

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV298
NAME: Simon Jochnowitz
DATE: 26 June 2024
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Kristin Baumgartner

[00:00:00]

Today is the 26th of June 2024, we're conducting an interview with Mr Simon Jochnowitz. My name is Kristin Baumgartner and we are in London. What is your name please?

My name is Simon Jochnowitz.

And when and where were you born?

I was born in Fulda in 1931.

Simon, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for Refugee Voices.

You're welcome.

And can you please tell us a little bit about your family background.

My family background, my parents were Polish Jews, who moved to Fulda very early on. I think my father and mother came separately, they met in Fulda, fell in love and got married. And so they went back to Poland to get married, and then came back to Fulda again.

All right. And did you have siblings?

Siblings? Yes, six [both laugh].

So and what was the age gap between the oldest one and you?

Joe, my older brother, Joe, was about fourteen years older than I, and the rest sort of in two and three-year gaps, my brother Naftali is just about nearly two years older than I.

Okay. And where in Fulda did you live?

In the Judengasse, when it was called that.

So most of the neighbours were Jewish?

Yes, yes, there were some non-Jewish people as well, but yeah, it didn't seem to matter then.

Yeah, was it close to the synagogue?

Yes, the synagogue was at the end of the road.

And that was important because your father was a teacher and cantor?

Yes, but he didn't officiate in Fulda so much, he used to officiate for the high holidays in the little towns around Fulda.

[00:02:09] *Oh, do you remember which towns?*

No, no.

Yeah, I think I remember, I read somewhere there was a little synagogue in Flieden, have you heard that?

Yes, I have heard of that, yes.

Yeah. And I think, oh now I can't remember the name. Another one that has now been not rebuilt, because it wasn't destroyed. It was turned into something else, and then now it's not a synagogue, it's more like a community place, and ah but that's interesting. And so he, who officiated in Fulda?

There was a Herr Rabbiner.

What was his name?

Kahn.

Kahn, K-a-h-n?

I think so, yes, yes.

Yeah. I think he was mentioned by another one of our interviewees, his name was Arnold Weinberg.

Yes, I remember, I know Arnold Weinberg.

And he mentioned that rabbi.

Yes.

And so your father, did he travel then a lot, did he spend a lot of time away?

For the high holidays and that sort of thing he had to be away, but then he also got a job in the Manchester yeshiva.

But that was later.

That was later on.

While you were in Fulda –

Yes, yes.

He – it was only for the high holidays, so he was at home with you in Fulda most of the time?

The rest of the time, yes, yes, yes.

And what did he do then, when he was in Fulda?

Well then he taught.

He taught, he was a teacher?

Teacher, yes.

Of Hebrew and religious studies?

Yes, of, yes.

Oh okay, how many teachers were there, just him or no?

I think – I don't remember how many.

Yeah, so which leads to the question, how many – what do you think or how big was the Jewish community in Fulda?

About 300 families.

So –

That I think German families, and then there were the Poles who came later, Polish families who came later on.

[00:04:02] *When you say later on, when was that?*

I should think in the '20s and '30s. '20s I think.

So late?

Yes.

Yes. And was it – so the majority were German Jewish families?

Yes, yes.

Yeah, and would you say – did that always work out well, or were there some times –

Well I think they didn't have too much to do with each other, I think the Polish Jews, I don't know what they worked at, or what they did. But I don't think they had much to do with the German Jewish families. Apart from us, we passed as German Jews.

You were mixed, yeah. So, you had basically the non-Jewish population?

Yes.

And then you had among the Jewish population, also some sort of separation?

Germans and the Jews, and the Poles.

So you didn't – but there was only one synagogue so you had to go there?

They had a synagogue downstairs, where we lived, there was a couple of rooms, and they turned that into a synagogue.

For the Polish?

For the Polish Jews.

So did they want that or do you think that was, they couldn't use the other synagogue?

They didn't want to, they had – their customs were different.

Ah, right, yeah. So maybe even the set-up of that fairly new synagogue was not what they liked?

No, they weren't comfortable in that. And they were comfortable, they like – with the people who were like them.

Yeah, but your father was Polish?

Yes.

But he was not – he was a cantor for the German –

Yes, because he could do it in the German manner, not – you know, he would say “au” instead of “oy”.

Yeah, but he already spoke German when he came?

[00:06:00] Yes, because I think where they were born was under Austria, so they all spoke German.

Yeah, so he was bilingual, yeah. But did he speak also Polish?

Yes, he did.

Yes, and with your mother what did he speak with her?

They spoke to each other in German I think, in Germany they did. Later on, you know, they spoke in Yiddish, but my mother wasn't – my father remembered his Polish, because after the war, when the Polish army was settled in England, he was able to speak to them in Polish, he remembered his Polish.

And your mother not so much?

No, she didn't want it, she didn't have good memories of it.

Ah, okay. And with your children, the language in the home was German mainly?

In Fulda yes.

Yeah, and like German, and not Yiddish?

No, definitely German [laughs].

Yeah, is Yiddish more what the Eastern European Jews would speak?

Yes, yes, yes.

Ah, interesting. So even on high holidays, the Jewish – the German Jewish and the Polish Jewish communities did not do this together?

No, no, no, they didn't, no.

Oh that's interesting.

Obviously, there were enough Polish Jews to form a sort of a community.

Yeah, yeah. So okay, so the language was that at home, and you were a very religious family.

Yes, yeah.

And was that orthodox and, yeah.

Yes, orthodox.

So not some liberal or reform or anything?

No, no, no, it was orthodox, but you know, not extreme orthodox, it was –

I remember I read a little bit in the transcript of Arnold Weinberg and he thinks the Jewish community in Fulda was fairly religious.

Yes.

So the majority was religious, and only a minority was not so much?

Yes, yes.

And he thinks if you are in a place where you are – like in Fulda where you were a minority, not like Berlin or one of the bigger cities, it's kind of there's more of a cohesion, you –

[00:08:04] Yes, yes.

You stick more together and then that religion is –

Yes, it was a more intimate community, yeah.

Yeah. Yeah, so did you start school in Fulda already?

Yes. The thing that I remember, you know, as quite a young child, was when I was – I think I must have been about four or five years old, and I remember going into the street, like, you know, when you are young the sun always shines [both laugh]. And I remember coming down, the sun was shining, said, “I’m not sucking my thumb anymore,” because until then I did.

You’re a big boy now [both laugh].

And then, right, going to stop now, at year four, and I did.

And you went, you probably didn’t go to a kindergarten or something, it was –

I did.

Oh did you?

Of course, yes.

Oh.

It was Jewish kindergarten.

I thought you had such a big family that you know you would just all –

Everybody was a different age.

Yeah.

And it was, you know, it was very well set up.

Oh nice.

It was *die Tante Elisabeth* and, you know, and we – and I remember going on outings with them in the summer, you know?

Yeah, where did you go?

Oh that I don't remember [laughs].

There's a nice park, Schlosspark, this – I mean there's nice stuff in Fulda, it's quite green and parks and yeah.

Schlossgarten?

Yeah, Schlossgarten.

We weren't allowed to go to the Schlossgarten anymore.

Ah, I'm sorry, I forgot that, hmm, yeah.

Juden nicht erwünscht. [Jews unwanted].

Yeah. So yeah, you then probably had to go even out of – for a bit more?

We were – yes, you know, as a child you don't remember exactly where we went, we were just taken out and we – and then it was summer and it was warm and it was wonderful.

Yeah. And I mean you remember of course the Jewish high holidays, but because Fulda was – the majority was not Jewish, you probably also remember all the other – not so much?

[00:10:00] That didn't affect us, no.

You did not – that was not the –

Didn't impact on us at all, no, no.

No. And I think you mentioned to me, maybe you can say it for the camera, the shops which were around where you lived, one seems to have stuck in your mind.

Yes [both laugh]. Yes, so the chocolate shop.

The chocolate shop.

Which had a back entrance in the Judengasse, and we used to get *Abfall* [leftovers].

Abfall.

Für zwei Pfennig [for two pence].

And was it like bars of chocolate, or was it like –

Bits were broken off that they couldn't sell in the shop.

Oh that's nice, hmm.

Yeah, we had a good time.

Yeah, did your mother – when she cooked for you, was it very Polish, or was it –

I don't think so, I think she was a very good cook, but you know, what kind of kitchen it was I wouldn't remember.

Do you remember –

But also that, you know, my grandmother whose picture's over there, she lived with us, and she helped – my mother always said she couldn't have managed without her mother, because there were nine of us, in a really small flat. And she's always around helping.

Yeah, so you lived in a flat?

Yes.

And was it like first floor or second floor?

Second floor.

And –

Die Gutmanns lived on the first floor, and we on the second floor. And downstairs there lived an – a single man who always used to grab my legs as I was going up the stairs, he always used to grab my legs, and –

Did he like pinch your –

Pinch, yeah, yeah, I think he did it in fun. And my grandmother, or my mother said, “Wouldn't it be wonderful if he went away?” and my grandparents could move into that flat. Well what do you know, he went to this – he went into the wherever he went, and he hung himself.

Oh.

We didn't intend him to do that.

No, of course, that's not how you wished, yeah.

But it happened [laughs].

Ah, okay, and then your grandparents –

So then we moved in, so my grandparents moved in on the ground floor.

[00:12:05] *And do you remember your Oma and Opa?*

Oh yes, absolutely. I didn't speak much to my grandfather, because he spoke Yiddish, and I didn't speak Yiddish, so we didn't have much to do, but my grandmother she interacted with us all the time.

Do you remember their names?

Yes, he was called Pesach and she was called Chana.

And their family name, their surname?

Yeah, their surname was Kalter.

Ah, Kalter, that's right, right. And so you remember them, and but they didn't – did they come – come to England with you?

No, no, because my grandfather died in '38, so he was buried in the Jewish graveyard. And my grandmother- because she couldn't come to England with us, so my mother found a place in a non-Jewish old age home, where they treated her very, very well.

Oh that's nice.

And they used to call her “*die fromme Frau Kalter*” [pious Mrs. Kalter] [both laugh] because she was always praying.

Was – it might have been run by nuns.

Yeah.

Because, you know, a lot of the kindergarten and the hospitals and care homes, that I think for a long time that was run by nuns.

Hmm hmm.

My father has – I can't remember how many, a lot of cousins who were nuns, and a lot of them were nurses and teachers, so yeah.

Yeah. But they were very good to her.

Yeah, and when did your grandmother die?

She died while she was there, and, you know, thank god she did, because she wasn't sent away.

Yeah.

But I managed to visit her grave when I went to Fulda.

So it's –

She wasn't buried, there was no Jewish graveyard anymore, she was buried in a non-Jewish graveyard outside of Fulda, and there were Jewish, three Jewish graves, so I went there, and I said my Kaddish, and I thought, you know, I hope I did right by her.

[00:14:01] *Oh, do you know where that was, outside Fulda?*

No.

No.

I mean they were very good, when I went to Fulda they were very, very helpful. So whoever from the town hall they took me there, and brought me back.

That's nice for you to be able to do that.

Yes.

Yeah.

Cameraman: And were these maternal grandparents or paternal?

Maternal, maternal?

Cameraman: Paternal?

And the paternal grandparents?

I didn't know them. They live in Poland.

Poland, and you never went to see them?

No, my father used to go every so often, and he promised to take my brother, Max, and then there was something wrong with the passport, and he couldn't take him, my poor brother got so ill because he was so upset, he couldn't go. But my father used to go every so often to visit his parents.

Yeah, where were they in Poland?

In the place I mentioned.

Ah Padewa?

Padewa [sic] yes, yes.

Yeah, yeah. I'll look later for that. And did he come alone to Fulda, or did he come with siblings?

No, he came alone when he came – in 19 – must be during the war. Because he was never enrolled in the army, because in my – my other uncles were all in the army, because they were Austrians. So but he had one of his hands didn't open up, so they didn't take him in the army, he couldn't shoot [laughs].

Yes, yeah, so do you know why he came to Fulda?

It had a reputation for being a good place to settle.

Ah, for business, or something, do you know what it was, because I actually really don't know.

No, I don't know that.

Yeah.

But my Uncle Samson, he had a sort of – I don't know, boarding house, or people used to go there to eat.

In Fulda?

In Fulda, and that's where my father, mother met.

Oh, how nice [laughs].

So, it wasn't a *shidduch*, it was a love match [both laugh].

[00:16:01] *And did you have like a lot of uncles, and aunts, or like –*

No.

Your parents siblings in Fulda, or just that one?

No. There were no siblings in Fulda, no families, my parents didn't have anybody who lived. That my Uncle Samson [ph], he went to – he left Fulda and he went to live in Antwerp.

Ah, okay. And so- like you said you didn't have family like cousins or anyone there?

No, not like that, no.

Yeah, and you also didn't go to Antwerp or Poland or somewhere to visit them?

No.

So it was actually just your – it wasn't a small family, but the nuclear family?

The nuclear family, well the family, yes.

Yeah. But did you have a lot of friends in Fulda, or your parents did they say?

Yes, yes, we had friends, because I went to school, and so I knew people, and they – you know, I went to visit them, and they probably went to visit – came to – well they probably had bigger houses or bigger flats than I did, so probably went there more.

And was probably quite easy in those days, you would just- even a six-year old was allowed to probably just –

Yes, oh yes.

Go down and cross the street?

Absolutely.

Yeah.

Yes.

And exactly, I remember from the transcript of Arnold Weinberg, he was asked if there were Jewish clubs, and he mentions one, so from the transcript I would say it's called Ezra?

Ezra [ph] yes, yes.

That was not sport, right, that was –

No, it was sort of a Zionist kind of club.

Oh yeah, and did your siblings go to this club or –

Not that I remember, no, no.

Yeah. Was that a sports club, football or something?

No. Well my brother, Joe went to the *Oberrealschule* [secondary school], until he was fourteen, then they kicked him out.

Yeah.

And then he trained, well he was a little bit older than fourteen by then, he trained to be a carpenter. [00:18:03] Because the idea was to go to Palestine.

Yes.

And he was quite good at it actually [both laugh].

I think, if I remember correctly Arnold Weinberg says they were in the Jewish school.

Yes.

And they were not allowed to speak German anymore, I think they were supposed to speak English and Hebrew.

That I don't remember.

So they were prepared for emigration.

Yes, well he was a bit older than I, so he remembered things that I did.

Yes, exactly.

But I mean that I remember Hitler speaking on the, you know, all the loudspeakers were on everywhere. And you couldn't escape it, and I remember distinctly, you know, being in bed and saying, "Oh I can't sleep, I can't sleep," and my mother said, there's nothing I could do about it.

No, and Fulda, I mean you're probably too young, but like party rallies, or like –

Yes, no, I remember them going through the sort of high street and whatever, I used to go like that with that my hand, and until my sister said, “Don’t do that.”

Ooh, but you didn’t know. Yeah, you didn’t know and –

No, I wanted to be like everybody else [laughs].

Yeah, but you didn’t have friends who were not Jewish, because you went to –

No.

To the Jewish school?

Yes, yes, it was a very closed community.

Yeah, and so the schoolchildren in Germany start school when they are six, erste Klasse [year one].

Yes.

Were you also six, or did you start –

Yes.

Earlier?

I suppose I was six. And I remember you went to the *Tüte* [“school cone”].

Yeah, I was just going to ask that, it’s such a big deal isn’t it?

Yes, and my mother was very crazy, she said, “When you shake hands with Herr Möller, the teacher, you say, you know, you shake hands with him.” And everybody laughed, because

[laughs] this was very formal [both laugh]. And they took the *Tüte*, I don't think I ever got anything from it [both laugh].

Did you have like a smaller one, because some of our –

No, it was quite big.

Mine was really big too.

Yes.

Some of them are, like almost as big as the child [both laugh]. [00:20:01] And do you remember what was in there?

No, no, I don't.

Because I think the olden days it was like fruit and sweets.

Yeah, probably.

*And nowadays it's, yeah, it's a bit much, I did one for my children here, but it is weird because they are not German children, but I like – do you have a photo of yourself with the *Schultüte*?*

No, there's – no.

No, because some of our interviewees have a photo.

No, and, you know, and who had a camera in those days?

Yeah, no, no-one, I just thought I'd ask, because we have a bit of a gallery with that. And so you started school, was it just the first year in the room, or was it a couple of different – one, two, three, four –

No, I think it was just the first year, yeah.

Ah, and was, do you remember roughly how many children, was it a small group?

No, I don't, I don't.

Yeah.

It wasn't long after, I don't know how long after, so I can't remember the time thing. But then we were sent away to Poland, we were – not when we were evacuated, is a kind word.

No.

No, we were –

You were really pushed out and –

Pushed out.

Was that at Kristallnacht or was it un –

Sorry?

Was it unrelated to the November pogrom, or was it at that –

I think it all had to do, we don't want any – get rid of all the Polish Jews, we don't want – they didn't want them there, so let's get rid of them. So, they came on Friday afternoon, and I remember my sister's packing suitcases, and half the suitcases were full of books, you know?

They - you don't think straight. And in two hours they'd put us in a car, a van or whatever, they'd take – I think they took us to Kassel.

So, you didn't get from Fulda Station, you were taken to Kassel?

Yes.

Oh okay.

And so it was the meeting point for all the other Jews who lived around that area. [00:22:06] And my father was able to make, you know, Kiddush and he had two loafs of bread to make Matzah with and all that. And I remember, I think it's the first time I saw non-religious Jews, because there were some people from a Kibbutz or whatever. It was Hakhshara really, that were there. And they were very different.

Yeah.

So, from there I think they – we – I don't remember how long we stayed in Kassel, but then we went on the train. And they locked us in the train for what reason, I mean crazy.

Were you the only family – no, no, you cannot –

No, we were –

Must have been quite –

Whatever Poles, Polish Jews were in Fulda were on that train as well.

Yeah.

But why they locked us in, the Lord knows, because we weren't going to escape [laughs]. And we got to Schneidemühl [present-day Piła, Poland] which was the border to Poland. And

a civilian policeperson came on. And I think, and I think we must have disembarked by then, from the train, and he said, "*Ihr seid frei.*" [You are free]. Because Poles had closed the borders, they wouldn't let us in fortunately. So, then he said, "*Ihr seid frei, you can go wherever you want now.*" And my father just couldn't take it in, he was so wound up, he just couldn't take it in. And then we were sent back to Fulda, and of course with efficiency they sealed our apartments, so we couldn't get into our apartment anymore [laughs].

And it wasn't opened again, it was –

Eventually, but not when we came back. So we had to – I don't know where we stayed, but with other people.

Yeah.

For a few days.

And I mean you were quite a young child, and you were probably shielded by your parents, but do you remember were you scared or –

[00:24:00] I remembered, yes, because particularly when they burnt the synagogue and that sort of thing, and you heard lots of noise and banging and stuff, and a lot of the time I wasn't home, I had to stay with other people, because we were so close to the synagogue, we had to move away from there.

So that event that you were pushed out of Fulda, that was after the synagogue had been burnt down?

I would think so.

Yeah, so okay, so you actually remember the – do you have memories of the synagogue burning, or –

Well yes, yes, I do, I remember that. But because we were not very far away.

Yes. And one step before that, do you have memories of the synagogue?

Yes, yes.

Of the interior, was it –

Yeah, it was beautiful.

Beautiful, yeah, yeah.

Yes. You know, there was a vestibule before you went into the actual synagogue, you used to wash your hands there, and then you went into the synagogue and it was beautiful, you know?

And was the school right next to it?

No, the school was somewhere else.

Oh okay, and was it like a primary and a secondary school?

Yes, yes, because my siblings went to the secondary school.

And your father taught in the secondary school?

No, he taught in the yeshiva, not in the –

Ah, that's the step after, yeah.

Yeah.

So your father did not – wasn't one of your teachers?

No, no.

No. And –

No, I remember Herr Möller, that's all I remember.

Möller?

Möller, yes.

Is it M-ö-l-l-e-r?

Yes.

Ah, I saw the name again in Arnold Weinberg's transcript, and it was Mellor, it was M-e-l-l-o-r, I thought, oh, interesting name.

No, no.

So it's Möller actually?

Möller, yes, definitely [laughs].

All right, I put this right in your transcript. And was it a nice teacher, was he – or was he very strict?

Yes, I seem to remember he was good. Except when we came back to Fulda, you know, I must have met up with my fellow pupils, at the thing, schoolfriends, and they said, "Oh, you are back now, you can come back to school." [00:26:09] And I really didn't want to go back [laughs].

You didn't want to go back?

No.

Yeah, you wanted to be at home with your family?

Yeah, yes.

But did you go back?

I really don't remember, I don't think there was a school to go back to anymore.

Ah okay, okay. And so you learned – so it was a Jewish school, but you learned like reading, writing?

The regular curriculum, yes.

Math?

Yes.

Yes, and the religious bit would be on top or was it on a different day?

I don't think so, it's that the first year you probably wouldn't have been, there might have been a special sort of religious school to learn, those things.

Yeah, and did you, because your father had, you said a beautiful voice, did you like singing?

They could all sing, my brother Joe sang very well, my brother Max sang very well, and my brother Naftali has got a sweet, lovely voice now, I'm the only one who doesn't sing well [both laugh]. I think I sing well, but they don't think so.

Well out of seven children, three, it's not so bad.

Yeah.

Did one of them become a cantor?

No.

No, and are you – you were a teacher in your professional life?

Yes, yes.

Did – were you the – do you think that came because of your father and –

I would – I think it was in the genes [laughs], yes.

Yeah, yeah.

Because although my brother Naftali is a dentist, he was – he's also a good teacher [both laugh].

And I mean your mother, we- I asked you before, she had seven children, so there was not really time for a career. But do you know what she liked doing, if –

She was a homemaker, you know, she – nobody taught her, she was an excellent cook, she used to sew all the dresses and whatever for the girls. She taught herself everything, she was very go ahead. I think had she been born later she would have become a career lady.

[00:28:01] *Yes, what do you think she would have liked to do? She never said anything?*

Anything, anything, I mean she had a very open mind.

Ah, okay.

I mean, you know, even when we came to England later on she learnt to write in English.

Great, yeah.

And she spoke English, so she was a bright lady.

Do you know how old roughly she was when she – when your parents came, how old they were when they came to –

She must have been, let me see, early 40s, and my father maybe late 40s or early 50s.

Yeah.

Should have brought the pictures down from upstairs, to show you, yes.

We can have a look later, maybe.

Yes, yes.

That's nice. And I mean seven siblings, you were the youngest, were you closer to the ones next in age, did you play a lot with them?

Yes, I suppose I was – eventually I was close to my brother Max.

He was not the – was he the next oldest?

He was not the next one, he was the one after that.

After.

Well that's partly because he befriended me more than the – he took care of me sort of thing.

Oh that's nice, did you play outside, or did –

Yes, yes. Well as long as we could.

Yeah. And when you were at home, did you – what did you –

At home, I don't – you know, it was such a small flat, and there were so many people, I don't remember what. And we certainly didn't have a bed of our own, we always had to buckle up with other children, you know, siblings.

And before I forget, you came back from Poland, do you know if your parents had tried before to emigrate, or did they really then just start the efforts?

My father was very clever, he tried to get out of Germany in the early '30s, he had a brother in Uruguay. And I don't know how he – he was a tailor. He wrote to him in Uruguay and said, "Look, you know, things are bad here, and we'd like to – what were the chances?" and he wrote back and he said, "Things are very, very bad here, I don't know how you can make a living, and I think you better stay where you are."

[00:30:14] *Okay. So that was kind of the first attempt?*

First attempt. And I don't – yeah, after that I think probably because my siblings managed to get to England, we thought of England, that was already late in the '30s.

So okay, he tried, he asked his brother in Uruguay, that didn't work out. But then he didn't like try to get on the waiting list for the US, or Palestine or –

Oh yes, yes, yes, he did, we had family, we had family in the US, and he wrote to them, and they were very careful about signing anything. You know, for a family with seven children.

Yeah.

They were a bit – but eventually actually they did, we did get an – they sent, I think it was called an affidavit, they sent that to us when we were already in England. And we could have gone to America, but by that time the war was on, and we were settled in England, and we didn't go.

No. So but the actual attempts to leave Germany, that started then after you were – came back from Poland, from this incident at the Polish border?

Even earlier, even earlier, my father was – you know, was farsighted, he knew there was no future there, and he tried whatever way he could to get out of it. I mean we even thought if England doesn't work out, maybe we'll go to Shanghai, because they took everybody in.

Yeah, so the first one to leave was it your oldest brother, Joe?

Yes, yes, he left to go to the – you know, he got an invitation from the Manchester yeshiva to go there. And then my –

How did this come about, sorry to interrupt you.

They just sent a leaflet.

So he saw a leaflet somewhere?

[00:32:03] Yes, they sent it to the house, lots of leaflets. They sent it to the house, my brother went to Frankfurt, they gave him a visa, they gave him a visa.

To the English Consulate?

Yes, English Consulate.

British sorry.

Yeah, and they gave him a visa to come to England, and they obviously had a lot of these leaflets, so by the tenth person who came they thought, oh, ah, we're not going to give anymore out [laughs].

So only Joe could go, not another brother?

No, no, nobody else.

Yeah, so he left first?

He left first. Then my sister Ida went as a – it was called a domestic in London. My sister Gine came as a – not – there was something lower than a domestic, looking after children, she – Gine came next.

Also in London?

No, Gine came to Manchester. My sister Malli came on the Kindertransport.

And did she go to London, or did she –

She also came to Manchester, she was adopted by a non-Jewish family, when she came to England, when she came to England and she – you know, she came to the rail station, nobody waited for her, eventually somebody did. And they took her in, and then she realised she didn't want to go to a non-Jewish family, being orthodox. So she eventually, they managed to find somewhere in Manchester, Bradpieces [ph] in Manchester who took her in.

And then she was there until your parents came?

Yes, yes.

And then she came back to live with all of you?

Because Joe and Gine found a house for us. I mean a house, you know, [both laugh], that was amazing for us.

Yeah.

Nineteen shillings a week, the rent. And we were able to take in some boarders then, that's how we were able to live.

But let's – so Joe was here, Ida, Gine, Malli?

Yes.

And then the last to come were you and Max?

[00:34:00] Max, Naftali, myself.

And your parents, did they also come on domestic visas, how did they manage?

No, they came as I think as a teacher.

Ah, so he was – did he come as a teacher and cantor at the synagogue in Manchester, your father, or –

No, no, it was just, it was a way of getting the permit.

Okay.

To say, because they didn't give us permission to work. So at least, you know, you are on a different list, there were different ways of coming to England, and if you were on the

professional list, you got a bit of preference. And also, because my sister Ida used to make – she used to go to Rabbi Dr Schönfeld, and she used to bother him a lot [both laugh] until he said, “All right, I’ll move you up.”

And then you left Fulda in July? When did you –

The end of July, maybe 31st of July or something like that.

July, and you took the train to Frankfurt, and then –

We went to yeah to Aachen.

Aachen.

And then onto Belgium, and my mother wanted to see her brother there, I think he lived in Antwerp. But she wanted to get off, my father said, “You’re not getting off until we get to England.” [Laughs] So she didn’t see him, but you know, we all got in to England.

And then but you don’t remember a lot of the trip, you just remember then coming to England, you don’t –

Yes.

So –

And the first place we stayed, we stayed in London for a week with a family that my sister was working for. They were Brickmans [ph], they were a very nice family, and they hosted us for a week. And then we went to Manchester.

And then you started school in Manchester?

Oh no, oh no, no, no [laughs]. We got to England, the war broke out in no time.

That's true, yeah.

And Reverend Siegel [ph] Gine used to work, she was the maid there. [00:36:06] He came and he said, "There, everybody's being evacuated, send your children to wherever they're going." So, we were evacuated to Fleetwood, we couldn't speak English, and we were evacuated to Fleetwood to a very nice family.

You and your brothers?

My two brothers, yeah, they took us all together. And I remember being very unhappy, it was Friday and no Kiddush, no anything, nothing going on, and I was very unhappy. So eventually I think Gine who was with the family Siegel, they were in Cleveleys which is not far away. They came to visit us, and we told them how unhappy we were, and we only were in Fleetwood for about a week and then we came back to Manchester. And then when we came back my mother said, "I don't know what came over me, that I let you go, we managed to survive as a family now, we're going to survive as a family in future."

And then do you remember air raids and stuff, or were you too young or – or was Manchester?

Well then – no, there was no school, we were – so there were a couple of people from the Halpin [ph] family who started a school, which wasn't a proper school. They had sort of had some sort of education. That that lasted a little while, and then eventually, we got back into the proper school.

And did you find it difficult to learn English, or was it just a natural-

It was difficult, because not everybody made allowance, I remember the first teacher, Miss Rickards [ph], I don't remember her very well. I know that we were supposed to write an essay which I obviously couldn't do, but Max wrote it for me, and I handed it in, and she

didn't seem to be surprised [both laugh]. The next teacher, Miss Woolley [ph], she was not nice. I think she was a bit anti-Jewish myself, because she used to give me the little ruler.

[00:38:04] *Yeah, on the fingers, oh.*

Yeah, you know, little child who couldn't even speak English properly, it wasn't right. But then we – I went up another stage to the next class. That was Miss Ridyard [ph] and she was the archetypical lovely teacher, she was wonderful. And she taught us until we went to sort of – until we went to grammar school.

Grammar school. Did your brothers also go to that grammar school?

My father?

No, your brothers, sorry.

Naftali did, Max stayed in a school, he was nearly fourteen, so he was really, he wasn't there long, but he was there for a little while, and again he was bullied, because he was a refugee.

Oh okay.

And, you know, some people were anti.

Probably not necessarily anti-Jewish, but –

But just anti whatever.

German or something?

Yes, yes. So, he didn't have a good time in school. And we stayed in this class, until it was a scholarship class, and I didn't get – so we sat the exam.

The eleven-plus?

The eleven-plus, and I didn't get in, and I was devastated, because all my friends were – got in. But they had a thing that – system whereby you could take another exam and you could be a fee payer. Now this exam I took, and that one I passed, and the fees were like £9 a year.

How much was that, was a lot more than now.

Well it was more than now, but it still wasn't a huge amount.

So your parents could afford it without –

They did, they knew it was important to be with my friends and so on, so I got to Salford Grammar, and there I stayed till I was sixteen.

And was that a positive experience?

On the whole it was – there was one negative thing about it, because I bunked off school for a long time, because it was time to take the school certificate, and, you know, in wartime you didn't get the best teachers. [00:40:13] So whereas I was average in maths, when we had this teacher, I used to sit next to my friends, and we used to exchange books, and we used to mark each other's work. By the time it came to the proper exam, I couldn't do anything. So, I didn't want to go to school, I thought if – you know, I can't do maths. But I was made to go back, and the headteacher was very nice, he said, "You don't have to do maths, it's all right, you can do school certificate without it." So, that made all the difference, so then I buckled down and I worked very hard, and I did well. But by the end of that time, my father wouldn't let me go into the sixth form.

Okay.

He said, “No, you’ve got to the yeshiva for a couple of years.” Which I didn’t like much. My brother Naftali took to it, he’s still doing it now [both laugh] but yeah, I never took to it. So, it was a bit wasted on me.

What would you have preferred to do instead?

Anything, anything, it – there was no options, but, you know, the – I didn’t have any options to do anything else, but I knew I didn’t want to be there.

So you – the religious studies were not your first choice?

No.

Would you have liked to do science?

I would have preferred to have stayed in the sixth form.

Yeah, but what in the sixth form, I just tried to find out.

I would have stayed, whatever was going, I would have taken history, you know, the arts things I would have taken, but anyway that wasn’t to be. So, those two years passed, and my friend – my sister had a friend what was then Palestine, it wasn’t Israel yet. And so the big thing was, well it was going to be Israel, so the big thing was to have a profession to go to, to be able to exist there.

[00:42:10] *Yeah.*

So, I very smartly went to the technical college and learned to be a chiropodist. It took two years and I learnt to be a chiropodist and that was, I mean it shows eventually as you will see, there was a theme running through that things were meant to be. If I had have done chiropody I wouldn’t be where I am now. So I did chiropody for a while, went to Israel for a visit.

In which year was that?

[Sighs].

How old were you?

I must have been twenty-ish.

So early '50s?

Yeah, yeah.

And the state of Israel had already been –

Yes, early '60s, yeah, definitely.

In existence.

Or even '50s, late '50s.

Yeah.

And so I – when I came back, when I came back from that visit I wanted a job, so I rang the organisation up, the chiropody thing. And they said, “Well we’ve got a job going in Elizabeth Arden, maybe you would suit them.” I rang them up, and I said, “Well I’m sorry, I can’t work Saturdays,” and they said, “Don’t worry about that, you only get fish and chip people on Saturdays,” [both laugh], “as long as you can work five days a week that’s fine.” So I worked at Elizabeth Arden. And that was a lovely time [laughs], because I met film stars, all sorts of people. And I remember Lauren Bacall particularly.

Yeah, I would remember her [both laugh].

She said she would come back but she never did [both laugh]. Anyway, so that was when I was there. And then I – I can't remember the sequence, but I must have – in the meantime I had to study – I wanted to get to university.

[00:44:04] *How long were you in Israel?*

The first time just a couple – few –

Just briefly?

A few weeks.

Okay.

It was a visit, an ordinary visit?

Just to get an idea on –

Yeah, yeah, it wasn't – I didn't intend to stay.

Did you have – did some of your siblings go to Israel, or –

No.

No, they all stayed in England?

Yes. So where was I, with –

You wanted to go to university.

I wanted to go to university, so to – in London to go to university you have to have Latin, so then you did, you don't anymore. So, I went to night school, to – for the first year, but I

wanted to do it – I was always in a hurry. So two years, I couldn't wait two years, so I went to the first class, and my sister's nieces were at school, and they were doing Latin, and she used to mark my work for me. And then I actually took a private teacher for ten shillings, and I managed to do Latin in one year. And I went away on holiday, and I did the exam, when I came back, I rang up and I said, "Well did I get through?" they said, "You've got 96," I said, "I think you've got the wrong," [both laugh], I think I must have just learned it off by heart.

Oh, well you have to translate it, right, you have to – that so you must have –

Yes, yes, but it was – I was – in those days I had a brain [both laugh]. So, then that meant I could go to university, and my first choice was Birkbeck, because you could work and go to Birkbeck in the evening, and I did history, psychology, and Hebrew. And that worked, until I saw a notice to say that I had to do something to do with maths, and so the black thing came down and I said, "I can't do maths, I'll change," and I changed to ethics. And I went to one of their lectures, and I didn't understand what they're talking about [both laugh]. **[00:46:09]** This is where God came in [both laugh]. Because I must have gone to see Mrs Sacker [ph] who I'd met in the Bond Street, in Elizabeth Arden, she was one of the clients I saw. And she got me to see her at home, she said, "Come to my house," so she lived in – so I went to her flat one time. And she said, "Well you don't look well," I said, "Well I work during the day and I go to college at night." "Why don't you become a full-time student," I said, "I can't afford that," "Oh, we've got a fund for this sort of thing." So, she gave me a scholarship. So then I went with great enthusiasm to University College, said, "Can I become a full-time student?" and they said, "Of course you can." So, I became, and I just loved being a student. Because I took it seriously, well all the others were eighteen years old, I was already ten years older, and I took it seriously and I really loved it.

And when you studied, what was the goal, did you know- I want to become, I don't know, a teacher, or psychologist or –

No, no, I knew, I knew it was a path to become a teacher, if you've got a degree it's an open sesame to other professions. And in those days, you didn't have to have teacher training, you had a degree, that was enough.

Oh.

So, I got my degree, and yeah- in the meantime I'd also been offered a scholarship to go to Israel for a year, and I went there for a year. I went there, but I wasn't there more than about a week or two, and I got a telegram to say my father had passed away. So that was a big disappointment, upset for me. And I went to visit, I had a cousin who lived in Haifa, and I went to visit her, and I wasn't there very long, she said, "Don't worry, I've got a telegram, your brother and sister are coming too." [00:48:11] Because they didn't want me to be on my own. So, when Gine and Max came, we spent a holiday, sort of a holiday for them. And when it was time for them to go back I said, "Oh I'm not staying here on my own."

Oh okay.

So then I went back to England. And I had already seen the headteacher of the JFS before I went, because he suggested I should go to Israel for a year. So I came to see him again.

How long – sorry, how long were you altogether in Israel?

Two weeks.

Two weeks, and do you think you wanted to go back because you – I mean the youngest of seven, you didn't want to be too far away from your family?

That's right, yes, yes, I thought, you know, we had such a close time together, I couldn't bear to be on my own again.

But so you didn't have this – I mean wanting to be in Israel and living in this state of Israel. And that was not –

That wasn't enough of a –

That was not strong enough to keep you, yeah.

No, it wasn't, no it wasn't, family came first [laughs].

Well I mean if you're the youngest of seven, and you are close to some of your siblings, quite close, so also it's – I haven't been to – so I guess it's quite different from life in England, as you knew it. And yeah, so –

Yeah, so yeah, so it all worked out. I – so I got a job at the JF – when I came back, I came back to see Dr Conway again, and he said, “Yeah, we've got something in what's called –” then was called the remedial department.

What is that?

For people who need extra help.

Like slower learners?

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Yeah.

So I started with that, I started to teach there. [00:50:01] And I had to be okayed by the education people, because I was teaching, they had to make sure I was a proper good teacher. So, they sent somebody there to observe me, he didn't observe me much, he just talked to me mostly I think [both laugh]. Anyway, he gave a good report and he said to the head, to Dr Conway, “Yeah, he can pass.” So, I got my certification as it were. And not long after that I think there was a possibility of getting a diploma, going on a course to get a diploma for teaching maladjusted children. And the – my headmaster supported me very much in this, so I –

Can I ask before, maladjusted, is that also slower learners or is that –

Yes, it includes everything.

Is that, it's also children with behaviour problems or –

Yes, to –

Autism or –

Umbrella term.

Okay, so okay.

So –

Thank you.

With his help I managed to get to this course. I got paid while I was on the course, and I got an extra diploma, and I got paid for the extra diploma, so I did very nicely there.

And that was at JFS?

Yes.

You –

Which is still going.

Yes, and that is, is it, I think you said it's one of the biggest schools –

It is the biggest Jewish school in Europe.

Jewish schools in the country, oh Europe.

Yes.

Okay. Where is it here in London?

Now it's in – I can't remember the name of the place, but it used to be in Camden Town, and now it's somewhere in one of the suburbs.

Did you spend most of your career, of your working life there?

Yes, yes, I did. Well, I was very smart, I – things were changing, because then when I was in – I had charge of the department, they left me alone. They were very happy to give me the children they didn't want to cope with, and send them to me, but that wasn't going to remain, people – you know, the more paperwork, more this, more whatever. [00:52:02] So I thought this is not for me, so I took early retirement, I was about fifty-five, I took early retirement.

Was it mainly as you said the bureaucratic bit of the job, or did you also then think, oh I've taught now for a while, I want to do something different, or –

No, no, I would have been happy to have stayed in, if they would have left everything as it was. But I knew they were going to interfere, there was going to be lots and lots of paperwork, which happened, lots of paperwork and less teaching. So, I took early retirement, had a wonderful holiday with my friends in America, and when I came back, because I had good friends, I said, "Have you got any supply work for me?" "Yeah, you can come back." So, I came back, and that I sat doing nothing for two weeks, but getting paid. They eventually, you know, they did give me little jobs to do, you know, to take care of a class and so on, and I did that for another ten years.

And you enjoyed that?

No.

No, you didn't?

Because it – you know –

It was more –

There was no continuity, it was one class, one time, year, another class another time, so there was no really continuity.

Yeah, you didn't go with the children, you didn't see them?

No, no, no, eventually it – before I finished the two or three years before I finished, I did, they got me to shadow certain pupils, and that was more satisfactory, because then I went from class to class to class, with those children and helped those children who were less able, and that was more in my line.

Was it a coincidence that you started with the remedial –

Yes, that was coincidence, I didn't know what it was.

So it wasn't, you didn't know that you had a talent for –

Yes, yes. That was good luck [laughs].

Yeah. But then you realised on the job that you were good with those children?

Yes, I mean, you know, the minute I started, well it took a little while, but I realised it is – this was what I liked to do. And also the pressures weren't there, I didn't have exams to – for the children to do. [00:54:11] So the other teachers were very happy to get rid of those children, I hopefully coped with them. And so everybody was happy.

Yeah, so you – are you a very patient man?

I think I was in those times, [both laugh], well not all the – I think I must have lost my temper sometimes, but –

And do you also think it was because of your experience, like changing countries, learning a new language, being as a refugee I guess you are a bit of an outsider, had a better understanding?

Subconsciously maybe, I wasn't aware – that not so much aware of it, but it must have had an influence.

Yeah. And then when you, you said you did the supply work for another ten years?

Yes.

Did you then after that retire for good or did you –

Well by that time I was sixty-five.

Oh [both laugh], so almost thirty years ago.

Yes, yes.

And did you travel or what did you then –

Oh I'm sure I travelled, yes, yes. Yes, I had – because on one of the courses I took there was an American guy, and we got friendly, and we – so I used to visit them, him and his wife – in Boston, and they would come here.

Okay, and most of your family, they were in Manchester, and were also some of your siblings here in London?

My sister Malli she was, this is the reason, because she needed help, she had some bedrest, and I wasn't doing anything much so she asked me to come and help, and I came and I never left [laughs].

But you were happy to live in London?

Yes.

You didn't feel you –

Yeah.

Yeah. And you said your siblings didn't leave the country, they all just stayed in England, and they were quite happy, they were, yeah.

Oh, they did very well, Joe, was a very successful doctor.

[00:56:03] *Yeah, and I mean I guess not, nobody really missed Germany that much, that they thought, oh, I would – I don't know.*

No, well we didn't have any good memories, so, you know, there was no point in reminiscing about that.

Yeah, did you go back, or your parents, did they go back and –

No, my parents certainly didn't. I think there was a, there was a very nice *Bürgermeister* [mayor] in Fulda who paid for people to come back and visit, I didn't join that group, but I went with my American friends and then we visited Fulda.

But they were not from Fulda, they were just –

No, they were Americans, we just happened – they went just because I wanted to go there, we did a trip around Germany and so on.

And were you – when you – you didn't go with that group, but I was wondering when – I mean you were too young, but your parents when they left Fulda, did they stay in touch with other refugees all over the place, and then you came, kind of visited, you know, Fulda as a group together, and then –

Oh we –

Kind of a reunion almost?

Well, that was my sister, one of my sisters, I think only Gine went with her husband, yeah, I don't think anybody else went, Malli didn't want to go to Germany. So, they – I think they went because it was a freebie, you know, and it was a nice thing to do.

Yeah, I mean maybe it was kind of interesting to see your old house, again and –

For my – for Gine maybe. I mean my brother- in-law wasn't from there, so he didn't have that interest, but they went as a couple.

Yeah. And we mentioned a couple of times Arnold Weinberg, you said you did not know him in Fulda because he was quite a bit older.

Yes.

But you knew him in Manchester?

Manchester, yes.

Yeah.

[00:58:01] Because I have a feeling he stayed, because when we came to Manchester we had some young boys who didn't have parents, came here as boarders, to – and stayed with our family, so I think he was one of them.

And that was probably, although another source of income for your parents, right?

Yes, that's the only income we had, officially we weren't allowed to work.

Yeah, and when your – when you came to Manchester, I mean your father worked, so he was integrated, and there were probably a lot of refugees, but was there also then- you mentioned before this- kind of separation between the German and the Polish Jews.

Yeah.

Did you have the same then in England?

No, no, that didn't exist.

No, so it was not like the English Jews were like, hmm, here come the Europeans?

No, not at all, no the English Jews might be “you are foreign”, I mean, you know –

But they were not –

They'd ask stupid questions like, “Did you have running water in Germany?” or something like, you know, they were – they really didn't know anything. But there was no distinction between Polish and German Jews.

Yeah, so your parents integrated well and –

Yes, very well because they could speak Yiddish, and, you know, the shops were down the road, and –

So did they like living in England?

I think they found it a bit difficult to begin with, at the beginning they always said, “It was better in Germany,” you know, everything was better in Germany [laughs], but that didn’t last long. And also, we still drank coffee instead of tea, so we used to get coal, there was a – you only got a certain amount of coal. So, we were able to exchange some of our coal for –

For coffee?

For coffee [laughs].

So they didn’t used to the –

Well, eventually they did, eventually, just took them a little while.

Oh, okay. I had just a question, now I forgot, but no, so your parents integrated well, and did your parents get like restitution?

No, no.

They didn’t look for that, or –

[01:00:05] I don’t think they looked for it.

No, they didn’t, yeah, it wasn’t that important to them?

I don’t think they were due anything, I don’t know.

Yeah, and maybe they were busy with life, and –

It’s not like they owned a flat or anything like that, you know?

Ah, so it was rented, of course.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yeah. Yeah, then there were – yeah, then – I mean of course they still, there are still things you can get restitution for, but maybe it wasn't like exactly like you lose the house or –

Yeah.

Or factory even.

No, the restitution comes to me now [laughs].

Ah, ah, okay, yeah. It's also like – isn't there something like a lack of education or something when your education is interrupted or –

Yes, well I can't very well claim that, but, you know, it's done through the Jewish refugee people, and they deal with all that, and –

Yeah.

How and why I don't know.

Yeah. So, we have covered quite a bit, I'm checking my notes, do you have any – I have asked about languages, and anything else about Fulda we forgot?

I don't think so, no.

Yeah [laughs].

I can't read with these, I can't read it with, and I can't read it without [both laugh].

Can't read your own handwriting?

No. No, I think I've covered what I've written down.

And we said you went back to Fulda, how – did you stay like a couple of days?

No, just about a day. I'm sorry, you know, because I wasn't on my own, I didn't want to linger, they had no interest in Fulda, so I'm a bit sorry that I didn't stay longer, and that there were no original Jews left, I think the Jews who lived in Fulda came from Eastern Europe.

[01:02:03] *I mean do you know if most of the Jewish community in Fulda managed to get out of Germany? Or not?*

I wouldn't think most, I think most probably didn't.

Yeah.

Well anybody who had any possibility obviously did leave.

Yeah. And the Jewish – the Polish Jews who came with you, when this incident at the border

–

Yes.

Did they all come back, or did some of them get into –

No, no, because they closed the border.

They closed the border, and at a later point because then, yeah.

I think I had one of my uncles' sons, must have been a cousin, who managed to get over the border, but the – not into Poland, as well they lived in no man's land for I don't know how long, until the Germans invaded, which that was terrible.

But then he didn't get out, yeah.

They were – I think – I don't know how they managed to feed themselves or anything.

Yeah, probably help from the Jewish communities there.

I don't – yeah, I don't know what the situation there was, I know there was a very dire situation.

Yeah, and your parents' family in Poland, did you have any contact with them anymore, and know what –

No, my – I think my –

Your father?

My grandparents used to write to my uncle in Switzerland, and he used to send – because Switzerland was neutral, and they used to send the letters onto us, till about 1940, I think I've got a letter somewhere dated 1940.

And that uncle is not the same like in Antwerp, that's another one?

No, that's another one, yes.

Is it maternal or paternal?

Maternal.

Maternal. And the one in Antwerp, did he –

He didn't, so they didn't survive, no, no. No, he had – my cousin who did live in Antwerp, she got married shortly before the war, and she managed to get to – she had two children from her first marriage, and she then got married to her present husband, and she went to America. [01:04:04] And those poor children, I think they went to a cinema in Brussels, and they were all ordered out of the cinema, and they were shot on the spot. So, you know, they didn't survive.

Was that a big family, your uncle in Antwerp had or –

I don't think a big family.

Yeah.

But no, because his daughter, they'd left already, you know?

Okay, yeah, yeah. What did he do in Antwerp?

I don't know [laughs].

Yeah, we have a couple of interviewees, and some of them were in the diamond cutting business.

Yes, I don't think he did that.

Yeah.

I think he was, originally he was a cook, I don't know if they had any kind of restaurant or boarding house, I just don't know, I don't think he was very well off, I knew that.

And then your parents found out after the war?

After the war, none of them survived.

Yeah, and did your parents go, or your mother go back to see her mother's grave in outside Fulda?

No, no.

No, she didn't?

Well there was nowhere, there wasn't a proper grave, you know, there was one of three.

Ah, okay.

So there wasn't proper –

So it wasn't marked or something?

No, no.

Ah, okay, I see. Yeah, well we have covered the school, and your working life. Is there anything in your notes you would like to –

No [laughs], no, all I can say is I'm a very fortunate person, I have a wonderful family.

Do you have a big family here in London?

I have a big family here, and they're all wonderful people.

And I mean you were quite young when you came to England.

Yes.

So very often the interviewees are asked about their identity.

I think I was the most assimilated, because I was eight years old when I came, so and my German is very rudimentary now. [01:06:02] I didn't identify with anything, so, you know, I basically became a little English boy.

Yeah, I mean you didn't miss anything, you didn't –

Oh no, no, I think life really – look, Fulda was a very small place, Manchester was a big place, and there were lots of choice, there was a lot of choice between friends, I made two very good friends that stayed with me for life more or less. So –

But you didn't stay in – did your parents stay in touch with Jewish people from Fulda, who also left?

No.

No?

I think they were all spread out anyway, I think there was maybe one family, in fact my – one of my nephews' mother, was friendly with one of my sisters, they were German Jews. But that wasn't very often.

No. And so you didn't speak – when you were – when you came to England, did you speak at home, then also English, no?

No, no, not to begin with, eventually, I mean obviously at the beginning, I remember not being able to speak English. But once we spoke English that that was it.

Yeah, and you said you became an English boy, so you – I mean you went through the school system, you really – the culture that is your culture, this is your –

Yes, yes.

And I mean you – your family didn't keep – I mean they didn't miss anything about Germany, so it wasn't part of your family life?

No, apart from the English culture, there was a Jewish culture as well, so you know, between the two, both of them kept me pretty occupied.

This kept – this was the constant, yeah?

Yes.

And I mean it's probably not so interesting for you, but some of your nieces and nephews, are they interested in German citizenship or –

[01:08:02] Now, no, they're not interested in German citizenship. Well because that we weren't German citizens.

I was wondering, but I thought, okay, you said your mother and your father were Polish citizens, but I wasn't sure about the details, you know, if you – because you were born there let's say and your siblings –

I don't think it had worked that, if you were born in – of Polish parents, you took Polish nationality. In fact, when my brother Max, and Joe, they were supposed to go to the Polish army. Now Joe didn't have to go to into the Polish army because he was a medical student, and Max had to go to be assessed for the army, but he made sure that he wasn't in good health [both laugh]. So he got –

So he didn't want it.

He got exempt, he didn't want to go to the Polish army, he didn't speak Polish, he had no connection.

Yeah, I just – I don't know anything about the legal details, but I thought, you know, because of the way that the Jewish people had to leave Germany, I thought maybe there's a bit more general – to give it back to those who are interested, you know? So, but I just asked because we had some interviewees where the children, or grandchildren applied for citizenship, and then –

That's a different reason, they want, because we left Europe, they wanted to have the German citizenship, it made sense.

Exactly, yeah.

But we couldn't get Germans – we could Polish citizenship.

Well it's European, right?

Exactly, so one of my nephews is interested maybe he should be – have that as well, then he can work wherever he wants.

Exactly, it's quite easy then, you can study, you don't need a visa, you can just travel it's easier.

Yeah.

But you would not be – I mean –

In my time of life I'm not interested in changing anything.

No, but you would also not be upset if some of your family members would say, "Oh I have this dual, Polish passport now?"

No, not at all, not at all. [01:10:03] Look, the Poland today is not the Poland of yesteryear.

Yes, true, yeah. I read something, but only the headline, I think they – I don't think it is the rule yet, but I think the Germans want to put something, you know, when you become a German citizen, I don't know after how many years, and some citizenship test, they actually want the new German citizens to confirm that they think the right – the state of Israel has the right to exist. That we as Germans support this, this is – and they say – I don't think it is a rule yet, but it's to come.

Oh they will – ah.

And let's say you come from wherever, really wherever, and you become a new German citizen, then you would have to sign that.

Agree to that, yes.

And well it's probably not going to be 100% smooth, but –

Yeah [laughs].

Yeah, well things at the moment. But well I found it interesting, I think it's good, it's with the German history, you know, if you become a German citizen, even if you are from Syria or Afghanistan or wherever, and then you have to – well if you want to become cultural German, there are – there is history that you have to be aware of.

Yeah, I don't think there's a lot of cultural attempts going on by these people [laughs].

Some I think in fairness –

Some yes, and some, most no I think.

Yeah.

It's somewhere to run away to.

Yeah.

Cameraman: Sorry, can I just ask one question, when you left Germany, what documents were you travelling on, did you have Polish passports, or were you –

Yeah, Polish passports.

Cameraman: Oh, so you weren't rendered stateless when the border closed?

No, no.

Cameraman: No, okay.

No. No, exactly, you weren't stateless because you had a Polish passport.

Yes, yes.

Yeah.

And so, you know, that what – I can't remember the year now, but whenever it was possible, well there was talk actually of sending the refugees back to Germany, after the war.

Oh.

[01:12:10] Until there was a big outcry, how can you possibly send people back to the place they were going to kill them [laughs]? So they let all the people stay, and my parents and siblings all became British, and my father who had obviously, you know, a big influence on me, or I wouldn't have disobeyed him, said, "You're not going to become British, because

you're going to have to go in the army, and I don't want you to go in the army, because if you go in the army you're not going to be a religious Jew."

Ah, so when did you become a –

So then when I was already in – about '65 or '64, '65, I then applied, and they said, "Why didn't you apply earlier, didn't you want to go in the army?" I said, "Oh no, that wasn't the case at all, no, it's just negligent."

No, it was your father who – I mean –

I didn't say that to them.

Authority and –

I couldn't say that to them. So, they interviewed Mrs Sacker [ph], they interviewed my professor at university to see that I was an okay person [laughs], and eventually they granted me, and I was very happy to become a British citizen.

But you didn't have to do the citizenship test?

No, I didn't have to do that.

Yeah, I had to do that.

No, all I had to do is go to the solicitor, and swear allegiance to the king then, and that was it.

Yeah. So all your siblings were naturalised, after the war?

Yeah.

Except for you?

Yes.

Okay.

I was very obedient in those days [laughs].

Yeah, yeah. But your father, was he okay with your choice of profession, or was he –

Yes, yes.

So he didn't want you to become –

No, I think, you know, it took me a long time to get where I was, and there was a time when I was very – in sort of not happy, and my brother Naftali had gone to Liverpool to become a dentist, to train to be a dentist. [01:14:01] He said, “Why don't you do that?” and I said, “I can't do maths, if I could do maths I could become a dentist, but I can't.” [laughs].

Would you have liked to become a dentist?

Not really [laughs], I'm very happy to – I was very happy to be a teacher.

Teacher. And any of your siblings, how many brothers were there, four, Joe, and you, and Naftali and Max?

Yeah.

So one is a doctor, one is a dentist?

Yes.

And what are the other –

Max was a businessman, he was very successful, that was his picture there.

Later, maybe you can show us the photo later and Frank and –

Yes, he was a businessman, and he retired quite early, and he went to live in – he always wanted to live in Israel, he went to live in Israel, and his wife used to send him out to do messages. You know, get me this, get me that, get me the other. So, he got a bit fed up with all that, and his friend Kalisch [ph].

So that's why he wanted to go to Israel?

No, that's not why he wanted to Israel, that was incidental. So, his friend, Kalisch [ph] was living in Netanya as well and they had an idea to start a business, so he went into business with Leo Kalisch [ph]. And they did – he – they were one of the first people who used to go to China for business, at that time it wasn't – China wasn't what it's now become. And so, they became very, very successful, and they eventually became a public company. And so he was able to retire again [laughs].

And he was happy in Israel?

Yes, yes, most of the time, but he also lived a lot of the time in Manchester.

Oh okay.

Where he had a flat, and I used to go and visit him there quite a lot, because we always got on very well.

And were his children then also in England and Israel or –

They were – now his children were in Israel, they went to school in Israel, and they went – one of them went to the – the girls still had to go to the army, one did Shnat Sherut, a sort of

service, and one went into the army. He brought Michael back to England with him, because he wanted him to go to a special school, it was Carmel College, which was a very well - respected school. [01:16:15] And he said, "I'm not going to stay there," he used to have his bag, he says, "And I've got all my- my valise is packed, I'm just going to try it out." So, every week, tried it again, another week, another week, and eventually he loved it [both laugh], he became head, the sort of deputy head boy. And he did very well, and he's still got friends from those days. And now of course he's a very successful television entrepreneur.

Yeah, and you then – did you sometimes visit your family in Israel, did you go often?

Yes, yes, yes, I did quite a lot, yes.

Yeah, so visiting, you enjoyed quite a bit?

Yes, oh I loved staying there, well because I had a job to go back to, and there was one year that again I was very lucky, I'd got another year's leave of absence. I didn't get paid that year, but that's the year I went to New Zealand, to visit some – I had always a vision of New Zealand as a beautiful country so I went to visit that. And when I went, when I came – and while I was there, I had enough after about a week, two weeks, I couldn't get out, there was a strike, everywhere, all the airlines were striking, could not get out. So eventually I did. I got out, and I managed to get to LA, I think it was. And from LA I went to – I think my friends invited me to visit them in Boston, although we weren't that – I just knew them, but I wasn't that friendly. And that it was – that was the beginning, I visited them there and that was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Oh, how nice.

So that was very nice.

So and your last brother, we said we had a businessman, a dentist, and the doctor, what – no, you are the fourth.

I'm the – yeah [laughs].

Sorry, that's the fourth. No, I was just trying to figure out, because your father was very religious, and it was important for your –

[01:18:13] Well my brother's taken that mantel, he's sort of more like my father, he – yeah, he retired to Israel, he married a lady from Switzerland. And I think they've got seven children, and some of them live in Israel, some of them live in England, and some in America. And he's – well obviously he – I think he'd practised a little while in Israel when he went to live there, but he retired as well, and –

As a rabbi or no?

Sorry?

He – you said he took the mantel of the religious –

Well he's not an official rabbi, but he sits and studies all day long more or less, so he's taken that on.

And I think you mentioned that your father had a beautiful and trained voice.

Yes, well Naftali my brother has also got a very sweet, lovely voice.

But more for private –

Well yes, you know, he used to officiate a bit, in the synagogue and that sort of thing.

Yeah. I had one more question, yes, so sometimes in our interviews I think Bea asks, if – can you imagine what your life would have been like if you hadn't left Fulda?

Yes, I think about that, yeah, I have thought about that.

Oh.

It would have been very different, because as Polish Jews, I don't think the German Jews would have intermarried with us, I don't think, maybe –

But your mother – no, hold on, no, your parents were both Polish, that's right.

Yes, yes, so they probably would have again married second generation of Jews from Poland, like they were, I think. [01:20:03] I don't know what – well if the Nazis hadn't come, and my brother would have become a teacher then, that was the acme of their [laughs], you know, sort of thing that they could think of. I don't know what would have happened to the rest of us, I suppose we would have all learned a trade or something.

So not medicine, or dentistry or –

No, because there weren't the facilities, we didn't have that kind of income to facilitate that, I think they – they had to pay fees for my brother to go to the *Oberrealschule* [secondary school] and that was it.

Yeah.

I don't think there was any money left for anything, probably as time went on they would have done better as well, and probably the more – as the children were growing up, they would go out to work and bring money in, and that would have been better. Who knows what life would have become. But I don't know how much integration went on with Polish Jews and German Jews.

Jews, yeah.

There must have been some.

Yeah. And I asked about your brothers, and I am equally interested in your sisters. So, one came as some sort of nanny, and one as a domestic?

Yes.

And one was probably a bit younger because she came with the Kindertransport.

Kindertransport, yes.

And what did they do, did they have families and stayed at home, or did they also have careers outside the house?

They married, my sister married the – the first one she married, she married, was a – she married an Englishman, that was a big thing.

An Englishman who was not Jewish?

No, a Jewish Englishman, but he was a Jewish Englishman.

An Englishman, okay.

But for a refugee to marry an Englishman, that was one up [both laugh].

And was she happy with him?

Oh yes, they were very happy, they had seven children [both laugh]. My sister Gine left to go to America, and that's where she met- her husband, was on his way to South America to Brazil, I think. [01:22:06] And they met where my sister was staying, and my brother-in-law said, "I'm not budging, I'm going to marry this girl," and he did.

And then they stayed where they were?

They stayed in America for a couple of years, and eventually because, you know, we're all very family-minded, Gine missed her family very much, she came, she already had one child in America, she was pregnant with her second child. And she had, I don't know what the medical terms is, but anyway there was a time when she couldn't see anymore and she had to go into hospital. And it was very sort of doubtful whether the pregnancy could be – could, yeah, come – go to terms. Anyway she did, she had a little girl who's now a big girl [both laugh], and it all worked out fine.

But they came back to England?

So, then they came back and stayed and he found work to do one way and another, and they had a good life.

Yeah, did he come over from England, or did he come from a different place to the United States?

No, he came from the – the family lived in Germany, and his father had the foresight to say, I'm not going to stay in Germany, they came from Oświęcim, Auschwitz.

Okay, yeah.

And you needed, for £1,000 you could get a permit to live in Palestine. One of his sons got married, was getting married, and as his marriage portion, he got the £1,000, so he gave that to his father and they emigrated to Palestine. And that's where my brother-in-law lived as well until after the war.

Okay. I have – the other thing that we ask interviewees sometimes is, do you have a message, because you've had – I mean you were born in Germany, you came here as a young child, you had a long life, you have a big family. [01:24:14] Is there anything you would like to pass on, some wisdom?

Words of wisdom [laughs].

Yeah.

No.

Nothing?

Just to do the best you can [laughs].

Oh that's a good message.

Well what else can you do [laughs]?

Yeah, no, it's just, you know, you've seen a lot.

Well, I feel I'm very blessed, I'm – and every day now that I'm almost ninety-four, three, sorry, I'm ninety-three, keep making that mistake, I'm nearly ninety-three, I bless every day that first of all, that I'm alive, and I'm physically all right, and that I have a wonderful, wonderful family, that I love, and they love me. And what more can I ask?

Yeah. It's nice for them to have this video then, you know, to – I mean you've obviously told them about your life, but it's nice for them to –

Yeah, well I think I've got a lot more details in now.

Yes. Did you – you weren't previously interviewed, did you not think about that, because I think one of your brothers was interviewed, right?

Yes, Max had an interview, that it was the Spielberg thing, they had – they went into it, he had a very good interview with them, but somehow they didn't get around to me, until now [both laugh].

And yeah how –

But as we say *acharon* – the last one is the best [laughs].

Ah [laughs]. Yeah.

In Hebrew you say, *acharon acharon chaviv*.

Oh, thank you, that sounds very nice [both laugh]. But it's nice that – was it your idea, or was it one of your nieces, or nephews, or who said you should do this?

Yes, my –

My interview, yeah.

[01:26:01] Yes, I think they said, “You should,” yeah, but my – one of my nephews actually I think was going to get a cameraman and I don't know what else to do it, but you beat him to it [laughs].

Oh, good for us [both laugh]. Yeah, well I've looked at my notes, the only thing, yeah, you have nothing to add, anything we've forgot, or –

I don't think so, I think I've talked a lot [laughs].

I remember one thing, it came up in an interview before, it was one of our interviewees, he said his father went to a place outside Fulda, you probably don't remember that, it's called Hattenhof.

No, I don't.

And Hattenhof didn't have a railway station, Kerzell where I'm from, had one. So, I actually guess you would have to take the train there, and then I don't know, somebody would you

take you from there to Hattenhof, where there was a place where you were prepared for Hakhshara.

Oh yes, yes.

So, I think that was in Hattenhof.

Yes, I think one of my uncles' stepsons, went on one of those, went to a Hakhshara there.

Ah. And –

But whether he – whether – I don't know when that finished, I knew that the people downstairs, the Gutmanns, they also had one of their daughters went to Holland on Hakhshara. But of course, Holland got invaded as well, so –

Yeah.

I don't think she survived.

I actually think, but I – so this interviewee, his parents they survived in hiding in Berlin, and then they came back and then later lived, they were in England, I think for a bit, but then they actually lived in Hattenhof later in life. And I think that place, it's called Gehringshof, because I remember listening to this interview and suddenly somebody says Hattenhof and I'm like, this is where my primary school was.

[01:28:03] Yeah.

And I had no idea that there had been a place, maybe a little bit outside Hattenhof which is not in the village, where you would have that, and I think after the war survivors from, I don't know, some camp, came to this facility that later where they stayed until they were able to go-move on from there. But when I grew up there, I had never heard, you know, nobody had ever told me anything about it, so I found it very interesting to hear about it.

Yeah.

Oh, and the other thing, when you were in Fulda, it wasn't a thing yet, but you have probably heard about the Stolpersteine.

Yes, of course, yes, yes.

Yeah, so I was – when I heard it for the first time I thought, ooh, I have to go around Fulda and look for Stolpersteine, there are none in Fulda, and first I thought, oh, this is weird, why are they not doing this? Because wherever I have been in Germany I actually found it – I mean look everybody – there are people who are different opinions about it, but I thought it was a good thing.

Yeah.

It's – but I read that they decided against Stolpersteine, but there is at a corner of somewhere, is a proper memorial for the Jewish community in Fulda. And I can't remember which big city, I think it was Munich, there were people who said, "No, we don't want this, we don't want people to walk over it."

Yes, yes.

"To actually step on," it was –

The memory of –

Yeah, so –

Yeah, makes sense, yeah.

Yeah, but I thought of that. But when you were in Fulda it wasn't even –

It wasn't an option, no.

Yeah, but was there something that reminded of that – there had been a significant Jewish community?

Not that I know of.

For such a long time, because I think the one in Fulda was a very old –

Yes, it was.

Jewish community.

[01:30:04] I don't know, that I – the time to have done it would have been at the time of this mayor, you know, of Fulda, who was – who he used to send out letters every couple of months, he used to send a letter, and they were lovely and respectful letters, he was such a nice man.

Really? What was his name?

I don't remember that.

You don't remember?

No.

There's, yeah, I can't remember, I've been away from Fulda for a while now.

Well, I suppose we've got to go back to the '50s or something.

Ah, okay, well that was a little bit before my time, but I've heard about, yeah, and you found it interesting to read about it?

Oh yes, well he was – yeah, I mean he was such a warm man, you know, and he was very glad to have been in touch, that it made a big impression on me.

Oh. And you know that there are a lot of people, refugees, survivors, and so who speak in schools, that was not something that interested you as a –

No, I think on reflection, thinking about it, I think I should have done, when I was at the JFS, I could have done that, you know, I could have talked to the sixth form. I don't know why I didn't do that.

Oh you can still do it if you like.

Not anymore, no, no [both laugh]. No, then I knew everybody, I knew the headteachers, I knew all the other teachers, now I don't know anybody there, now, I think it's – and, you know, I was much more men – compos mentis in those days so there would have been –

Maybe also because you felt you were so young that –

Yes, I didn't want to be identified that much with this, and maybe.

Ah, that's – you think you didn't actually want to be identified as a refugee, I mean you don't have an accent, you blended in.

Yes, yes, very well integrated, so let sleeping dogs lie.

[01:32:04] *Yeah, yeah, no, that's, yeah, makes sense. Well, then anything else?*

No.

Have we covered everything?

I think so.

Well then I thank you very much for your time.

Thank you for –

And would you –

Cameraman: Just one second.

Would you like to show us some – do you have photos or documents or –

Well they're all the back, I'll have to get up and show you them. [Moving around] [Pause]
You can [laughs] – [pause].

Okay, these are my maternal grandparents, my grandmother, Chana and my grandfather Pesach [ph], they lived in the bottom part of our house. **[01:34:02]** And whereas I didn't have much to do with him, because I couldn't speak Yiddish and he couldn't speak German, but my grandmother she used to help my mother a lot, so we communicated somehow. And she always used to give me little tips like *zwei Pfennig* to buy some chocolate with.

Cameraman: Do you know when the picture was taken about?

It must have been taken about '37, 1937. I can't really tell you much about this picture, because I didn't know any of these people, but in the middle is my grandfather Shimei [ph] and my grandmother, I can't remember her name now. And right at the left on the top is my Uncle Naftali. The other two ladies I don't know who they were, they must have been aunts, but I don't know who they were.

Cameraman: And these were your paternal grandparents?

Paternal grandparents, yes.

Cameraman: And do you know where it was taken?

This must have been taken in their little – the nearest town to where they lived somewhere near Padewa [ph].

Cameraman: In Poland?

In Poland, definitely in Poland, yes.

Cameraman: Okay.

And Naftali, was he the one in Switzerland?

No, no, that was on the maternal side anyway.

Oh right.

Cameraman: Okay.

This is a picture of my mother and it must have been taken before she was married because she's got her own hair on, so more than that I can't tell you. So, it obviously – before she was married, but how much before I wouldn't know.

Cameraman: And this would have been taken in?

In Fulda in Germany, yes.

Cameraman: In Fulda, in '20s?

In the '20s.

Cameraman: Thanks.

Or even, yeah, must have been the '20s, because before that there was a war. Right, this is my mother, I can't tell you what age, but my – there's my eldest brother, Joe sits – standing there. [01:36:01] There's on her lap is my sister, Gine, and the other little girl is my other sister, Ida I think. The other two children, I don't know who they are.

Cameraman: Do you know where and when?

No.

Cameraman: No.

Right, so the little girl on the far right is my sister Ida, and the little boy is a little boy on the far right, that would be my brother, Max. And that's all I know, that's – those are the only people I know.

Cameraman: And this was taken in?

In Fulda.

Cameraman: In Fulda. Thank you.

And this is a family portrait, I think it must have been done in about '45, there's my sister, on the left my sister Malli, myself, my brother Max, my mother, my father, my brother Joe, and behind him my brother Naftali, and right is my sister Gine. My sister Ida didn't want to appear in this picture because she was pregnant, so she didn't want to appear.

Cameraman: And this was taken in?

In Manchester.

Cameraman: Thank you.

This is a picture of my father, and I think it was taken in – at the back of our house in George Street, and he must have been about, in his early fifties at the time. But more than that I can't tell you.

This is a picture of my father, I think it was taken in Switzerland because my brother Naftali just got engaged, and my mother was not well, she couldn't go to Switzerland with him, but he went, and obviously very happy, he's looking very happy on that film, picture [laughs].

This is a picture of my mother and father, in – it's their first and only trip to Israel, for the marriage of my brother Max. **[01:38:01]** They went there, and it looks like they're in front of the – where they had the scrolls exhibited, the Dead Sea Scrolls. But they had a very happy and good trip there.

This is a picture of most of my family, on the left is my sister Gine, beside her is myself, my brother Max next to me, below Max is my sister Malli, and next to her is my sister Ida. And next to Ida is my brother Naftali and it was taken in Manchester when we got together at – for some – for the whatever.

Cameraman: Thank you very much Simon for sharing your story.

Thank you [laughs].

[01:39:02]

[End of transcript]