Those are dirty eastern Jews. I'm not like that, and this is not like Poland. This cannot happen to me. It cannot happen here. Look, these are the people, they love me." And they did! And they do! Well, from the other side, because most of them are there. Anyway. My mother was aware. And it was really my mother who was probably the moving force in trying to get us to- to move to England in the thirties. And- and my father was- without my father's help and my mother's help, my uncle who was a young man then, could never have made it to England and could never have got their- their father to help him and finance him and what have you. I mean, all that- but that's, sort of, detail. No, my- my mother was continuously active in that, and believed and knew about it. And then we were, we were being

concentrated into these houses. And this was going on in- in- in the whole country. And even started in Budapest, I believe. Now deport- actual deportations, which started in northeast Hungary which was the religious …you know the expression, 'a shtetl Jew'? They were shtetl Jews there. We were- you see, they were- they didn't call themselves "Hungarians of the Jewish faith". They spoke Hungarian. They also spoke Yiddish. They didn't speak German so much. So there was a distinction. And to some extent we looked down on them. But this is where the Satmar Rebbe comes from, and- and, you know, it's- it's it was a- that is where it started at the very beginning of May. There, and in Transylvania in the town of Cluj. And this is where a man by name of Kasztner, whom you may have heard about, became active. He was not the head, but he was the- the- the motive force of something like- something called the Zionist, the Va'ad [Council] in- in Hebrew. He was from Cluj. I'm not quite sure in what order should it be- he- through a colleague, got a connection to Eichmann, and negotiated with Eichmann all along, and saved - in my opinion – [with emotion] many thousands of people. But to me, most important, saved me. Anyway, the deportations started. We knew about it. Nobody can pretend that we didn't know about it. There were attempts made by the Germans to mislead us. To say that we were deport- we were- we were taken to a place of work. They called it *kenyérmesö [bread fields]*. They organised masses of postcards, which were ridiculous because I remember seeing a dozen postcards being handed out, always the same text: "We are fine, send you our regards." No postage stamp. They were - you know? I mean- it was childish but- but people believed it. My father wasn't home. My father was in- in this camp. And my mother heard - as you say, she was quite well informed - that the turn of Ujpest is coming the next day. She organised a country gentleman to pick us up during the night and take us into hiding during- during the- in- in the countryside.

Which- would you know the date or- or roughly when your mother heard about these-?

Well, this was in- this was in June.

June.

[01:03:55]

It was about the 26th or 27th of June 1944. The end of June. You see, we were really the last ones to be deported, to be taken - in Hungary. So, she made- she gave this man a certain

amount of money. The porter at the factory at the gate was on our side. We were waiting at the gate. My mother felt terrible, because she felt she couldn't take her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law because they were too decrepit. But she wanted to save her children. We stood and we stood, and the one who didn't come was this man. He kept the money, that was nice. And- and we stayed. The next morning the Hungarian gendarmes- it was the gendarmes who did the deportations. The SS were just not visible. And the police wouldn't take part. But the gendarmerie who were the country police, they had- were dressed very distinctively. They had cock feathers in their cap, and they were carrying guns and so on. They came for us. And marched us out. I shall be grateful for one thing on that day. There was not- I mean, it was a work day. The- the factory was operating. There were two hundred people working there. Not a single one was visible. They didn't want to know. They couldn't save us, I mean, they would have had to sacrifice their lives. We were chased down the street. I'm afraid most of the rest of the population were jeering on either side. I remember one incident. My mother, who was a very thoughtful woman, realised that we don't have any bread. Don't have any. So there were two little girls standing there, and she said to them, "Please little girls, go into that bakery. Tell them Mrs. Donath wants to buy two loaves of bread but has no money. They'll pay for it at the factory." And the girls went. Brought the bread. And the bakery was paid. I mean, that - the bread I saw. About the bakery being paid, I learned afterwards from both- it was these Transylvanian gentlemen who made sure that they were paid.

[01:07:10]

So, we get to the railway- there was no railway station in Ujpest. The railway station was in a place called Rákospalota, so it was a nice little walk of maybe four or five kilometres. And there we had- we had this audience on either side and they were having a good time. And we were carrying- I mean, my mother years- for years afterwards said, "I never realised we could carry so much." I mean, it was a bloody- sorry- a waste of time. But I mean, we did carry it. We get there and there are the wagons so we are going to the wagons. And we've got numbers, up to eighty. My mother ends up, number eighty, into the wagon. The two of us, my sister and I, are out! Into the next wagon. So my mother, I don't know how, got out. And screams that she's not going to be separated from her children. And the gendarm *rendör* [patrolman] comes with a gun and hits her with the back of the gun. And she says- she says, "You can beat me to death, you can shoot me?" - nothing doing. She won. So we- we got into- all three of us got into the next wagon. And after a few hours, we ended up in a brick

factory in Budakalász, which is in the outskirts of Budapest. It was a concentration of Jews from the northern suburbs of Budapest. I don't know whether they are today: Ujpest, Rákospalotapest, Erzsébet, places of that name – Kispest was somewhere else. There were 25,000 Jews there. A brick factory is an ideal place for this sort of thing, because whilst there is cover, it is also open. So they could supervise us. There was one single SS there. All the others were Hungarian gendarmes. There was a railway – a sort of suburban railway, if you like - going past. And had a stop in Budakalász, outside the factory. There were dozens of people walking out and getting on the train. Nobody stopped them. Nobody stopped them, they couldn't be bothered for a few, and they- you know, it would have created a commotion then maybe more would have gone. They went. I remember that very clearly. The other thing that I remember, and this friend of mine in- in- in Israel was there, and there were other people there. But what I remember very clearly, that at night, there were lights playing. Whether they were search lights or- or not to let us sleep. To- to- to- to reduce resistance. I mean, the Germans were, I mean they- they were the masterminds. The- the Hungarians were just the- the [inaudible]. And- and they just- they took care of every, of every detail. Anyway, I think we were there for five nights. We certainly were there on the night of the 1st of- the 1st of July, so I'm probably wrong on the 25th, it was the 26th of June when- it was the first bombing of Budapest and you could watch it. And we loved it. I mean, the sight that people are being bombed. Wonderful. The next morning, the wagons were ready, and we're going to be put into the wagons. There is a- there are six names circulated in the camp. Ours is one. My mother, who was really the head of the family, because you know, who was there to- well, we were teenagers by then- well, my sister wasn't. I may have been a teenager. My- my grandmother and my- my aunt who were not really, they're not really with it. I mean, my mother was a- you know, was an active, strong woman. She told me afterwards she puzzled, should we report? Should we answer? Is it good, is it bad? She found the other family from Ujpest. There was only one other family from Ujpest on the- on the list. There were six names. And apparently, they decided up till now we didn't have a name. It has to be something - not bad. So we reported. We spent a day - in the what I think could be termed the *Appellplatz* in- in- in Auschwitz, the central place surrounded by stones, and not allowed to stand up but sitting down, and a couple of gendarmes looking after us - watching people being loaded into the trucks. There was another sight which we saw. There was a tannery in Ujpest called Kaufer, Lajos Kaufer. Very short-sighted, a very strong man, big strong man but very short-sighted, almost blind. And he was being- he- he was not serving in the- in the labour force, because of his eyesight. And he was being driven by the- by the gendarmes, and

so on. And one of them pushed him with his- so he turned round. He was shot instantly. There and then. It's probably the best thing that happened to him, but it was a- you know, dreadful sight. Anyway.

[01:13:40]

It must have been a shock for you as a teenager to see these things happening.

Well, it- of course it was. Of course it was. Look-

And frightening.

Sorry?

And frightening.

It wasn't. You know, it's an interesting thing, and I've thought about it a lot. I was never frightened. I will tell you other things which happened as we will go along. I was never actually frightened. My mother wasn't frightened either. She had fear. I was very nervous apparently at one point. I don't- you know, I don't know about that, but I- I- I- my mother told me but that was at a later stage and I'll tell you about it. I had a strange faith – [with emotion] in my mother. That she will look after us. Which she did. Anyway, we are sitting there, and all of a sudden a lorry comes, and we are told to get in. So, we get on this lorry - about sixty people - the Bernsteins and ourselves, and the lorry drives out. There- there is- there are no gendarmes on the lorry. There is an SS. And we are going. And we realise that we are going into town, not away from town, into town. I mean, even as a child I could recognise the buildings and- and, you know, and I knew, I mean, I'd been there before- not all the way to Budakalász, but I'd been on- on- on that side. We are going into town. Next thing we know we arrive at a building which I also knew. It was the Jewish Deaf and Dumb Institute. And we go into the back entrance and there are hundreds of people there. And we got off of this- this- this lorry. And they say- they say- we are being welcomed, and how nice, and you know, "congratulations you are here" and- and- and we are fed. That was the camp established by Kasztner, with, I mean, not by Kasztner in the sense, just as an individual, by the Zionist Defence League, by the Va'ad. And they collaborated with Eichmann, in

removing people of their choice from the camps. So we had people there from all over the country. The famous train, Kasztner train, had already left. This- my mother's sister was on it. As were some other relatives of hers. There were 1,800 people. I don't know if you want any detail at this point about the train, but let me finish about what happened there.

[01:17:40]

So you had your mother's sister-

My mother's sister was already gone. My father, my mother, my grandmother and my aunt, my paternal aunt, my father's sister, my sister and I, the five of us, arrived there as a family unit. We were told that we were saved. That we were- my mother found it difficult to believe. And to her dying day, blamed herself for not taking- nobody would have known if we had taken another half-dozen children that were not hers. But who the hell thinks? So we were given a place to sleep and- and I got a job in the kitchen, would you believe, which was very helpful because I could- I could steal food. I mean the food- there was no- we were not starving there. And Kasztner, and a man by name of Ottó Komoly who was the head of the Zionist organisation in Hungary- and his nephew is here in Manchester, a friend of mine, were there. The next day would you believe another two families from Ujpest came. We did not pay a penny for anything, didn't know of anything. To this day, I am not certain- I can give you the speculations about why we were chosen. These two families were wealthy families. One of them was extremely wealthy. The other one was a lawyer and they were friends. They paid a lot of money to be removed. And that was done through Kasztner and Eichmann. We shall never know the full details, because they're not going to talk about it. They told us as much as I think they told anybody, because we were there together and they were- I mean, my mother was friends- friendly with- with both these ladies. And they were there, they arrived. The train had gone. We knew that the train had gone. We were told that there would be another train. We were waiting for that train. You know, we felt safe. One of the odd things was, that we could send word to the factory in Ujpest to the two Transylvanian gentlemen. All the other white-collared workers were Jews. So they were not there anymore. They came and visited us and brought us money. The- the factory was still ours. We had all through from here on, all through the time that I'll tell you about, until so-called liberation, we were not short of money. We- we- we, you know, we could draw money from the factory and somehow or other there was always money there. How the hell it happened, I don't

know. Sorry about the- about the language. So, these people brought money. And my mother said, “What can I do? I mean, I want to help.” So they said, “Well, we need to build some- some covered places to- to- to allow these,” - there were 800 people there, and there were I think 200 deaf and dumb at the best of times - “Where they can sleep.” So my mother said, “Well, I’ll pay for the timber.” Or something. And anyway, so, I shall never forget we had first choice of the place in the new hut that was built. The first choice was nearly as good as the last. But- but we did have it. So we, you know, we- we lived there happily. I worked in the- in the kitchen. I had a friend who was running the baths, so we- I- I- had to help him clean the toilets. He was- he was from Szeged. He also ended up in England. And- and we were there.

[01:22:35]

The war was going on. We even managed to communicate with my father, who was not out; he was still in Hungary. In a- in a- in a labour camp. He couldn’t come and see us, and there was no question of that. So we were there from the beginning of July. And by September, it looked like things were going to improve very much. And the deportations have stopped. I mean, historically the deportations have stopped early July, partly through Kasztner. Well, Kasztner not so much did stop - the delay. He managed to get delays. And then Horthy had pressure put on him and he actually brought troops to Budapest to stop the Germans and- and he could have done that a lot sooner, but he didn’t. And in September, we felt, you know, we can leave the camp. And we left the camp, and we left and went to live in my maternal aunt’s husband’s family home. In Budapest - in the city. And we were living there and we were hoping things were- quiet and- and- and happening. Along comes the 15th of October, another fateful date. And I remember walking down the street with my mother and of course wearing a Yellow Star and a German officer comes the other way and spits on us and says, *“Saujuden”* [anti-Semitic term]. And my mother said, “Something has happened.” Because this was not said to us all the time in- from July onwards. And something did. The- the- Horthy tried unsuccessfully to change sides. Was arrested. The Arrow Cross, Nyilas in Hungarian, took over, and the terror started. My mother once again decided that this is not for her. And in the middle of the night we marched from this flat which was- without Yellow Stars, went to one particular house, asked for asylum, we were not allowed in. Went and marched to a farm near my grandfather’s tannery, who was a nice man, and who was a friend of my father’s. My father looked after him, and he took us in. [Phone rings]

[01:25:55]

They took us in, and they fed us. And we were there for maybe a week, ten days, I'm not absolutely certain. And my mother's sister's husband had a man, a- a non-Jewish man, whom he paid and who looked after things that needed looking after in his place. And somehow or other we managed to get word to him where we were and he came to see us. Now, whether that was a mistake or whether somebody else from the tannery recognised my mother, which is unlikely because my mother didn't have so much to do with the- oh, I left something out. I'll have to go back in a minute. But anyway. The next thing we know the police arrive, arrest us together with this man, and take us to the police station, which was, in a way, fortunate. They didn't take us to an Arrow Cross house. They took us to a police station. Can I just go back? [sound break]

[01:27:15]

The choice of why we were saved, why I thought. I thought for a very long time, that it was my mother's Zionist activity. And it was the Zionists who organised it. And it was Otto Komoly who was head of the committee making the choice and in- and in his diary - and he was killed eventually by the Arrows Cross, but in his diary - he says how terrible it was to make these choices. Until I met some other survivors, who had nothing- who were not Zionists, who had nothing to do with Zionism. They were prominent individuals, or the families of prominent individuals of various provincial towns. And that made me believe that it may be [coughs] that my father had some merit in it. I'm very glad my mother didn't hear this. She died before- I mean, my mother was ninety years old when she died but she didn't hear about this- this particular theory. Although Kasztner was accused of saving the prominents. And of course, I don't think he gave that answer, but I am doing it. How do you save a nation? My- by saving the street sweepers, or by saving the people who produce? And who are in fact prominent? And it doesn't have to do anything with money. And- and I'm the proof. Not of the prominence, of- of that you don't have to have money. And Kasztner was accused with all kinds of things and I spent a lot of time defending him and still do. And shall. He was murdered eventually in Israel. Assassinated. But you know, I- I'm not sure that fits into this story. But if you like I can fit it in. Anyway to jump back to where we were. We were taken to the- to the police station. The police didn't know what to do with us. They

didn't want to hand us over to the Arrow Cross, because that would be the end. So there was a prison in- in Hungary, which was called Tolonshaz, which means 'transfer house', where undesirables were taken. Pimps, prostitutes, petty thieves. You know not large criminals but- and that was under police control. They sent us there.

[01:30:35]

Do you know why the police came? Did someone inform them of you?

I am not certain. I think, and subsequent things suggest that, that my mother was recognised by one of the workers in the tannery and denounced. But I don't understand the coincidence, why the police came at the time this man, who was my uncle's strongman if you like, was there. And I suspect, and we discussed it, that he may have been followed. And they knew it would lead him- he, he would lead them to something. And he lead- he led them to us. So I'm not sure which of the two scenarios, I'm sorry. I can't be any-

That's all right.

But the police didn't want to kill us. The Budapest police were not Arrow Cross. And they were not country gendarmerie. But they didn't know what to do. So they sent us to this transport prison. Another reason for it was, that we heard, that we had San Salvadoran citizenship waiting for us at the Swiss Embassy. Now, that was a practice and there was a man by the name of George Mantello who used to be called George Mandel in- in Switzerland, who was the Honorary Consul of San Salvador, who had the right to issue twelve citizenships. He issued twelve citizenship papers and twelve passports which meant twenty-four families. Two names that were suggested to him, and I think it was my aunt who by that time was in Switzerland, who suggested our name. And the papers arrived there and we were advised that they are there; we should come and fetch it. And the police didn't want to take us there, but they said, "Well, if you are foreign citizens this is the place for you." So we get there, it was a hell of a place. They separated men and ladies, so I was on my own. I mean the company I had was really absolutely fantastic. I mean, it was the highest class people I ever saw. The pimps were the tops. And, I mean, there was everything. Petty thieves. Dropping- drunks. You name it. I don't think I was robbed. Mind you, I didn't have anything; I didn't have any money. I had the clothes that I stood up in, that's all. My mother and my

sister were separated of course. And my mother asked for an interview and got- got it, with the police chief and said, "Look I must go to the Swiss embassy. I must get this citizenship papers because you know, otherwise…" And he says, "How do you know that we are going to come back." So she said, "Look you are going to have my children. You really think I'm going to leave my children with you, and I run away?" And the- you know, he accepted that. And my mother went and got the papers. And on the way, I- it couldn't have been on the way by accident, but somehow or other made contact with my father who escaped from the forced labour camp at that point, and was in Budapest.

[01:34:46]

So, came back, and the police let us go. And we were together with my father, but didn't know exactly where we wanted to go. This was already in November 1944. The killing was going on everywhere. Every night you could hear the machine guns at the Danube. And- and the Arrow Cross were active wherever you went. There was a ghetto. We heard that the camp where we were previously, was re-established as a Red Cross protected camp. And we went there. They said, "Yeah, fine. You can come in here. But the best place we can offer you is- is under an acacia tree in the garden. There is absolutely no space." And my father had the bright idea that he had a friend - my father was quite resourceful as I'll- as you'll - who had a removal vans, you know, one of those large things. And he got in touch with him. And this chap sent a removal van into the camp. And we moved into the removal van. And we had- there were the five of us… How did we become? No, no, no, there were only. Yeah, there were only the four of us, and another five people - relatives or not relatives - they had to sleep somewhere. So we all slept in the removal van. We were there for, oh, maybe two weeks. You know, and we were hoping it will blow over. What happens one night, the Arrow Cross break in, and go into the kitchen, and demand food, because somehow they realised that there was food there. Well, they realised, I mean, you know, we had money- not we, but the whole community, but we also had- had money. And we bought food and there was food. They demanded food. One of the chaps. One of the Va'ad guards, if you like, had a gun - and shot one of them. Now, people, especially in Israel, you know: "How come you didn't resist? How you didn't- how you couldn't resist?" Well, there was one man with a gun, the rest were mostly women and children. During- by the early morning, the place was surrounded by the Arrow Cross. We were driven out and driven into a sports field. And that is- the police were there. But so were the Arrow Cross, who were yelling and shouting that the Jews were theirs.

And my father was talking to one, a police officer. My father had a certain presence. And- and people would talk to him. And he said to him, “Look we are Salvadoran citizens. This will cause an international incident, blah, blah, blah.” So the police officer said, “Well, look, I’m ashamed of what is happening here. If this goes on, I don’t know what I’m going to do, but I’m going to protect you and make sure that you don’t go with the others.” The others were taken to a railway station, where they couldn’t be deported anymore. They were sent on a death march, and a lot of them, not all of them, but- but a large percentage perished. We were taken into the ghetto by the police, where we found my grandmother and my aunt. But my mother didn’t like that either, she said, “This is too dangerous. This is too much. This is not for us. We have to go out.”

[01:39:37]

My father wasn’t so sure, but- but my mother, I think, was quite persuasive. And again, the two old ladies couldn’t move. So we were dressed up as two Hungarians. I with my school cap, and a- and a- and a feather- and a pheasant’s feather, and- and various other things. And we walked out of the ghetto without Yellow Stars. I think we walked maybe 500 yards, maybe not. Maybe less. And were arrested by- the Arrow Cross. And they took us into the Arrow Cross headquarters. And there we were stood against the wall. And we were not beaten. We were standing against the wall, we were not allowed to turn around. Not for very long. I mean, for about an hour. I had some false papers, and my father told me, “Get rid of them”, because we didn’t all have them, and we were going to rely on the Salvadoran citizenship. Anyway, the- the- the Arrow Cross boss says, “Salvador, Schmalvador. Jews.” Called in two youths, and by that time about eleven in the morning, and said to them, “Take these four. Do whatever you like with them, but come to the usual place tonight.” Well, we knew exactly what ‘the usual place’ was. It was on the Danube. And these two youths were sent to enrich themselves. So my father said, “Well, we’ll take you.” And we took them to various apartments of various family members, which were all ransacked by then, but they still found bits and pieces so they were relatively happy. And we were just walking. And I hear my father - and I’ll never forget this - he says to this young man, “My dear young chap, which university to do you go to?” So he says, “Me at university? I can’t even dream about….” “An intelligent young man like you? What a waste. What a waste! I will not permit this to happen. You know, these things are going to come to an end. Things will probably change. And I promise you that I will look after you if you take us to the Swiss Consulate

because- and avoid an international incident." Anyway, he went on like this - for hours. And we were walking. I- I- you know, I was listening. We were walking my- my mother and sister together, and- and my- my father and this youth. And we're getting nearer the Danube and I knew if we're getting nearer the Danube and there is the Freedom Square, or Szabadság tér, and that's where the American Embassy is and was. And that was under Swiss control at the time with Swiss flags flying. And we're going past it. And my father as a last attempt says, "Look this is the place. Just let us go in there, and everything," you know, "Otherwise I can't guarantee- people will find out, we are under their protection. I don't know what's going to happen to you, but if you do that, I'll look after you."

[01:43:52]

They rang the bell. The door didn't open, so they shot in the air and somebody came out and let us in. I'll never forget the conversation. They said, "Here are four Jews for you." "OK." "Go. Get in." Then he said, "Oh, wait. I want a receipt." So he says, "What's their name?" "Names? They don't have names. They're four Jews. Sign." And we were in there. There were a large number of Jews there already. It was a working office. We had to hide during the day. And couldn't stay there for any length of time. We stayed there long enough until- for my grandmother to arrive there. How she- she was arrested on the same farm and this is why we think- well, she was undoubtedly recognised. She went there because they were hiding - she and her husband. And her and her mother-in-law. Partner mother in law with- with her son in law in an apartment in- in one of the outskirts of Budapest. And they were hungry and she went to get- collect some food. She was recognised; of that there is no doubt. As I said, my grand- my father, my grandfather wasn't so popular. She was arrested. She was taken to the Gestapo up on the hill, beaten up. And then when- when the Russians were really coming in, they were chased out and she walked down from there. She was in a terrible state, I remember. And there was no bed. She couldn't do- anywhere. And we had to leave there. And I remember we managed to get a car, an embassy car, to take her home - 'home' - where we were hiding. How people there didn't think, "What is the embassy car doing here?" - I don't know. But by that time the situation, it was in December. So we were then moved into another Swiss protected location, of which there were quite a number. And we had a private room with another thirty-five people. And had space on the floor where we could sleep. And we had overcoats and things so we could sleep on the floor and that was great. And the men -

there were very few of them, but there were some - stood guard. Where the Arrow Cross were- opposite the Arrow Cross and they were- and one night, apparently-

[sound break]

[01:46:40]

OK. Well, we- I- I- just told you about the incident between my father and this Arrow Cross man, who whispers to him, “Uncle Gyula, Uncle Gyula! Don’t you recognise me?” And he says, ‘Who?” “I am Doctor Klein’s son!” And he was a- a- the son of a doctor from- from Ujpest, who joined into the Arrow Cross and was sabotaging everything. Risking his life. But at the same time saving it and saving others. And he recognised my father. So, there, there were things like that. Anyway, we- we stayed there and then two incidents which may be of interest. One, in this private room with thirty-five people, all of a sudden the bomb falls and all the windows shatter. And everybody runs to the door. Except the door opens inward. So we’re all standing against- thirty-five people pushing the door closed, and nobody can get out. The next incident that I remember particularly, was the first or second day that- that the Russians have liberated us, and the Russians are inviting us into the streets to rob all the textile warehouses, shops-

And this was when, please?

Sorry?

When was this?

This was in January - January 17th, 1945.

Thank you.

And we didn’t have any money. My father still had a watch. And there was a gentleman there who said, “I’ll buy the watch from you for 800 pengös.” My father said, “All right.” So he said, “I’ll bring you the money.” So he goes out, comes back and gives him 600. My father says, “We agreed 800.” “No, no. This- is what you get.” So my father had no choice. Handed

over the watch. In that moment a Russian soldier comes in and says, "*Davai chasy*," which means, "Give us the watch", and took his watch. My father had his 600 pengös. So these are the sort of things that- that- that- that happened. They were funny times. I mean, we had something like eighteen kilos of bacon, you know, of sides of bacon. No bread. So my father was trading- trading one kilo of bacon for one kilo of bread. So eventually we decided we would go home to Ujpest. And we started to walk along. On the way, Russians stop us. Ask us for a watch. We didn't have a watch anymore. And-

Did you have many problems with the Russian soldiers?

[01:49:50]

Not really. I mean, they took watches, but nothing else. I'll tell you an incident about Russians. So we get home. Of course we can't get in to our house, because our house is occupied by somebody. Actually my father made an arrangement with this man that he can have the house if he looks after it. So we bed down in the factory office. And my father was very ill by then. The next morning we have nothing to eat. So my father gives me a list to go and see people, ask them, beg them, for food. There wasn't a single one that refused. I shall never forget that. Everybody gave something. You know? "You're back! On the floor?" And in our rou- in our house eventually, a week or two later, we managed to get them to give us a room. And we slept there. And one night, there were banging on the- on the- on the shutters. Russians. They want to come in. And my mother turns the light on, and my- this was the only time in my life I heard my father really shout at my mother. "You idiot" he says, you know, " Try to pretend that we are not there." And of course she turns the light on, sort of a sign we were there. I shall- I shall- I shall never forget that. There were other, sort of, bits of incident. There was a lady, a friend of my mother's who came, and said, "We'll collaborate and bake something." So we had flour and she had sugar and - I think we had some beans. And we made some- some… little square, little croissants really, filled with not- not- not walnuts, but, but beans. And at the end of it, this lady says, "Well, I'll… ", you know, "my sugar was here." "Fine." Before she leaves, she steals back the sugar. [laughs] There were very funny things. But, you see, going back, overall- and we hear a lot about Wallenberg, and I do not want to deduct anything from Wallenberg and his great tragedy of course was, that his family let him down, I believe. They didn't look after him. But anyway. In Hungary, the real damage, if you like, was done between May and July. Wallenberg didn't arrive until the

middle of July. The other diplomats, Mr. Lutz, the- the Spanish, Bruno Heim, who became a Cardinal afterwards. They were there. They were watching people being deported in the provinces. It's not possible that they didn't know. The only man who did anything was the Jew Kasztner, who was negotiating, he was trying. He diverted a couple of trains and those people were saved. He couldn't do any more. Diplomats? Absolutely nothing. They were heroic once it was in Budapest and it was right in front of them. Wallenberg of course had no chance. And he saved a lot of people. Lutz: he saved some people also. But it was too late by then. All right, we, you know- something like 300,000 Budapest Jews did survive, in the end. Maybe not 300,000, maybe 250,000 – who is counting? And the Russians were not very nice to the Jews. They were raping in the ghetto in exactly the same way as they were raping outside. They were robbing inside and outside. They didn't actually rob us. But- now, to go back to the story about the young man who should have had a university education. In about March '45, I walked to the factory with my father, and whom do I see sitting there but this young man in the office. So I said to my father, "Do you know who that is?" He said, "Of course of course I know who that is." "What is he doing here?" He says, "Look, I told him I was going to look after him. I was going to help him. I gave him my word. He didn't kill me. He didn't murder me." Now I spoke to you about Kasztner and if you don't mind I'll put in another world for Kasztner. I also mentioned Mr Becher, Kurt Becher, who did the deal with- with Chorin, Francis Chorin. And he also negotiated with- with Kasztner and- and, and did help him. Kasztner at the Nuremberg Trials swore an affidavit in favour of Becher which arguably saved his [] life. He probably wouldn't have been executed. He probably would have gone to jail but he didn't, because of that. It's exactly the same. That is, you see, this is what people don't seem to understand that there were certain standards of Hungarian Jews by which we lived, or Hungarians of the Jewish faith, and this is a manifestation. Kasztner made an enormous mistake and I used to make that mistake. He denied having saved Becher in his trial in, in Jerusalem. And because of that, he- he- he- he lost his case. And he was- he wasn't murdered because of that but he lost his reputation for- for quite a while and even now, there was a scurrilous book against him. But he couldn't help himself. That's how he had to do it, because he told Becher "I will look after you", like my father told this youth. I don't even know his name. I don't think I ever knew his name. Don't even want to know his name. But he said, "I will look after you. I will save you." And he did! And that is how we always lived.

[01:57:13]

Your word of honour?

Sorry?

The word of honour.

Yeah, yeah, Yeah- yeah – yeah. So, you know, I mean that is in a way, I suppose with a lot of omissions I'm sure, this finishes the actual chapter of what I call Holocaust. And you- you- you said you were interested in the aftermath, and what happened, and what didn't happen, and how we lived and how we didn't live. We really started life. My father went back to the factory. [Phone rings. Sound break]

You know - life re-started. I went back to- to- to my school. My sister went back to her school. My father was running the factory. He was very ill. He picked up e-coli bacillus infection during- in- in the camp. And he never recovered from it. I mean, he died some- four years later. Not even. Three years later. And- so, life re-started. We lived in the same house again. What was missing, were our friends. Especially my parents' friends. There was one incident. There was a doctor friend of my father's and he- the two of them buried their treasure in his yard which had walls around it so it was protected. My father and I went to try and find it and couldn't. We dug, well, one night. Certainly a day and night and a day. And because we didn't dare leave it, because people would know that we've been digging there and they would come back and- and dig and find it. But we didn't find it. Lo and behold, the doctor returns. And says, "Oh yes. I reburied it all somewhere else." So we go back and dig for another two days and find it. But you see you couldn't let anybody else dig. We had to do the- we had to do the digging. I became a pretty good digger. I also was a good digger in March '45 when my grandmother died. It was a very cold spring. There were no grave diggers. And there were- there were no funeral services. So my mother did the ritual services.

[02:00:00]

Did she say Kaddish?

She didn't say *Kaddish*, my father said *Kaddish*.

Was- he was well enough to do that?

Oh, yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean he was, yeah, he was up, but he wasn't- and then he- he didn't go actually to bed until much later, when he- anyway. Yeah, so Kaddish was said and there was a rabbi. But I remember taking the- the- the coffin. We took- we took the- the- the coffin in a in a handcart to the cemetery. The rabbi came and we- but to dig in frozen ground. To dig a grave in a frozen ground is- is- is a pretty good performance. And I was- I must have been in reasonable shape. Anyway. We've been in touch with my uncle in Amer- in- in England, and- and really decided that this is what we are going to do. My parents changed my school for me. I went to a school in the country, which- where English was taught intensively. And I was there for a year-and-a-half. And then in January '47 I came to England. I came to England on the basis of a scholarship that was offered by the British Council. Now, I'm not so clever that I won the scholarship, but the British Council were very pragmatic, and they said, "We're only going to give this scholarship to somebody who will use it in England. Because that is what it's for." And I could prove that I wanted to go to England and I had an uncle there who could make up what is missing from the scholarship. And I got a visa on that basis. And I came to this country in January '47, and I went to school up in West Cumberland in a place called St. Bees. I don't know if you were in England at that time in the- in the winter of 1946- '47? It was one of-

I wasn't born.

[02:02:27]

It was one of the coldest winters in, in history. The first job that I got to school, the next morning we were snowed in. We had no food. So 250 boys went on the road to digging our way six miles to a town called Whitehaven nearby, which was great fun.

How did you feel coming to a school in- in Britain? Did you feel very much an outsider? Were you accepted?

You know, funny you should ask that, because you were asking before about anti-Semitic incidents. When I went to the English language school which was a very old established school in the northeast of Hungary, called Sárospatak. It's fairly well known, was supported by Lord Rothermere and so on. I was the first Jewish boy, but they- they had some before from the neighbourhood, but I was the first one for a very long time. And I got into what is the fifth form of a gymnasium. And the second day I was there the eighth former called me in and beat me up. But, you know, really. Like I've not been beaten up before. And they didn't say anything, they just beat me up. And then one of them, who happened to have been the brother in law of one of the masters, said to me, "You know what this is for?" I said, "No!" "You're a Jew. And you better not think that things have changed. You stay a Jew, and you'll never be anything but a Jew." And he gave me another couple of hits and they locked me in a cupboard.

Did that have a lasting effect? Do you have a phobia about being locked in at all?

[02:04:46]

No. Look- I'm a very insensitive individual. Nothing, I mean, I- I- I don't have any hang-ups. As I said to you, that I am a- I'm a Hungarian of Jewish- of the Jewish faith. I mainly stuck to Hungarian. I also despised them. I think they're anti-Semitic, but they're cowards. As most of eastern European was. They would not have committed the Holocaust without the Germans. It is the Germans. They were not blaming the Germans; they loved it. They loved every minute of it. And they knew exactly what was going on, each and every one of them. And- and individual incidents, to give you just one more. My father had a schoolmate in secondary school, who had some kind of illness and was allowed to complete his university course during the war. And he was a mechanical engineer. And my father employed him and kept him in, you know, he stayed there. And I mean, they were schoolmates; they were friends. So in March, April, May '47- '44, the hiding things, my parent were hiding things, were giving things out. Clothes, valuables. And my father said to this chap, "Look here is my Leica camera. Please keep it for me. If I don't come back, it's yours." We came back, my father said to him, "You still have the camera?" "Yes, I'll bring it to you." Brings it the next day. A

week later, his wife comes to my father and he says, "You know, my husband really fell in love with that camera. He really- he likes it so much. He gave it back to you because he's an honest man. Could you not give it to him?" So my father said, "You know, he's my friend, he's worked for me and he's still working for me and he'll continue working for me. Here is the camera." Another week passes. The friend comes to him, and he says, "Gyula you know, I have this camera. I don't use it. I know you use it. Would you not like to buy it off me?" And my father did. [laughs] This is- is the sort of- the sort of incident. And my, my mother saw people in the street wearing her clothes. And this happened to- to a lot of people, so this- this this- this happened there. But, you know, this incident in Sárospatak, this never happened during the worst days of the Arrow- well, the Arrow Cross would have killed me, easily. But in school? Nobody would take me into a room and beat me up. And I mean, this school was residential so they had the room to do it in and so on and so forth. It may have been easier. But it was really savage, and I was really told to- to- to be in my place. Anyway, I was, I was there and then I came to- came to England. I don't- I don't- I never had- look, in Hungary, in spite of that beating, I felt I belonged. And I had a very close friend with whom we kept up the friendship for a number of years. Non-Jewish, obviously. And it's- there were no, no hang-ups. No worries. In England, where obviously I was the outsider. I remember the first day I went. I arrived with long hair - not quite as long as it is fashionable now, but pretty long - and a trilby hat, and long trousers. And the first thing the headmaster said, "Well, look, the first thing you've got to do is go to the barber. The next thing you put on a uniform with these shorts with these socks…", well fair enough. And a hat? "I'll take the hat." And from there on it was, it was more- what actually brought home to me that I was part of the school- it was very cold, and we had one radiator in the study. And there was always a fight to get on to the radiator, because you get a certain amount of warmth. And I fought with a chap by the name of Whittaker. And, I don't know, somehow broke- I broke a finger. I- I forced his finger back and I broke his finger. And I thought, that's it. I'm going to be expelled. Cause he was taken to the infirmary, it was found that it was broken, it was- he never spilt on me. He never let on that I broke it. And then I knew - that I was part of the school. I did- I did reasonably well at school. I always did reasonably well at school. I didn't find it difficult. The English-

[02:10:46]

With the English were you-?

My English was much better than it is now. It- it deteriorated. You know, with a Hungarian wife, your English gets lost. No. I- I- I had- I really had no trouble with- with English. The only- the only concession they made. You know, in the old days in school certificate you had to do two pieces of literature. One Shakespeare and one something else. So the class did *Julius Caesar* and Chaucer. And I was allowed to say- to do George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* because that was understandable. But other than that, there was no problem.

What about the food? How did you cope with the different food? Did you miss your salami?

You know, when I arrived in London in January '47, two things happened. I looked around. And Budapest, by that time, was lit up and you know, every-everything was available – food and everything. And in London was grey. On Sunday there were not even trams, buses or anything. Saturday very little. Everybody was glum. My uncle took me for a meal at a place called the 'Csarda' which was in [76] Dean Street. We go in, sit down, they serve us soup. We eat the soup. I'm looking around. They bring the bill. My uncle pays the bill. They bring our coats. We put the coats on. And I say, "What the hell is going on? We go outside. We come back in, take our coats off. There was a five shilling remit on the cost of meals. And for five shillings, at the 'Csarda' in Dean Street, you couldn't get anything except soup or one-each course. So we kept going in and out. The food at school, look I was at St. Bees School from January '47 until July '48. Eighteen months. I ate rabbit twice a day during that period. And I think most of those rabbits had myxomatosis, because that- that was the thing going on at that time, and the rabbits were dropping dead. They didn't have to shoot them. Was awful. And in the morning we got porridge, which was- I mean, what was it like? I mean, it- it was like glue. But look, at the age of sixteen you eat anything because you are hungry. The other thing that happened to me with these shorts. I got chilblains on my knees and they were bleeding. So that was lovely. That was- and the boys came to look at it. Then one thing happened during my very beginning, in October '47. My father had a very bad turn and my mother felt I should come and see him and I went back to- to Hungary. And my mother always thinks that helped, that helped my father- not to recover- because he didn't, but to- to re- to become sort of - alive again. Anyway, that- and of course, there again, first time experienced Hungarian honesty. Because I had a- I flew back via Prague; there was no direct flight. And I arrived in- in Budapest. And the- Málev, the Hungarian airline, said, "Well, please leave us your ticket so that we can make a return reservation." I never got the ticket back. They denied ever having had the ticket. I had to- in fact- well, the Hungarians took my

passport away. Fortunately, there was somebody from my school working at the ministry who managed to get it back for me. And I left by train with an- in the- in the sleeper of an acquaintance who was going from Budapest to Prague, and I was hiding under his bed, and he was paying off the- the conductor. And then I had to- I spent five days in Prague trying to get on a plane because everything was full. But I mean, this was Hungarian honesty and- and things that, things that go on.

[02:15:45]

How did they- if I may interrupt? Why was your passport taken? I mean, was somebody going to misuse it or was it to delay?

No, it was just, just somebody decided this fellow shouldn't have a passport. Why should he have a passport? Why should he be allowed? At that time, nobody was allowed out. You see, I had- I left- when I left the Hungarians still allowed you out. You had to have a Russian permit. By the time, the second time, the Russians didn't insist on a permit, but the Hungarians weren't giving passports. So they took mine away. For no reason whatsoever. And I still had a right to it, and I still had my English visa, and I still had the scholarship and I still had the evidence for it, which I was very careful to bring along. But look, it's- it's- it's whim. And if you have the power, you do use it.

Yeah.

So I get into London, and the second thing that happens, my grandmother, with whom I travelled to England, had to be taken to hospital. And in those days there was no NHS. So I was left in London to look after her for two weeks. And I had to go- because the hospital didn't supply medicine, so I had to go and buy medication. And I think I had about a hundred pounds that my father gave me, which was a lot of money in those days, actually, it may have been two-hundred. I don't know if you remember those white five pound notes? No, you- you didn't know them. They were white five-pound notes which were on- on watermarked paper. But it was, they were relatively easy to- to- to falsify. And people used to sign them on the back. And I had two hundred pounds of that which my father bought. I went into Allen & Hanburys, which was the pharmacy in those days. It then belonged to Beecham- Beecham's bought it out. Anyhow. I go in there and I ask for this medication. I had the medication. I give

them a five pound note. He asks me to wait. And I wait. Policeman comes, and he was handed my five-pound note and he cames to me- comes to me and he says, "Is this your money, Sir?" I've never been called 'Sir' in my life. And I said, "Yes." "Do you have any more?" I said, "Yes." "Can I see those please?" So I had- I didn't have the full amount with me, but I handed him whatever I had. And he says, "I have to ask you to accompany me." So we go to the Bank of England and there, they check the money. And it is- it was what is known, what was known as Cicero money. Now Cicero you may not know. Cicero was the butler to the British Ambassador in Ankara, who- who was spying for the Germans. And he was double-crossed by the Germans by paying- being paid off in- in- in counterfeit money. But the Germans at the same time, were attacking the currency. You have you know, there is no confidence anymore in the- in the money. So I think- I think he left me with twenty or twenty-five pounds. Those were all right but the rest- the rest I- I lost. They didn't actually punish me, or anything. So that was- that was my, my next-next thing. So then I was here for eighteen months. My grandparents were here already. And they lived in Windermere and I used to go on holidays with them. And eventually, my parents came out in August '48 with my sister. I'll never forget, I did the correspondence to- to get a place for my sister in school. And nobody, you know, nobody wanted to accept anything from a- from a sixteen year old boy. But it was only correspondence, so they couldn't see it. But anyway, I got it, then she went to school here and in- in- in Harrogate.

[02:20:15]

Did you feel that you'd grown up very quickly-

Absolutely.

... during the war years? Sixteen - now - is still very young, but sixteen in wartime is very different.

Look, I- I- grew up, I think, on that little walk from the factory to the railway station. With people spitting, and laughing, and clapping - and me being powerless. And then, when I- when I was working in the kitchen and I could bring food to my family and there was a very lovely blonde two year old girl, whom I stayed in touch with in- in the same camp, and I used to take food to them also to her and her mother. Her mother remembered it for a long time.

She's no longer with us. Yes, you do grow up. And of course, look, I was then also on my own. It was- I went to a boarding school in Hungary which was not usual, but it has happened. And then I was on my own here. And my grandparents they're not quite the same and- and- I mean, in certain things I was very naïve. I had a bicycle. And I left the bicycle somewhere in Windermere and somebody took the pump, you know, the bicycle pump. And I sat there. And eventually somebody came to look for me and said, "What the hell are you doing here?" So I said, "I'm waiting for the chap to return the bicycle pump." I thought that somebody just borrowed it, and was going to bring it back. So I was, you know, pretty naïve at the same time. Yes, I- I was, I was happy in my school years. I'm still in touch with the school. Not very close touch, but- but in touch and with one chap in particular. And then I got into Leeds University… rather earlier than I expected.

[02:22:40]

When did you go to university? [repeating] When did you go?

Nineteen forty-eight, in October 1948. I was just about- just- well just eight- not quite eighteen. And I went- Leeds University at that time had a leather department. So you got a degree in the chemistry of leather manufacture, which was really a chemistry degree with a little bit of leather thrown in. And I had a marvellous time there for three years. Always short of money. We used to go around- I'd- I was in a hall of residence and had a- we had a small circle of friends. Very nice chaps. And we used to go around the Leeds pubs. We used to take this 'idiot foreigner' which- who was me. And they would offer, on a back of their hand, a penny and a sixpence. And I would grab the penny because it was bigger. And I went, you know, it was amazing, but you know, the amount of money I collected that way for the- for our little group. I mean, people they laughed at me! And one chap says, "Well, don't you know that the little one is worth more?" "Really?" And then he said, "Why don't you take the little one? It's better!" "No, no I took it once, and no good." You know? So I- and- and then still, university I- I've been in touch with friends and well, I keep on burying them, so. You know people keep- people keep on dying. There is one thing in general about here, I don't know whether you want to have any more detail about my so-called career.

Yes, about your work and-

[02:24:30]

Work, yeah, that's what I mean. I don't have any other career. I- I did try a few other things. I tried thievery. I tried robbery, but I was never very successful. I'm sorry. Well, all right. I'd better finish that then. Look I went to the university. I came out of university. I- whilst I was there my father died. And my mother was widowed which she was- more difficulties. I then went to work for my uncle in the tannery in- in Cumberland. He was not terribly nice to me. I think he may- you may call it exploitation but you may not. Anyway, I- he- I did a very big job for him in- in- in Morocco. I went to Casablanca Morocco and I introduced a certain process of manufacture on my uncle's behalf for which he got paid - very nicely. That- that was a I mean, you know, I really learned. I learned French for one thing. And then I learned a lot about life. And I learned how to shake hands with thirty-seven people every morning, which you have to do in a- in a French tannery in Morocco in 1953. This was in 1953. And in the same year, my mother got married, remarried.

How did you feel about that?

Very bad. I- I'm very ashamed of that. [with emotion] To this day. I said to my mother, and thank God she didn't listen to me, "You're my responsibility. Don't marry anybody." My sister, thank God, was much cleverer than me. And she said the opposite. And my mother listened. Got herself a very good husband. I got myself a very good step-father. And my sister got a very good step-father. But, after the wedding, after- I decided I want to go and not be around when my mother, my step-father. I- I- at that point I wasn't over it. So I started to look for a job. And I got a job, you won't believe it, in Puerto Rico. Mainly, because I was a genius. And the only people who wanted to recognise is other people who owned this tannery in Puerto Rico. And Puerto Rico is a very special place with tax exemptions, part of the United States and so on. But they couldn't get anybody to go there and run a tannery, so they had no option but to take this little genius, little Hungarian genius would you believe, from England - and make him the manager. So I was the manager. I never forget walking again into the office. And you see you had to have a first preference American visa to get into America. Because America, at that time, had quotas. And- and the Hungarian quota, you had to wait something like 150 years before you could get on it. Anyway, I got first preference on the basis of all my qualifications. So I had all these things hanging on the wall. My school certificate. My subsidiary higher certificate. My entrance certificate to university. My City

and Guilds certificate. My degree - and I don't know what else. All framed, all hanging on the wall. [laughs] It was hilarious. But I, I was in Puerto Rico. I was there for the best part of a year. We had an argument. We fell out. I came back to this country. I worked for a chemical company selling chemicals to the leather industry. My uncle and I never got on, so I never went back there. I mean, I went back to see my grandparents, and- and my mother and so on, but- but never- not to work. And after eighteen months of this, and I learned a lot again, and I learned some Italian by the way and that was the beginning of my Italian. I also met my wife. I shall tell you about- that was also a very Hungarian affair. After eighteen months, the owner of the tannery in Puerto Rico was in London and telephoned me and asked me to come to dinner. And I said, "I'll come to dinner." Cut a long story short he said, "Well, why don't you come back to Puerto Rico? We liked you, you liked it. Your uncle ruined it for you…" Anyway. I went back. In the meantime I met my wife. She's only my first wife, by the way. And we'd not been married very long.

[02:30:08]

Where did you meet? How did you meet?

Well, let me tell you the story, I mean, don't interrupt, young woman. I'm sorry, I'm lapsing back into normal, you know? I found myself in a leather chemists' conference in Stockholm in 1955, and I sit at dinner with two Hungarian gentlemen, one of whom was a very clever chap. He was already living and had a business in Barcelona, in Spain. The other one was the head of the Hungarian leather industry, was a great communist. He actually used to work for my father-in-law - for my wife's father. And we were chatting. And I asked this man in Barcelona, "Can I- can you please do me a favour? This, and this and this…" So, being a true Hungarian, he says, "Oh, my dear chap, how much I would love to do this for you but I'm not the right man for it. Now, if you go to Milan, and you look up my friend the engineer Csillag he is the perfect person for it. And in case you don't get anywhere with him, he's got a very good looking daughter and you might do yourself some good." So I find myself in Milan six months later. I get in touch with engineer Csillag who confirms that he knows my father, knew my grandfather, and you know, he's in the tanning business. So I go there and I'm offered a coffee, and I meet his wife, and we chat and I ask him for the favour. And he says, would you believe, "My dear young chap, how much I would love to do this for you, but I'm not the right man for it." So I said, "All right." So what? So I said, "Well hold on a second. I

heard that you've got a daughter. Now, I don't see any daughter around here." So they say, "Well, she happens to be in Turin visiting friends." So I said, "Is she going to be there the day after tomorrow?" So they said, "Well, yes." I said, "Can I have her telephone number?" So they disappeared. And I remember they had a- an alcove with an arras in front of it, you know, a curtain. And they disappeared. They come back with the telephone number. So they obviously decided that I was suitable for the telephone. And I met- and we met in Turin, in the rain, in Val Salice**,** which is where she was staying with this friend. And that was in 1955. Then I went to Puerto Rico in- went back to Puerto Rico in '57, and we married the same year. We married- you see, mind you, it's too late, I think, to tell you what the secret of a good marriage is - but I'll tell you anyway, just for the sake of posterity, is - to take your wife a minimum of 4,000 miles away from her mother. Which I did. Cause they lived in Italy. We married here in England in a hurry. Not in a hurry because usually people get married in a hurry, but because we needed an, an American visa for her, and she couldn't get it without me. And I went 4,000- actually took her 4,000 miles to Puerto Rico. And we lived there together for six- six-odd- six years. And by that time it was, you know, too late for a- for the mother-in-law's influence.

[02:33:46]

When did you marry? Did you marry in…?

In Millom, Cumberland, where everybody does! Don't you- didn't you know that? Well, you see what actually happened was, I- I wrote to her and then I telephoned and then she said, "I must see you." So, so I came, you know, which was not a- I mean it was quite a big deal in those days a, to telephone from Puerto Rico to Italy, and b, to fly from Puerto Rico to Italy. But I did. And we decided we'd get engaged. It was in July, and I would come back in December and then we'd marry. The next morning I remembered I should go to the American embassy or consulate and ask about a visa for her. So, they laughed at me and they said, "Look, you can't even- there's no point in applying until you're married." So I go back to the flat where we lived and I said, "We've got to get married." So in Italy there was no divorce in those days. You know, it's six-month bans. I go- we go up to Lugano, to Switzerland to ask - same thing. I go to the consulate, the British consulate - exactly the same thing. So, I telephoned my step-father in Millom Cumberland, and I said, "Speak to the registrar, he may remember me. Will he marry us?" So my step father went, rings me back in

half an hour, and he says, “Mr. Kitchen says, if you come, present yourself, he’ll marry you forty-eight hours later by special license, because you are a resident of this parish.” So we got on a plane, we rushed there, and we were married. And then we separated. I went back to Puerto Rico, my wife went back to Italy and I came back in December and we started our proper marriage.

Were members of your family and in particular your mother unhappy about the fact that you didn’t marry in a synagogue?

[02:36:00]

My mother certainly was not. My grandfather said that he was, and he- he ordered me to be married, not necessarily in a synagogue, but according to Jewish rites. So what did we do? In Puerto Rico I had some Jewish friends. And we also had a handkerchief. So, we held a handkerchief by the four corners, became a *chuppah*. So, my wife and I went under it and declared the vows and I confirmed to my grandfather that I had a Jewish wedding. My two daughters, I- I- have twin daughters.

What are their names?

There is Vivian Julia and Lia Suzanne.

And when were they born?

They were born in 1949, December ’49, and in Puerto Rico. That’s why they’re a little bit dark, you understand. The- the atmosphere makes them dark. They were- they were American citizens for a number of years and they gave- they- they renounced. Anyhow. They were born there and- and it was marvellous, because twins are quite you know, labour intensive, and there was no problem getting help there. So after, you know, once they were about four years old, my- the people of the tannery sold it. I had to stay for a little while, but I always wanted to come back, give my children a decent education. I came back, and I came back and I had a- sort of a consulting job with an English tannery in Leeds, which lasted for a little over a year. During which I managed to make an arrangement with an American firm making chemicals for the leather industry to establish a new factory in a place called

Loughborough which is outside Leicester. And we went there. And you know, I- I- I ran that for fifteen years and quite successfully and we were very happy. And then that was sold, that we sold. And again, a typical leather industry incident took place whilst that was happening. I, I find myself in India. At the Ashok Hotel in New Delhi. And I bump into two ladies, mother and daughter-in-law, who own a- whose husband and son own a tannery in Yorkshire. And I saw them not so long ago in Madras. And the ladies are there waiting for them to arrive, that evening. And they're going to Darjeeling for a holiday. So, you know, we kiss and- until we notice you didn't kiss. So, I go my way. I come back in the evening to the hotel, and a uniformed man waits for me and says, "So you are Mr. Donath?" "Yes." "I'm from the Indian Airlines. I believe you know Mr. and Mrs.- the two Misses Kanellis." I said, "Yes." "Are they friends?" I said, "Well, 'friends' is probably overstating it, but- but I do know them." He said, "Well, a terrible thing happened. Our number one Boeing, the first Boeing that we ever had, had an accident on the way back from Madras this morning. Everybody died, including their husbands. Now we didn't- we couldn't make ourselves tell them, without some assistance. Would you be helpful?" I said, "Well, you know…" What- What can you do? He said, "Look we'll have a doctor available." So on. So I go and I say hello to them and, and, and they come out with that the plane is late, and the husband is not coming and this is the luggage. So I said, "Well, do me a favour, sit down, and I'm afraid I have to tell you something that you will not like to hear." Being Englishwomen they didn't need the doctor, but I mean, it was- it was- it was terrible. So. You know, I- I helped as much as I could. There is, there was nothing left of the husbands. So they went back to England, and then they got in touch with me. They want to sell the tannery because they don't know how to run it. Can I help? So I got together with a friend of mine, and we bought it. And then this friend of mine and I, as I say, went into business here in London just trading and- and having tanneries and so on. And we had the business for fifteen years and, and we sold it and then I've been retired ever since. And I've travelled the world with that, and took my wife, my first wife, with me quite a lot of the time. And- and- and here we are. You know? We- we are what we are, and not we're not. We've been in London now forty years. Which is the longest we've been anywhere.

[02:41:51]

So, is Lidia your second wife?

No, no, she's my first wife. I only had one.

Ah, you were joking. [laughs]

As I said, we're newlyweds. Only sixty-one years.

I know. I know.

I'm sorry. I- I manage to do that to people.

I didn't know whether you were joking or not.

But that means I have to keep her on her toes. No, she's a pretty good wife to me.

Did she work before she married you?

No. No. Or after. She had a- a business for a while, selling period costume jewellery. Buying it here in various markets, and selling it in Italy. And after I retired we used to go to Italy together to sell. We have had great fun driving around in Tuscany and best parts of Italy which was great. That was a good part of our life, yeah. But you know, we had a reasonable life. I said I wanted to say something in sort of slightly general terms. Hungarian Jews somehow or other, manage to do reasonably well all over the world. Not- Not only materially, and I like to think- I mean you know, I- I- I am not rich. I didn't become rich. I am- I am what my father used to be, comfortable, if you like. I don't have to worry about where my next meal is coming from, but I can't sort of go and spend I don't know how much on- on anything. But. We have achieved- and this sounds very pretentious, a similar social standing, amongst the English, and I hope I'm not hurting feelings, as we had amongst the Hungarians. Now, we did not become English patriots because we haven't and we're not likely to.

Did you become British citizens?

[02:44:12]

Oh, yes. I've been a British citizen since 1953. And- and my daughters are and my wife has become when we got married. But citizenship doesn't mean all that much. It is- and oddly enough, I find more in common socially and- and- and, well, socially, basically, and even business-wise, with English-English, I mean non-Jewish English, than with English Jews. Why? There are several reasons. I mean, you know, I've tried to work it out. Number one I think is, that Hungarian Jews and the English, can laugh at themselves. And that, to me anyway, is very important. English Jews cannot. They take themselves far too seriously. You know? They- their feelings can be hurt, that this can and that can. It's- it's- I can't get on. We have Hungarian Jewish friends. I really don't know- I have acquaintances obviously, quite a lot and- and- and- and you know, I play golf and bridge and I don't know what else with- with- with British Jews, but they're not friends. I have English friends, definitely. And I'm very proud of them. The other thing which I'm inordinately proud of, that my children have achieved the same.

What work do they do?

[02:46:10]

They were both- well one of them is a solicitor, and the other one was a solicitor. You see, they both went, and I'm very proud of that to a fairly good university, at least the university has a reasonable reputation. You may have heard about it; it's called Oxford. It's nearly as good as Cambridge, I keep on telling them [laughs]. But anyway, they went. And they made friendships there. Yes, they do have some Jewish friends, but they also are part of- of England. I mean, it is now very part- very easy to be part of England in London. When we lived in Leicester, it wasn't quite as easy. And I was the first ever Jewish member of Leicestershire Golf Club. Although now they have a lot of Indians. I don't think they have any other Jews, but I may not- I'm not sure about that. And what is interesting, when we got to Leicester, I used to play golf in- in Leeds. In Leeds there was a Jewish golf club. You- I don't know, you probably know that now, golf clubs are reasonably open. But twenty years ago even and certainly forty years ago, they were not. And you had Jewish golf clubs which were- most golf clubs would not accept Jews. They never said so, but it was a fact. And others, because they had to have golf clubs, they were hundred percent Jewish golf clubs. So I used to belong to a hundred percent Jewish golf club for a number of years, until it wasn't necessary. Anyway, get to Leicester. From a Jewish golf club in Leeds. And I talk to a local

gentleman, one of the leading members of the community. And I mention golf, he said, "Forget it. You'll never get in. Don't even try. You'll just make yourself..." So I find myself at a- at a drinks party. And I meet a solicitor. And we talk. And we talk about golf and I mention golf. He said, "Why don't you join the Leicestershire?" So I said, "Hold on. I understand you don't have Jews. And- and I am." So he says, "Rubbish. I am the immediate past captain. I'll put you forward and you will be accepted." All right. So I- I fill in the form. Three weeks later I get a telephone call. "There's no reason why we didn't accept you; you have the courtesy of the course. You can come any time. We will advise you when the official meeting is" - and so on. So I learn when the official meeting is and I call this gentleman who proposed me, and whom I didn't know that well. I mean, I met him but- and I said to him, "John. Look, I don't want to join under false pretences. This is the reputation the club has. I want to be open. I want the- the committee to know that I am Jewish and they're accepting me as a Jew." He said, "I don't think it's necessary, but if that makes you happy, I'll do it." I get a letter, I don't ask any more questions. Ten years later, would you believe, I'm elected to the committee. I mean they're foolish people those people in Leicester. And I get to the committee, and the first thing that I do, I go to the secretary and he was a Scot. I said to him, "Jock, can I see the minute book now that I'm on the committee?" So he looks at me, he says, "*Och*, I know what you want. I'll give you the minute book. The one that you want to see." And he gives me the minute book and he gives me the thing and it says, "Mr. Simpson stated that his candidate, Mr. George Donath is of the Jewish faith, and wishes… [coughs] the committee to be aware of that before they vote on his candidacy."

[02:50:46]

Bravo. Do you feel very proud of your all your achievements and of being accepted?

I feel very proud, but I don't have very many achievements. But I feel very proud of a lot of them. I mean, the- the non-achievements particularly.

Coming back to the English Jewry, it has been said, and this is- I'm not giving a personal opinion. It has been said that the English Jewry did not help the Jewish refugees very much when they came over.

Never.

Did you find that was the case in your experience?

Look, I- I have- yes, I have direct experience. I mean, the first one was my- I mentioned that I was at Leeds University when my father died. And I went to say *Kaddish*. Maybe not as often as one should. Certainly not twice a day. But I went. And I- you know, one speaks to people. And maybe because I'm an objectionable individual, I don't know. But I was never invited anywhere. I told them that I'm there and I'm alone and you know, and I'm at university, and I come to say Kaddish and I just lost my father and- and- well, my experience certainly in Hungary, of- of a Jewish community is that in a situation such as that, people will say, "Come for Friday night dinner". There was one Hungarian Jewish gentleman in Leeds who did - just that. That was one experience. The other one was indirect; it is not with me. That was with somebody- parents of a friend of mine who moved to Nottingham and then went to the synagogue on a Friday night, and somebody came and asked them, you know, and he said, "Well, you know, how do you- have you- if you got food and…?" And he said, "Well, it's difficult. We've just arrived. We haven't got.." "Oh, well, you can come to the soup kitchen on- on Tuesday mornings." And the third, and that possibly is to some extent my fault. My father- my mother lived part of the time in Leicester. And when we moved to Leicester, I wanted to- to join the Jewish community. By the way, going back to my daughters in Puerto Rico. My wife is, if anything, anti-Jewish. I mean, she is Jewish alright, but- but- but she doesn't want to know anything. My two daughters when they were born there was a friend who registered them with a synagogue in San Juan in the capitol. We didn't- we lived in- in a smaller town. Registered them. So they have a Jewish name and they, they, they are Jews. Anyway, that's just by the way. Anyway, we come to Leicester. I go to the rabbi. And I say, I'm- you know, and I give the details of myself. He didn't ask for my circumcision, but I think he believed me. And I'm not going to prove it to you either. And then he says, he starts to ask- asking me about my children. And I tell them about my children and tell them their Jewish names. And asks about my wife. And I say, "Well, my wife doesn't have a Jewish name, because her parents by a cockeyed fortune, registered her as Protestant in the registry. Hopefully saving her life. But I can promise you that she is Jewish." "Well, I have to be very responsible because I may have to marry your daughters and I may marry them under false pretences, and that would make your grandchildren illegitimate…" and so on. Anyway, in the end, because of my mother and because he knew my mother for a number of years, he accepted me. Accepted us. So I stayed there for, I don't

know, thirteen, fourteen years, something like that. We come to London and I go to Chelsea Synagogue, with the same request, the same questions. And I tell them and I tell them I've been a member of the- of the synagogue in Leicester and they can- they will attest that- that I was, and my children. And my children went to Sunday school - not for very long, because they hated it, so- but, I mean, you know, they did. So he says "Yes, fine." He apparently telephoned Leicester. The rabbi who accepted me was no longer there. There was another rabbi who confirmed on the telephone that I was a member, and my wife and children were members. So this gentleman here, asks, would he please confirm this in writing? And he says, "No." He says, "There was some question about the validity of their, their belonging, and I am not going to confirm it in writing." So I was not accepted by the United Synagogue in- in Chelsea. Maybe if I would have argued more, but I doubt it. I- I wouldn't. And that is not belonging.

[02:57:27]

You must have felt totally rejected and [inaudible].

I am. Look, I am as good a Jew - as anybody. Suffering doesn't make you a Jew. But I feel belonging, I support Israel, fairly substantially. My mother spent a lifetime working for it. I don't like being on the outside, but I am. And- and I gave up worrying about it. It still upsets me. But I don't worry about it anymore. That's what- that's what English Jews are like, that's what they should stay. It's- I find it is a pity. I have a- well, my ex-business partner is German. He has a different explanation. And you may not like it. There are a lot of English Jews probably won't, but I'll tell you anyway. He said, he was a German of the Jewish faith, and to some extent still is. And I was, and to some extent still am, a Hungarian of the Jewish faith. There is nobody in this country who says "I am an Englishman of the Jewish faith". He said, English Jews are *shtetl* Jews, which means they're Jews. Has its advantages, and- and it is probably acceptable now with the existence of a state, and belonging to it. You know, I- I told you about my mother's Zionism, about other people, and so on. I feel to some extent that way. Rightly or wrongly. I never considered moving there. My sister, oddly enough, did go and live in Israel for a number of years. She died very young, unfortunately. But she- she- she felt the same way as I do about being a- a Hungarian of the Jewish faith. Even in Israel.

You were not drawn to live there?

No.

No- at all?

[03:00:24]

I don't know why. Look, I like the English. It's- it's a very odd taste, I must admit. Sorry, Fred. But- but it's- it's a tolerant country. There is a poem by somebody I have- I've seen here, "*Much to hate, much to forgive, but in a world- but in a world where England is no more, I do not wish to live*" I'm probably paraphrasing. But- but- but then I feel that way. And then I'm- I'll tell you another, it's- it's an odd thing, as I told you and I bragged about it because I do brag about it. My daughters. I don't have anything else to brag about, so I brag about them. When they went up, they actually went up in different years, to Oxford. And there is something called the- the Freshers - affair, as you know. And they each went, and went to the various stands. Amongst others, each one joined the Israel Society and the Jewish Society, without me prompting. So, they're certainly not religious, they're certainly- but, I mean, I happen to think it's a race. It's- but - I'm still also Hungarian.

I wanted to ask you about how they felt as Jewish people in Britain, but also whether they identify at all with your Hungarian cultural background and identity?

Who?

Your- your daughters?

No- no. Very little. I mean - that's our fault. And they blame us for it. You see, they were born in Puerto Rico, where their first language was Spanish. We felt, rightly I think, that English is an extremely important thing for them to learn, so we spoke English to them all the time, and insisted that they learn English and speak English. And we felt Hungarian, a third language, would be too much. We were totally wrong. Children learn languages just like that. And- and… because they don't speak the language and we speak Hungarian to each other, they were never really- I mean, we tried not to speak in front of them when they were small so that they don't- but they never seemed that interested. And they don't- I think it also has a

lot to do about recent political developments in Hungary. I mean, not even recent because you had the Communist era, which- which was a dreadful and where we were prosecuted just as badly, as in- as in- as in the Nazi era. The only advantage was we weren't singled out as a racial group or as a religious group but we were prosecuted, so we were always prosecuted. And they- they had that reaction. Their grandfather, my- Lidia's father, took them to Hungary when they were in their early teens. And they liked it and they- they're still quite friendly with their cousin who's a similar age. But they don't have any affinity. They're- they're very English, actually, and- and- and- and- although, I mean, my- my daughter who lives in Italy has been living there for thirty-odd years. I mean, she's bilingual and has more Italian friends obviously. And in a lot of things has become very Italian. Giving her opinion, for example. And- and- and food.

How many times have you returned to Hungary, and how to do you feel? What's your reaction when you go with your wife?

[03:05:14]

Well, look, how many times I don't- I- I can't give you a count.

Many times, certainly?

I've been many times. I didn't- I first went in 1966, which was best part of twenty years after I left. I've been a number of times. Mostly on business. I used to do business with them, and- and- and I had an advantage because I spoke the local lingo and- and that helped. Whether one forgives and forgets, I don't know. You cannot forget. I accept that most of the people I see these days, have nothing to do with what happened to me and my family or particularly my family all those years ago. I also realise that it would again, given half the chance. But there are strange dichotomies in that. I like Hungarian folk songs. I love Hungarian poetry. My wife doesn't understand it. I sometimes read it to myself. I have Hungarian poetry books by the dozen. But I don't try to push it on anybody. I don't think my daughters would be richer if they- if they- if they had it. I've got out of the habit of trying to help Hungary, as such. Because every time I did that, I was either- either kicked in the teeth right at the beginning, or, I was taken advantage of to the extent of such help as I could give was accepted and-

What sort of help were you-?

Well, to give you- well, alright, let me give you two examples that come to mind immediately. My old school, where they were- they were teaching, for a number of years I didn't go back for a particular reason. Because this very close friend of mine prevent-

Which one of the schools?

This is the- the English language school in Hungary, which was a very good school, with a- with a certain reputation.

Where you were beaten up?

[03:07:55]

Where I was beaten up. Exactly. And- and I had this very close friend, who talked me out of it. And afterwards I found out he talked me out of it because he apparently was working for the Hungarian spy organisation, and didn't want me to find out from the old schoolmates what he was doing. Then he died, poor chap. And then I went. And I offered- I had- I have a cousin whose two sons went to Eton and- and I said, "Listen, Sárospatak is the Eton of Hungary. And Eton is the Sárospatak of England. Can I do some exchanges?" And they totally ignored. Well, that's fair enough. They don't want it, they don't want it. The last thing, and that really annoyed me. Here, I went to a … you know the JW3? JW3 invited various ambassadors for an interview. You know Trudy Gold at all? You don't know Trudy Gold.

I know of the name.

Well, Trudy Gold did the interviewing, and I was on a- on a panel. Trudy was protecting this Hungarian Ambassador like anything. I wasn't allowed any of my real questions. Well, Trudy was a diplomat- didn't want to, you know- anyhow. But they also made approaches to me. There was a meeting some years ago where I- where they- there was a- a report about gypsies and I spoke up against the Hungarians' treatment of gypsies and we slightly fell out

and they tried to make up and they made up. And there was a- the press attaché, a young lady who came to see us and he said, “Look, we must - friendly.” “Yes. Fine.” We are friendly. And they started to invite us to various functions. And then she said, “Well, the Ambassador would like to approach the English middle class with selling Hungary,” – Hungary, as it were - “and go to the clubs.” And I happened to belong to something called the Royal Automobile Club. And I said, “Look, I’ll see if I can do something. Would you like that?” “Oh! That would be- yes.” So I go to talk to the- the manager, and he says, “Oh, no, we don’t want anything to do with the Hungarians because last time they offered us anything, they offered us a week’s kitchen of Hungarian food. We made all the arrangements and on the Thursday before the week, when we already told the staff that they can have the following week off, that these people are coming, they sent a telegram saying that they are not coming.” So I spent days talking him out of this, and there’s a new organisation. And I told this press attaché. She said, “Oh, impossible. That didn’t happen. I know nothing about it.” Turned out she was lying. She knew all about it. But anyway, we went to see the- this manager and made our peace, who gave us lunch. And I come home and like a good boy, I write a nice letter saying “Thank you very much, Mr. So and so…” And I wait some weeks. I sent a copy of the letter to the- to the lady, to the press attaché, and I hear nothing. So I ring her up. I say, “Tell me, have you done anything?” “Well, we have to have some meetings about it.” I said, “Hold on. Have you at least- wrote two lines to the- to the guy who gave you lunch, and gave you your time? At least fix that you have been forgiven on something which I think is- is- is very bad manners at- at the very least?” “Oh, no. I never thought about that.” I said, “Well, will you do it?” So she says, “I don’t think so. I don’t think why I should. I’m sorry I put you into such a position.” End of everything. Well, you know, this is no way to- to be. This is- you know, obviously changed their minds, fair enough.

[03:12:20]

But…

But. And- and they- they are like this. They are like this. And I- we just had some friends come back. I mean, we you asked about when your original question was, how often do I go? Well, lately, not very often. In the last seven years we went once, which was last summer, where we were recommended to go for a cure in- in Heves in one of these watery places, that Lidia needed. Needs. Didn’t do any good, but we- we went. I found that people - maybe

because things are not so good - they have become quite ill mannered. The language is abominable. I mean, I think language here has become very- very unacceptable, if you like. Because, you know, people didn't used to use words, in everyday language like they use now. But in Hungary, they don't use any others. Yes. In the- in the hotel industry, in the tourist industry, they're still very polite and "yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir". But amongst each other, and- and- and to you, to me, if I speak, it's- it's become- and it was like this in the Communist era.

Definitely. And it's lingered.

Yeah. And it's now back again with a vengeance.

Does that make you feel alienated from…?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes. I don't- look, I- I suppose I'm scared to become like that. I don't know. Maybe I am, I don't know. But- but- but I don't want to be like that. I- I- I am- and of course anti-Semitism is rife. And- and mind you, you can be a fascist without being anti-Semite. And the Hungary- Hungary's current political organisation, is the arch-typical textbook example of fascism. Power amongst a very small number of people, controlling everything and everybody. They do it very cleverly. But they're doing it. And it's-

Does that worry you about the future of Hungary?

[03:15:05]

Look, I suppose it does. On the other hand, why should it? So if they disappear, so what? They're not going to disappear; they're going to be around there for a while. It worries me about the Jews who are left there. I mean, there are still- well, between 80- and 100,000, which is quite a lot. I mean, nobody knows the exact number, because of the- on the census you're not allowed to put religion. But you see I have this cousin of- of Lidia's. And- and I

have the son of my own cousin. Well, he's only half-Jewish. But this cousin of Lidia's says, "Well, I want to leave, I want to leave, I want to leave, but I'm doing reasonably well here, why should I?" Exactly what we said in the 1930s. And exactly what I heard from my father in those days. I don't know if anything- and- you see, I used to believe that European Union would do something about that, should it become necessary. I no longer believe that. I no longer believe that for two reasons. The first one is, that sixty percent of the Hungarian national income, or the income of the Hungarian state - it's not national income - Hungarian stat-, originates in Europe. Half of which finds its way into the pockets of companies and groups next to the government. Thinktanks- I mean, the present Hungarian ambassador used to be a- probably still is, owner of a thinktank that had nearly every thinking contract from the government that was going. Statistically, the- the Hungarian oligarchy owns percentage-wise as a- their- their asset expressed as a percentage of Hungarian national product, the GDP of- of Hungary - higher than Russia. Because - and this they have done in the last fifteen years. It cannot lead to anything good. I don't know where it will. You see, in the way that I disbelieve in Socialism, and I believe that Mr. Maduro in Venezuela is a disaster, and he is a disaster in his very manifest as it is. In Hungary at the moment it's not this manifest. But. Half a million Hungarians left Hungary in the last six years, out of a population of nine million I mean, you know? If half a million leave from here, so what? There is a shortage of labour and now there is forced overtime. If your boss tells you: "Work overtime." - you have to work overtime. And it's- and the premium is very little and can be paid late. I mean, you know. It is- it is the against the people as Communism ended up being against the people. So I'm very pessimistic about Hungary and- and- listen, I won't be around for so long so I may not see the result but-

[03:19:06]

What about Germany? Have you ever been to Germany?

Oh, yes. I've been to Germany. Look, the Germans did something which I admire. I mean, I obviously hate what they did before. But they said *Mea Culpa*. They said, "We want to make things good. We want to restitute-" and that is not only money. I mean, money is pretty important and there's nothing else to do it with. And they have money, and they do it. And they did it to Israel. I mean, the State of Israel owes to its early years an awful lot to the Germans. And we have to recognise that. And we, as individuals, I mean, I don't because you

know, but my in-laws and- and- and my own family had German compensation. And- and deservedly so! But they did that, and that I admire and- and that- that makes things good. I admire their efficiency. They are efficient. Whether they would do it again? I wouldn't guarantee that they would not. It is- it's very attractive. And- and- and- and you can always find- I'm not saying that the Germans did everything themselves, I mean, there were the nice Ukrainians, and the nice Poles, and the nice- well, the nice Hungarians. Czechs last, but Slovaks, definitely. You are from the Czech Republic - not from Slovakia.

But - did you- did any members of your family perish in the camps at all?

Yes. Of course. Not-

And furthermore, perhaps not in the immediate family, but…?

Not in the very immediate family. No, I mean my- I'm very, very fortunate and it's a rarity that my parents, grandparents, cousins, I mean the cousins some of them were born afterwards, but- most of them were born afterwards but we survived. But we have- I mean, you know what I told you about my mother kicking herself not to take half a dozen children which [???] were cousins of hers, who perished. I can't give you a number, because I never added it up. But- look, in- in- in- I mentioned the town of Ujpest. In the synagogue- yeah, the synagogue was quite a big synagogue. But there is a wall that they built of all the names. I can- If you want it, I can give you a photograph of that also. There are 13,000 names.

[03:22:33]

Yes. Like the wall in the Pinkas Synagogue in Prague, there's-

Yeah, yeah- similar- similar, very similar. Very similar. But this is- this is outside. Not inside the synagogue- Pinkas, I think it's inside the synagogue.

Yes.

Yeah, this is outside. They built a wall, which in a way serves to protect the synagogue. And it- if you or any- or any- need to protect it.

If I may come right back to the early part…

Yeah.

…of our discussion. You asked yourself why you were still alive. Do you- do you, even now, after all these years, sometimes feel guilty that…?

Always. And anybody who doesn't - [becomes emotional] I'm sorry - isn't human. My friends, my relatives. The thousands. Even if I didn't know them. Why me? I'm- look, I'm not going to kill myself because this doesn't help. But I feel guilty every day of the week. And I'm upset about one thing, which is very personal. I told you I've got two daughters and they don't- I don't have any grandchildren. So I'm asking God, why did you do this for me? But he did. You see, I'm not religious, but I do believe in God. I need it, for my-

Do you feel that there's a lack of purpose for you?

Well, yes, that's what I'm trying to say. I mean, you know, lack of purpose, we- we live because we live. I mean, that's- it's a question of philosophy. And the Jewish religion is, to me is unique inasmuch as one of the purposes is, to live well. And- and- and that I have achieved. I'm very happy about that. I- I- I have lived well. And I, I continue to live well, alright, sometimes this hurts, and sometimes that hurts. But- but I do live as well and I do what I like. I hope it's not too sinful what I like. And I don't really- really know the difference between the, you know, the sinful and the not sinful. But yeah, I mean, the lack of purpose is in the continuity. There I- I feel- I feel- I feel very badly. That's- but look, I can't force- having said that, the way the world is going and not- and not only Brexit because that's a hiccough. But the way the world is going, is it so good for- will it be so good, for those grandchildren? Maybe that is God's mercy. I mean, I don't like to talk about God's mercy. That's- that's too saintly for me. I'm not- I'm not a saintly individual.

But you spoke about living well but also in the Jewish faith living well involves being kind, doing something good for others. And that you've done also.

[03:27:00]

Well, yes. I mean, that's- look, I'm saying this and I don't know how to say it. I would like to say it with- with humility, but it will not come out like that, I'm sure. I think in the last twenty years since I've been retired, I didn't have to be nasty to anybody. And I don't really think I was. Well, my wife wouldn't agree with that. But she's not here, so that's fine. But I did try to be as helpful as I possibly could. Not- it's not only a question of charity. I mean, charity is one thing and donations and so on. I mean, you know, one- it's one's duty and I believe in a- in a principle of tithe. And- and but that's, you know, that's, that's a detail. In treating people- you know, if you see somebody fall down, you don't walk by. And a number of other things. And- and- look, through my life, I'm not a doctor, so I couldn't help too many people, but there were- are a number of people whose life I think I made - better. And that's all I can- I can- I can hope to do. And if I can continue to do that for a little while, a couple of years wouldn't – you know. You know the term, "*bis hundertundzwanzig*"? To until a hundred and twenty years- he should live to a hundred and twenty years. But I want to live to a hundred and twenty, plus one day. I don't want to die on my birthday.

[Jana laughs]

I think that's a very positive note on which to end, but before we do so, is there anything that you would like to add, you know, thinking back to what you said earlier, is there anything that you didn't mention then that you would like to add? Or is there some personal message that would like to record for your children?

For?

[03:29:40]

For your children? For the girls, or anyone else looking at the video.

There is one line in the Bible which says, "If I am not for myself, who shall be for me? And if I am only for myself, who am I?" Don't ask me where in the Bible, but it's there. And if my children can remember anything, they should remember that. I can't think of anything. I think- I think I've told you so many silly things.

No, that's been absolutely tremendous.

Well, you say this to all the boys, don't you?

No.

Come on.

But I'd like to thank you very, very much indeed for your time-

Well, thank you very much for coming. And thank you for the opportunity as I said when we started. I- I- I have a friend from Moravia, would you believe, from Olomouc - you know Olomouc? Who keeps on- who wrote a book about his life, and so on. Keeps on telling me I should do the same thing, but now I don't have to anymore. You've got it all. [laughs]

Fantastic. That's wonderful.

Good. OK. Now- You said photographs-

If you could just stay there for one moment, please.

[End of interview]
[03:31:55]
[03:32:00]
[Start of photographs]

Photo 1
The picture is of my father, Gyula – that's G Y U L A - Donath. The picture was taken in Budapest in 1914, very soon after he enlisted in the Hungarian Army in the First World War.

Photo 2
This photograph was taken in Transylvania in a- in a place called Sovata in- in Rosh Hashana which is the Jewish New Year in 1916. All Jewish soldiers. My father is the second one from the left, seated. The others, I'm afraid I do not know.

Photo 3

This is wedding picture of my parents, Gyula Donath and Livia Vigodny, on the 12th of August 1928.

Photo 4

This is a picture of myself, George Donath, and my sister, and Anne Judit Donath. Taken in Ujpest in 1935.

Photo 5

This is a photograph of my grandparents Josef Donath and Bertha Goldstein in 1937. It was taken in Balatonfüred in Hungary. Balatonfüred.

Photo 6

This is a picture of my great-grandparents, Ignaz Schwarz and Sara Donath, taken in Ujpest, in their garden in 1928.

[03:34:12]

Photo 7

This is a picture taken in 1927, in Ujpest. Standing, my uncle Andrew Vigodny, my mother, Livia Vigodny, my grandfather, Adolf Vigodny, and seated, my aunt Marta Vigodny. And my grandmother Krisztina Antonia Schwarz.

Photo 8

This is a picture of Class 3 of the Venetianer Lajos, elementary school in Ujpest in the year of 1940. I am George Donath, the second one from the right, seated. The picture shows five survivors. The rest – lost.

Photo 9

This is a picture of myself, George Donath, taken in January 1947 in Millom Cumberland.

Photo 10

This is a photograph taken in the Columbus Street camp in Budapest in August 1944. Of my sister Judith Anne, my mother, and myself, George Donath.

Photo 11

This is a picture taken in Millom Cumberland on the 23rd of July 1957, on the occasion of the wedding of Lidia Csillag and George Donath, who happens to be myself.

Photo 12

This is a photograph taken on the day of my daughter Vivian's wedding on the 25th of April 1985. From left to right: My daughter Lia Suzanne, myself George Donath, my number one wife Lidia Donath, my son-in-law Enrico Murchio, my daughter Vivian, Enrico's uncle, and my mother, Livia Vigodny.

Thank you very much George.

[End of photographs]

[03:37:12]