

NATIONAL

Life stories

**LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY**

XENIA KAHAN

Interviewed by Jennifer Wingate

C410/075/01-04

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F320 Side A

My name is Xenia Kahan. I was born Xenia Kirschner in a town called then Vindau. In - then it was Russia, it became afterwards Latvia. Heaven only knows what it is now. One of the Baltic provinces. The family was my father, mother, brother and afterwards a sister.

Could you tell me their names?

Max and Mary Kirschner. My brother Racki. And four years later my sister Elly.

And your parents names?

Max and Mary. We lived in a very nice flat. We had a maid, a nanny. I was taken for walks every day. And I remember all the lovely scenery. The woodlands around us where we picked mushrooms and wild strawberries and bilberries. And life was normal for that kind of - setup. In 1914 when I was 7, the war broke out. As the town where we lived was a port and one of the two or possibly only one port which was deep enough to hold a battleship. And was not frozen over in the winter. My father decided that it was of great strategic importance, which it was, and therefore if the Germans advanced this was not a town for us to be in. We would go further inland to a place called Goldingen. Which was all of 50 kilometres, or was it miles, away. In order to move there, as there was no railway, you had to go by horsedrawn carriage. And so we were all taken into this - I don't know what to call it even - it's like in the Wild West, you know, one of those things with two horses. And we had to overnight because we had to change horses.

It was a covered wagon?

Yes. In a wagon. And we landed in Goldingen the following day.

Was it just you and your family that went or other families?

No, no, this one was a small wagon. Only us went. And we went and stayed with my father's brother who was living in Goldingen. We only stayed there a couple of months. And then came back to Vindau. But my memory of that wagon ride will remain with me forever.

Was it very uncomfortable?

Oh yes.

How long did it take?

A day and a half. 50 kilometres dear. It's a long way.

And did you take food with you?

Oh but of course. But of course.

And when you stayed overnight what sort of place was it that you stayed in?

Well I - I wouldn't like to call it a pub. But that is what basically it was. Where we changed horses.

You had bedrooms?

I think so yes, we had beds.

What time of year was it?

Early autumn. Because war broke out in August.

So it wasn't too cold?

No. War broke out end of July or August in Russia. England came in a week or two later. Then - we came back.

Would you like to tell me a little bit more about your home in Vindau?

Our home was a very nice apartment. In a house which was owned by the local doctor. And he lived downstairs. And we had a four roomed or five roomed apartment. I remember it had a bathroom. It had even a toilet, a flush toilet. A kitchen. In fact it was probably the best apartment in town. And judging that because during the war - the German army which eventually did occupy that town, had as its head - commander Prince Joachim of Hohenzollern, the second son of King William the Second. And he commandeered our flat while we were away as his headquarters. Which must have been either the best or the second best or third best flat in the town.

Did you have electricity?

Yes. Yes, we had electricity.

Did you have a telephone?

Yes.

And was there a concierge?

There were just the two flats.

And what about the entrance to the flats. Was that from a courtyard?

No, it was from the street. There was a courtyard at the back.

Was this in the main part of town?

I would scarcely call Vindau a town. It was a small townlet shall we call it. It was - certainly walking distance to the centre. Very much so. But it was not right in the centre. It was just a bit out of the so-called centre.

What were the streets like. Were they paved or cobbled?

Cobbled. Definitely cobbled. Yes, cobbled.

Were there any cars around at the time?

No, there were not any cars. But cars were already in use elsewhere. And I remember that some friend of my fathers who had a car, came to visit him and took us children in a car for a ride. That was great excitement.

Was this before 1914?

Yes, that's before 1914.

And who was this man?

I can't remember. He was a friend of my fathers.

Where would he have been from?

I don't know. He might have been from Riga which is the capital of Latvia. He might have even been from abroad. I don't know. All I know is that he had a car and I drove in it. Big excitement.

Can you remember the name of the port?

Vindau.

The port was actually called Vindau as well, because it was very close to your small town?

Well it was in the small town. It was in the small town. Then there is a river called Vindau. Which lets out into the Baltic. And the town is Vindau and - Vindau is its German name. Windara is its Russian name. And Venspils is its Lettish name. And I think it is now called Venspils.

Did you have a synagogue in your town?

Oh yes, we definitely had a synagogue. My grandmother used to take me to the synagogue. And I clearly remember the outbreak of the First World War, when all the Jews went to synagogue to pray for a successful outcome. And we all went outside the synagogue and sang the Russian national anthem.

Did you go to synagogue often?

Frankly no.

You weren't a religious family then?

We were not a religious family, but we kept all the major holidays. We had of course a kosher kitchen. And my grandmother, who was a very educated woman, taught me various aspects of Jewish history. She also taught me German literature. And - she had - she had a lot of books always. And she would always insist on sitting me down for an hour or so next to her and reading with me whatever it was that she chose to read.

And she would read to you in German?

Yes, in German.

Was that the language you spoke at home?

Yes. We all spoke Lettish, because you couldn't get on with the servants or with anybody else without nobody Lettish. We all spoke German. But we all learned Russian. And in 1914 German was not allowed to be spoken anymore. So we all had to switch to Russian.

What did you do at home?

At home we spoke German. But I was at school already at the age of 7.

And so at school you spoke ..?

Russian. At school I spoke Russian. With a lot of my friends I spoke Russian. But I was actually brought up with the three languages. Lettish I have completely forgotten. Nobody need ask me to say anything in Latish. I just don't know any anymore.

Was it similar to either of the others?

Not at all, it was completely different. Russian of course you had to learn a new alphabet. Which was different from the German alphabet. Which at that time was still the Gothic alphabet. It was not the Latin alphabet yet.

What about Lettish, what alphabet did they use?

The Latin alphabet.

When did you start to learn English?

When I came to England.

Not until then?

No. Before that I had been - some French had been instilled into me. So when I came to England eventually - but this is out of context. I could not see any reason why I should learn English since I already spoke Lettish, German, Russian and French. Why on earth could the wretched English not learn one of my languages. I had four and they only had one. It didn't seem fair at all. I refused to learn English.

You obviously changed your mind?

I was made to change my mind.

You were telling me about your grandmother and that she took you to synagogue. Do you remember anything more about your grandparents?

My grandfather died. And it was a traumatic experience for me. I was taken into his room. I was not quite 4. I was taken into his room. And of course ran out again. And I then was told that he had died. And I saw a coffin and it was going to be a burial. And I started crying because I had been told that only old people die. And I needn't worry, I wouldn't die. Only old people die. And I maintained that as I was the youngest person that I knew, I would be left all alone in the world and what would I do then. A few weeks later my sister was born and I was consoled, there was somebody younger.

Where did your grandparents live?

In Vindau. But when my grandfather died my grandmother came to live with us.

Can you describe their house. Do you remember anything about it?

Just an ordinary little house. Yes, I do remember. Yes, I do remember. I remember both their house and a house of an old uncle and aunt who also lived with us.

Can you describe the houses?

Well, they were wooden. They were wooden, that I do know. They had little cottage gardens. I wasn't really allowed into those because I picked all the flowers and they didn't like it. I was always given a few flowers to pick. But I wasn't allowed to pick the whole lot, which is what I wanted to do. There was no electricity there. They had candles and oil lamps. I don't know why we had electricity, but we did in our flat. In their flat there wasn't. They had houses actually, small little houses.

Did they have a bathroom and running water?

No. We did.

They didn't have running water?

Yes, there was a cold tap. But in order to have a bath they had a pump and you had to have water boiled on the kitchen stove, which was of course a wood burning stove.

Did you ever have a bath at your grandmother's?

Yes, I think once. I certainly had baths of that description in - in inner Russia during the war when we lived in a house which had no running water nor hot water.

Would there be a bathroom in your grandmother's house. Or was it in the kitchen that you had your bath?

I don't - in my grandmother's house there was a definite room in which - in which I think there was a tin tub. But the tin tub had to be carried out. There was only one storey - on the ground floor. There was no upper storey to these little houses. They had about 3 rooms.

Did they own their house?

I think so.

What did your grandfather do for a living?

That I don't remember. By the time he came to Vindau he was already retired. But previous to that I have an idea that he had - not a pub, but a kind of a restaurant, a halfway house for travellers when they - There was some food and some refreshments served.

Where was that?

A place called Talsen.

In Latvia?

Yes. I wouldn't know where it is, I couldn't find it on the map. I don't think so, I haven't looked for it. And then of course living with us was also my maternal grandfather. So in point of fact from the outbreak of war in 1914 our household, apart from father, mother, brother and sister, consisted of my father's mother, my mother's father and an old uncle and aunt of my father's who he regarded as his step-parents, because when he went to school in Vindau - he lived with them. And they had a son of his age and the son died and my father regarded them as his second parents. And he always looked after them until their death.

He sort of adopted them?

Yes. Yes.

Do you remember any of their names?

Oh yes, of course. Well my grandmother is actually buried here in London. She came with us to England. And she lived until she died here in 1926. She's buried in - in Willesden.

What was her name?

Raina. Raina Kirschner.

And your grandfather's name?

Eliahu.

Did they have servants in their wooden house you were telling me about?

That I don't know. I think yes. I think yes.

It was very usual to have at least one servant?

Yes. Oh yes.

But your flat must have been very large to accommodate all these people?

Ah no. We had that from the day that we moved out of Vindau, that's right. Not - My grandmother was with us right from the beginning. But the other two and my grandfather they came with us when we were expelled from Vindau in 1915. One year later. Less than a year later. Beginning of 1915. As opposed to the outbreak of war in the autumn of 1914. Six months later.

You were telling me about the synagogue. Do you know how large the Jewish community was then?

Reasonably large. Quite large I think. Because the synagogue was always crowded. I do remember the name of the rabbi. It was Samunov.

Did you go on Friday nights?

No. Friday nights we had candles at home.

You had a Shabat evening?

Yes. Complete with gefilte fish and everything that goes with it.

Did your mother cook?

She knew how to cook and she liked cooking, so she did. But of course it was the maid's job.

And did you sit down as a family to all meals?

Not always, because very often we children were given our food, when we were younger, in the evening away from the family. Because if my parents had guests or visitors we were not allowed in. But we always had a governess, a nanny, a governess or somebody, a French mademoiselle or somebody to look after us. French

mademoiselle was absolute bore because she made us go for a walk every hour speaking French.

I'm sure that was very good for your accent?

It may have been very good, but - not appreciated by me at that age.

Can you remember any particular recipes that your mother prepared that aren't very common now?

Oh yes. My mother or my grandmother's recipes are very often used.

Apart from gefilte fish?

Oh yes. I don't often make them. But we used to always have home baked cakes and home made pasta. Home made vermicelli. And - oh, I don't know - ways of cooking meat which were different from the usual way of cooking meat.

What did you call the pasta?

Noodles. Noodles.

But in German what would you call it?

Noodle. Simple as that.

Vermicelli?

Well everything went under the name of - farfel it was called. Farfel - noodles. Then we had things called kreplach which was made out of pasta.

Did you ever join in with the cooking?

No, when I got married, as I told you before, I didn't know how to boil - when water boiled in a kettle.

Your mother never wanted to teach you?

No, it wasn't - I was only in the way wasn't I. Definitely in the way.

Can you describe your synagogue. Do you remember it?

I remember that there was a gallery with - a curtained off gallery for the women to sit in. And my grandmother would peek through. And I could look down. And all the men were on benches below. It was wooden of course.

Was the floor wooden?

Yes. Yes.

And were there beautiful windows?

No.

Plain windows?

Plain. Nothing beautiful about it at all.

But you had an ark?

Yes. We had an ark. And we had torahs. Whether they were good, bad or indifferent I don't know.

And were you part of the Jewish community?

Definitely yes. Definitely yes. Now the Jewish community in Latvia was not a ghetto community. Not like in Lithuania or in Poland. It had a freedom which the others did not have. So we considered ourselves, for reasons which I don't know, superior. Don't ask me why.

Socially superior?

Yes. Because we were not in any kind of - enclosed settlement.

What did your father do as his business?

Timber. Timber. He owned - woods, forests. Wherever they were I don't know. And they were cut down and they were shipped abroad. And that was his connection with England. He was exporting timber from Russia to England.

Only to England or to other places as well?

I should imagine to other places as well. I don't know how big the business was. It wasn't enormous. And we weren't rich in the sense that one would call rich nowadays. But we were always comfortably off I believe. There was never any question that if shoes were available that we shouldn't be able to buy them. If they were available we could buy them. Unlike many people in those days that I remember, during the war when there were no shoes or what have you, even if they were available they couldn't buy them because there wasn't enough money. There was never any question of not having enough money.

Would you say that your family was better off than most of the other Jewish families that you knew?

No, not in that town. Better off than some. Obviously on the top level of that. Bearing in mind as I look back now on the kind of flat we had.

Did your mother wear a sheitel?

No. No, not even my grandmother did.

And your father didn't wear a yarmulka?

No, no, no. There was none of that.

What about prayers on Friday night?

Nothing. No. But father could and would if necessary. But he might make a brocha over a glass of wine or something. And he would conduct a seder. But no more than that.

Tell me about your school. How old were you when you went to school?

In Vindau I only went to kindergarten. A sort of primary school. And we did Froebel work and we learned the various alphabets, the Latin alphabet in order to be able to write in Lettish. The Gothic alphabet for writing in German. And Russian alphabet for Russian. We learned the three alphabets. We learned our multiplication tables. Not to a very high level, say the second or third, perhaps the fourth, but no more than that. No more than that.

(End of F320 Side A)

F320 Side B

Was it mainly a Jewish school?

No. No.

It was mixed boys and girls?

Mixed boys and girls. It was either a primary or kindergarten. But I only went there for a very short time. Because - when war broke out we went first to Goldingen for a couple of months, where I didn't have any school. And then we were thrown out of Vindau and started our journey to into the interior of Russia.

You say you were at this mixed school, did you ever come across any anti-semitism while you were there?

Not there. Not there. Not there. I don't remember it. Not there. I didn't even come across any anti-semitism in the Russian schools. It's only when I came back after the war to a German dominated school, that I really met anti-semitism in its ugliest form.

What was the religion of the other children in your school?

In Latvia Protestant. Lutheranism. Lutherite. In Russia Greek Orthodox. Russian Orthodox.

So do you remember any incidents at school. The way you were taught. The size of the classrooms?

We were - I know that we were about 15 or 20 children in a group. And great - very great stress was laid on handicrafts. We were taught how to make little lampshades and - and to knit and to crochet and to embroider and - that kind of thing.

What would the boys be doing while you were doing that?

Woodwork of some sort.

How old were you when you started school?

I must have been about 6. About 6. But I could already read and write because we had a governess at home you know, and grandmother and so forth. And I was taught at home.

Did you do any sport at school?

No.

What was the classroom like?

Just an ordinary room. With a blackboard and chalk.

And desks?

And desks. And desks which opened up and you had all the things inside it.

Were they kind to you at school?

Oh yes. Oh yes. Definitely yes. In my prep school for the year that I was in Vindau I have very few memories because nothing special happened.

It was just that one year?

Even less than that.

Can you remember exactly what happened to make your father decide that you had to leave Vindau?

Right at the beginning, to Goldingen you mean. Well he was afraid that the Germans would invade the town having such strategic importance. Whereas Goldingen being more inland it's not so important, we would be safer.

Did anybody else leave from your town?

I can't remember. Probably yes. Because my father couldn't have had that idea entirely on his own without having discussed it with some of his cronies. So there must have been others who did the same thing.

So you left?

And we came back within a couple of months. Back in Vindau. And then came April 1915 when a Russian decree was made expelling all Jews from Vindau and surrounding towns. Not from Riga. Which is the capital. From Vindau and the surrounding towns. Because they were considered to be an unreliable element in case of German invasion. The Germans were advancing. And the one thing that they did not give us was the right to settle in any other town. You had to leave. And we left. And that - we were given 48 hours notice. My father happened to be in Riga. My mother collected the family. Which is her father, my father's mother, old uncle and aunt. And we went into the train. I do remember lots and lots of people coming to the flat that day, begging mother for money, until eventually I heard mother say "I have not got any more to give you".

Who were they?

Other Jews who hadn't got money to leave. Poor Jews. Obviously. And I remember running to mother and saying "if you haven't got any money what will happen to us". She gave me a clout and told me to shut up. Which was of course the correct thing to do. In Riga. We got as far as Riga. Where my father was waiting for us on the platform of course.

You went by train to Riga?

Yes. And he had managed to arrange with my mother's sister who lived in Riga, to bribe the concierge to let all the people, all the relatives of the Berman's, my mother's sister, into their flat. And we spent the night there. But then had to go on further afield.

Can you say what sort of flat it was?

Oh very lovely big flat. Very well to do flat.

Were these family you had already met?

Oh yes, it was my mother's sister, my aunt and uncle by marriage. And all her 4 children. You know. And they took in about 40 or 45 people into that flat that night. We all slept on the floor, I remember that.

What did you do after that?

Back into the train and went further on.

Where to?

My father originally had a woodsman's hut somewhere along the line in a little village where he owned a forest. So we went there. We went there. But there was a fire the following day and the hut burnt down, so we went into another. Whether it was arson or an original fire that I can't tell you. But we couldn't stay there. So we went on and got to another town where we did disembark and stayed for two or three months. And then continued further inland.

Do you remember the name of that place?

Registava. But what it's called now I wouldn't know. That I wouldn't know. And then we got to the end of the line which was Rubinsk. Rubinsk is now something else, but I forget what it is, it's on the Volga. And my father then arranged for us, after a few months, to go and live in Petrograd. Now Jews as you know were prohibited from living in - in the capital cities. Jews had to have a right of residence. And that right was given to Jews who had either a university degree like doctors, lawyers. Or who were sufficiently rich. In other words belonged to the first guild. There were three guilds in Russia. Guild number one, guild number two, guild number three. And guild number one could live permanently in the big towns. Guild number two had a six months residence permit. And guild number three could only come in and stick their nose in. If you didn't belong to any guild you couldn't even visit. Well my father was guild number one. Which meant - it went by income tax.

So it was to do with wealth, not with ability?

Yes, well ability was given to the ones with university degrees. There were other categories which could also live in the big towns, like prostitutes. And any amount of

Jewish students, girls, in those days took out the yellow ticket, which was a prostitutes' ticket, in order to be able to go to university. Oh yes, I've heard of that as well. I've heard that one as well.

Did anybody keep an eye on them to see that they were following the profession that they had stated they had?

I think they did. I think they did. But those were the girls who had their own boyfriends and could prove that they were following a profession. And possibly some girls did turn prostitute in order to get - I wouldn't know. But it's more than possible.

How did you travel to Petrograd?

Well, by train. By train.

And it was a pretty simple matter to get a ticket to go on a train?

Oh yes. Yes. Yes. The travelling from Vindau out, when we were expelled, that was not a simple matter. That went in cattle trucks. That was cattle truck travelling.

And was that illegal?

No, no, no. We had to go out and they provided us with cattle trucks.

Did you have to have papers with you?

I should imagine that my parents had their papers. But there was nothing special.

But would it say that you were Jewish on the papers?

On your passport it would, yes. Your passports would have it.

I don't suppose you still have your passport do you?

No. I did - I still have somewhere or another somebody's Latvian passport that I kept. But I haven't got any of the Russian passports. At least I don't think so.

You were saying that your father was in guild number one. So all the family arrived in Petrograd?

Yes. Except my grandfather. My mother's father. He went off to live with one of his other daughters.

Where was that?

Somewhere in Russia. I can't remember.

Where did you live in Petrograd?

In a very nice flat. In a very nice flat. In fact recently I was in Leningrad. And I had already been to see the house where we had lived. But I was in Leningrad about 10 years ago and I took a taxi to take me round various places. And I asked the taxi driver to take me to my - to the place where I used to live. The name of the street had changed, but I remembered exactly how to get there. And the taxi driver drove me up there very happily. When he saw the house he says "Do you remember which flat?". I said "Yes, on the first floor on the left hand side". So he says "Why don't you go up to see the people". This was before perestroika and glasnost and I did not wish to inflict a foreigner's presence on any Russian who might be living in the flat, so I told the taxi driver I was too shy to do so. So he looked at me and he said "Well, that your father had money is obvious. But he also had very good taste to have a flat in this house". So presumably it was a good flat. It was a large flat.

You could go back now?

Perhaps yes, perhaps not. I'm not going to go in order to see whether a flat where I lived when I was 9 or 10 is still there.

So this was in the centre?

Yes. Definitely in the centre.

What was life like in Petrograd for you?

I went to school. There was very little food available. There was - very little clothing available. There was - constant queueing and constant argument as well. One cannot, cannot get a bit of bread if one stood in that or that queue. That was definite. In the summer it was a bit better, we would go out to what nowadays is known as a dacha, outside of - it is a dacha - which we had in one of the seaside places around. And there were lots of things to be got like - like mushrooms and berries, you know, wild strawberries and wild bilberries, wild raspberries. Everything was there, you only just had to go and pick it. And it was lovely.

And your father was carrying on his timber business at the same time?

Yes, yes.

Do you remember the names of the places that he used to go to?

No. No.

You went by train to the seaside?

Yes. We went to a thing called Siverskia and we went to a thing called Sestrowietsk. I think they still exist under these names. Perhaps they don't, I don't know. All the names I think have been changed. And we went by train. One of them was on the Finish border I think. We sometimes went into Finland. Finland was also part of Russia at that time.

Did your father have his own transport at all?

No. No. I don't think anybody had private motor cars or anything like that during the war years in Russia.

And not a horse or a carriage?

No, we didn't have it. No.

So what was it like going to school in Petrograd?

Very nice indeed. We walked. I was very seldom allowed out on my own. I was escorted. Either by my mother, my grandmother or the governess. Or mademoiselle. There was always some kind of a mademoiselle around. When I think how badly I speak French and how little I know, I think I wasted my opportunities very badly.

The school you were at was it boys and girls?

No. Just girls.

And non-Jewish and Jewish?

Non Jewish. Very few Jewish children.

So there was a smaller Jewish community where you were living?

Oh, I don't remember going to synagogue in Leningrad at all. Or Petrograd.

Did you know any other Jews there?

Yes. Yes. Friends of my parents, you know, and other Jewish children. Yes. But - I don't remember going to synagogue. There must have been one somewhere. But it must have been far away because my mother never went to synagogue and my grandmother didn't, so therefore it was too far for her presumably.

Did you encounter any anti-semitism there?

No. No. We were not allowed to take part in scripture lessons.

Who didn't allow you to. The school or your parents?

I think it was by mutual arrangement. And the priest on one occasion - we were made to sit at the back of the class while scripture lessons were given. And I remember one day, knowing the answer to some New Testament question, and nobody else in the class had put up their hand, so I did. And the priest who was taking the class laughed at me and says "I can't take your answer dear".

That was sad?

Yes, but that was not anti-semitic. Definitely not.

How long were you at school in Petrograd?

Until we left - until we left at the end of 1918. No, the end of 1917.

Tell me a little bit more about your family. Were you a very close knit family?

Not more than usual. I mean there was all the sibling rivalry as it's now called. There was a year and a half difference between me and my brother. We were forever fighting. But would forever fight anybody else who attacked either of us. And my sister who was 4 years younger - she didn't - come into our life because it's difficult for an 8 year old to communicate with a 4 year old. There's 4 years difference. So my brother and I had the same interests and did the same things. Squabbling if you like. But my sister didn't go to school yet when we did. She didn't have the lessons which we had. She didn't learn the French that we had to do. So she was - out on a limb. And in fact one of us, she believes it was my brother, but I know it was me, said "You are a spare wheel to the carriage. A carriage has got to have 4 wheels. There is a father and mother, a boy and a girl. And you are a spare". She resented it very much at being the spare.

What about your parents? Were they very loving parent?. Were they strict?

My father was travelling around a lot. All three of us adored my father. My mother - left the education process to governesses and to schools. And she had always a fear, which afterwards proved to be justified, that her son, her first born, was weak and not well. She was absolutely right. He died at the age of 27. Here in England.

What was the matter with him?

Hodgkin's Disease. And he had it for 7 or 8 years before he died. Today it's curable, then it wasn't. And she somehow sensed it. And he must have been rather a weak child. So - we girls always felt that he was being favoured, when we were not. It took me quite a while, until he got - really got ill, to realise that this was not so.

Was your mother a loving mother. Was she strict?

Sometimes this way, sometimes that way. She certainly loved us all, there's no question about that. But she wasn't a demonstrative woman. I can't ever remember mother opening her arms and saying "Come my darling", you know, or kissing me. That I can't remember. But I do remember if I was ill that she would sit by my bedside for a long, long time. You know. But she was very undemonstrative.

What did she wear?

She was a smart woman. And laid great store on - on looks, on the right colour scheme, on - for herself, for her clothes. And so forth. That was - always - She didn't go in much for jewellery, but she had furs and - everything that had to be - had to be. And she was I think a bit of a snob. Being a complete contradiction to my

father, who was tall, handsome, very popular. And wouldn't know what a snob was if you gave it to him in a dictionary and tried to explain it to him. He just didn't know why his wife objected if he invited the newspaper man together with the Sir James Calder? for dinner at the same time. He couldn't see it, they are both nice people and they will get on. Which they probably did you know. He wouldn't know the difference. He either liked you, in which case you were everything and acceptable. If he didn't like you you could be Lady Pinstock, he wouldn't care a tinker's cuss. If doesn't like you he isn't going to speak to you. And if he likes you and you happen to be the flower girl speaking with a Cockney accent, that doesn't matter, you're a nice person aren't you?

Where was he born?

In Latvia.

In Vindau?

No, not in Vindau. Because he had to come from outside to be at school in Vindau. I think it was a place called Hasenpot or something. I don't know. Some little village.

Where was your mother born?

I think she was born in Vindau. I can check up on that one. Because my cousin who lives here her mother would also be born in the same place, she might know, but I don't think she would.

Did your mother also dress you nicely?

No. She dressed my sister nicely. I wasn't worthwhile dressing nicely. I was a fat clump who spilt everything down her clothes. It wasn't really worthwhile buying me a new dress because I would only muck it up.

What about your brother?

Oh, he had everything. Oh yes. But it didn't very much matter because father would come along and he'd say "oh Xenia you want some new clothes. Come with me and we'll go shopping".

He was quite smart too was he?

Oh yes. Oh yes. He was very handsome, very tall, very handsome. And immensely popular with everybody.

Did your parents get on well together?

Reasonably so. I wouldn't have put it past my father to have had - to have sidestepped during his many absences away. But who goes into that too deeply.

Did you go to the theatre or the opera or the ballet in Petrograd?

Yes. Yes, I was taken to the ballet. And I was taken to an opera. And I was taken to the circus. Whatever there was going we children were taken. As I said before there was never any question of not being able to afford what was available. If it was available it was affordable.

And what were your parents particularly interested in?

I don't really know. Father was interested in politics. There was a lot of politics being talked in the house. Mother was interested in clothes. Mother was interested in cooking. Mother was interested - oh, they were both very keen card players, they played bridge both of them. My mother played very well and my father played excellently.

And they had bridge evenings?

Oh yes, they had card evenings, they had bridge evenings. They had a lot of entertaining. Always.

What about music in the home?

There was always a gramophone or something. They went to concerts. We children - oh yes, we used to go to open air concerts, you know, where the band is playing, that kind of thing. But we weren't taken to any actual concerts I don't think. But I do remember sitting by the band, you know, listening to the band and all that kind of thing. The usual children's things.

Did you learn any instrument?

Yes, we had to play the piano. Because that was part and parcel of - a - nice girl's education. Speaking French was of essence. Playing the piano was of essence. And dancing was of essence. You had to have dancing lessons, you had to speak French and learn to play the piano. I was as unmusical as unmusical can be. My sister was extremely musical and practically concert standard. Whereas I couldn't hit the scales. So that I hated it even more because she beat me so completely at it. And my brother was a good piano player. Mother was musical come to think of it.

Did you have musical evenings at home?

No. I don't know why, but we didn't. At least not that I can remember. Don't forget that when I came to England I was 11 and it would have had to have been when I was 8. I would have been put to bed long before that, so I wouldn't know.

(End of F320 Side B)

F321 Side A

What was it like going to the ballet?

I remember going to what it was then the Maryinsky Theatre which is now the Kirov several times. And I remember seeing 'Swan Lake'. Not with Pavlova, she was in England. But with somebody else. And I remember seeing - I went to - I don't know where I went to, but I did - I do remember hearing 'Boris Godunov', which is the opera. So I must have been several times. I know that I went to the Maryinsky Theatre several times, that I do know.

Do you remember what it was like going there?

Oh, I was pushed into a new dress for that, you know.

What sort of a dress?

I don't know, but it was something new.

A long dress?

No. No. At the age of 9 or 10 I wouldn't be put into a long dress.

But a very beautiful dress?

A beautiful dress. At least I thought it was beautiful. And I considered that pink was the only colour that should be worn. And I think I even had a pink dress. But pink was the one colour that I really should never have worn. I was big and fat and clumsy and pink, God knows, pink is not the right thing for me. But I was always fighting for a pink dress or a pink blouse. And nobody would ever - give it to me.

But it was a very formal occasion was it?

Yes. Yes, it was a formal occasion.

Where there many other children in the audience?

Some. So it must have been a matinee perhaps. No, it was in the evening. It was in the evening.

And which ballet did you see, do you remember?

'Swan Lake'. 'Swan Lake' I definitely saw. I must have seen something else as well but - the 'Swan Lake' sticks in my mind. It still is a very favourite ballet of mine. And I go to it if I can.

Can you remember anything else that you saw in the opera or the ballet?

I do remember one thing that I did see. And that is when I was taken by my governess with my brother and my sister, we went to a circus. And this was already after the first revolution. And there was a picture of Kerensky. And somebody from the - and there was somebody who came running down from the audience and tore the picture down. Which provoked a tremendous outcry and fighting started between people who wanted to have the Kerensky picture up and the ones who wanted to pull the Kerensky picture down. At which point our governess grabbed the three children as fast as she could and ran home. And I didn't see the end of the performance. But our governess grabbed the three of us and said "Out as fast as you can". Because she wasn't going to have herself and three children in a riot in a circus. And I was very annoyed, I wanted to watch.

And that must have been 1917?

That must be 1917.

Because you said your father and his friends talked politics a lot?

Yes. Yes.

What side were they on?

Oh, they were all of them always what they called K-Dets in those days. Which is Constitutional Democrats. Which is neither the Left nor the Right. It's a sort of - the middle way. KD. Constitutional Democrats.

So how did the beginning of the revolution affect you and your family?

With unutterable glee that the Tsar has gone. Everybody loved it. Because they were all anti-Tsarists because the Tsarist regime was a very anti-semitic regime. And - Rasputin, I remember the great outcry at the murder of Rasputin. Which in the house was felt to be a very good thing. And then when the first revolution came in March or February 1917 it was wonderful.

When you heard news of how the Tsar and his family had been killed?

That came much later. That came much later. At that time we didn't know. At that time we didn't know. We knew that about a year or so later, or six months later. Because they weren't killed immediately after the revolution. They were only killed after the Bolshevik revolution. After the communist revolution. There were two revolutions. The one in February, which brought in eventually Kerensky. And the one in October which brought Lenin in. And it's only after that - that - the Tsar and his family were murdered. Or executed, whichever way you like to put it. And - the Jews of Russia couldn't have cared less. It was only right. Because it was a very violent time. And lots of people were killed. Undeservedly so. And these were - it was deserved, you know.

You say you yourself never encountered any anti-semitism. But obviously you knew about it, or certainly your parents did?

Oh yes.

You knew about the pogroms?

We knew about the pogroms, but even I knew about the pogroms. And the anti-semitism was there, we knew that the Jews weren't allowed to do this and the Jews weren't allowed to live there. And you mustn't say that you are Jewish because it might be nasty for you if you say it. That we knew. But when I say I didn't encounter anti-semitism I didn't encounter active anti-semitism. I was never in a pogrom. I did see the aftermath of a pogrom once. Not a big pogrom, a little pogrom. And I saw two peasants sitting there saying "If I wouldn't have been drunk I wouldn't have done it. Why the hell did I get drunk?". Because don't forget that most of the pogroms were instituted by - from up downwards. And in order to make the peasants and the rabble do it they were given a lot of vodka and made drunk and the battle cry was "Kill the Jews and save Russia". And in a drunken state an uneducated peasant will do it. I haven't got that hatred. Of course I'm against pogroms, of course I am bitterly upset that they happened, of course. But I haven't got that hatred - for a drunken Russian peasant who does things - on instructions, as I have for an educated German who does it calculatedly. There is that difference. And that difference is never accepted - here in England. Everybody says "The Russians, they had pogroms". Right, they had pogroms. And they were terrible. They were terrible. But it was an anti-semitism which went downwards. Whereas in German anti-semitism it's from the people upwards. That is my difference of it. I hate both of them. I hate both of it. But you do see what I mean.

It is a complete distinction, yes.

When you say you saw the aftermath of a pogrom, can you remember where that was?

Some village outside of Rubinsk.

What were you doing there?

We were staying a few months in Rubinsk. And we obviously went for picnics or something.

Did you see any damage or any ..?

No, I didn't see anything except two peasants. I'd heard that there was a pogrom the day before, or two days before. And I saw two peasants who were literally beating their heads with their fists saying "why did I get drunk and why did I do it". And that remained in my memory. And that made me realise that somebody had made him do it, he didn't really want to do it himself, he didn't know any Jews and he had no desire to do whatever it was that he was made to do.

But your family felt fear sometimes. Did they ever think that they might ..?

No, they felt fearful of the communists. They felt fear from the communists. And they felt fear from the white terror or the red terror when we eventually went back to Vindau before coming to England. That - there there was fear.

Did you personally as a child ever experience any anti-semitic comments at school for example?

Only when I got to a German school.

So your life in Petrograd was really quite happy and peaceful?

Yes, it was. It was. No different from anybody else's life in those days. A constant hunt for food. A constant queueing. Even more so than there is now. Sometimes even hunger. And while in Rubinsk - this might amuse you - there was a great shortage of food, but there was an absolute horrible disgusting load of caviar to be had. And we had caviar morning, noon and night. And we came to the stage where we said "What, caviar again". And to this day I dream of eating caviar with a tablespoon.

Did you like it?

I got tired of it. But I adore it now. Anybody who will give me it - a few tablespoons of caviar. It's no use putting a two little grains onto a bit of egg and covering it with onion and - That's not it. I want caviar by the tablespoon.

Was it expensive?

No. It was terribly cheap. It was the only thing available.

What about the sturgeon, did you get sturgeon as well?

I must have had some of it. But very occasionally. Because that was fish and people ate it.

And what about salmon. There seems to be a lot of it in Russia now?

Yes. There was salmon. As I say, whatever was available was affordable.

And was there a blackmarket in food?

Yes. There was a blackmarket and there was a big fight for food. I remember while we were in Rubinsk where food was difficult. And my grandfather heard that somewhere or another you could get flour. And he went off to get a sack of flour. And he managed to get that sack of flour. He was attacked on the way by whoever it was who also wanted the flour. And he fought them off and he came back with the flour, but with a broken arm.

That must have been a great shock for your mother?

Yes. But my grandfather was a man who could withstand great deprivation and great pain. His arm - I remember seeing it - mother took his jacket off, you know. And his hand was upside down. And he said "don't worry Mary, it'll be alright. Don't worry". The doctor came and the arm was set. And that was that.

Did everybody know that you were Jewish?

Oh yes. Oh yes. No question of that one. That was never, never hidden by any of my family. In fact even now I'm accused of flag waving. You know. Because with a Russian name like Xenia - nowadays when I meet some non-Jewish Russians. In fact I met a non-Jewish Russian woman last week, who told me with great excitement there was a wonderful service going on in the Russian Orthodox church and would I not go with her. You know - she didn't know me very well, I mean she was just a slight acquaintance. But it never struck her that I wasn't. Because my Russian is good. And it hasn't got any - sometimes one has a sort of a Jewish intonation, I haven't. Neither in German, nor in Russian.

What else can you remember about your life in Petrograd?

A few horrible things. Like going for a walk - I can't remember if it was Mademoiselle or my governess - somebody was with me. And a house was burning. And on the balcony of the house stood - on the second floor - stood some people screaming for help. And other people just - pouring more - wood into the fire to make it burn more quickly. And the governess or - whoever it was, grabbing my arm and rushing me home. And locking herself in her room and I heard her sobbing. Because people were being burned alive you see. I didn't realise what was happening until much later when I realised that that is what I saw.

Who were the people?

I don't know whether it was left burning right wing or right wing burning left wing. Do I know.

You don't think they were Jews?

Oh no, no, no. No, nothing Jewish.

How can you be so certain, how do you know?

By the way they were screaming - "Christ help me", you know, - you know, all that kind of thing they were screaming. And my governess grabbed me and literally dragged me away from it. This kind of thing was happening. Because it was a revolution.

Can you remember anything else?

About the revolution. I remember once - there was the - constituent assembly was being - was being - established. And it was the communists who broke up the first meeting of the constituent assembly. And they were apparently murdering each other

there. And into our flat flew, literally flew, some man or another, screaming for help and running and hiding underneath the bed. It was one of the members of the constituent assembly who was being chased by whoever wanted to kill him. And my mother turning to father and saying "Well what shall I do, I can't throw him out. And if they come in here to catch him". But they didn't come in here to catch him. And so this man eventually left.

Did you know him?

No.

A total stranger?

A total stranger of course. It was a revolution.

Was there gunfire in the streets?

Not gunfire, but there was occasionally shooting that one heard. But there were the two revolutions. There was a February one and there was an October one. We knew that Lenin was on the 'Aurora' outside Petrograd. And eventually he came in. So I mean we were - we children were kept out of it as much as it was possible to keep anybody out of this kind of thing.

But did you get the feeling that your parents were worried?

They would rather not have been there. And they were a bit afraid because - under the communist regime a lot of people - whom they called borjui - taken from the French word bourgeois. Bourgeois means middle class, you know. They took borjui to mean aristocrats or wealthy people. And to be a borjui you automatically were put onto the scapheap and killed or something. So - I believe that we were already classed onto the borjui level. Because of wealth, position, do I know what, my father's fur coat - or fur hat. Or my mother's furs or what. You know. So they didn't like - And quite a few of the people that we did know were arrested and never heard of again. That I do know.

Russians, not Jewish?

Some Jewish, some Russians.

Did you get the feeling that your parents were worried?

They were anxious to get out. There is no question at all about it. Because the minute they had the chance of getting out they went into German occupied territory rather than remain in Petrograd. Also there was by that time a tremendous amount of disease. There was typhoid, there was cholera.

And your parents were worried that you would be affected?

And how, because people were dropping dead on the street.

No vaccines?

No vaccines and no medicines - much. Oh no, they wanted out. They wanted out. Whether it was they wanted out mainly because of the shortages, the hunger and the - Or whether it was the political situation. A combination of both I would say.

Did they ever sit you children down and talk to you about what was going on?

No. No. We were so much in it ourselves, that what we - that we understood much more, much more than a normal 10 year old would. Because we grew up with the whole of it. It was part of daily life.

Was it talked about at school?

No. No. No. No. No. Because there you were - there you were a bit afraid. Because you didn't want to tell somebody because they might be of a different opinion. And then their parents might tell to somebody else. No, we were - I think we were actually told not to discuss things at school of that kind of thing. And was certainly not encouraged by the teachers. Oh no, no teacher would ever do a sort of halfways propaganda talk left or right or centre, no. No, no. No question of that one.

You were explaining that you were all relieved when the Tsar and his family were arrested and Kerensky came to power?

Yes.

What was your feeling after the second revolution?

Didn't like it, didn't like it at all.

Nobody wanted Lenin?

Nobody. Obviously somebody wanted him, but not my parents. Not my family or anybody around my family. No. And yet a number of the leaders, if not the majority at that time, not Lenin himself, were Jewish. That is one of the things that they are now bringing up in Russia as anti-semitism. That the revolution was started by the damn Jews.

That is why I asked, because I thought it might be possible that the Jewish population would feel that finally they had a champion?

No. No. The Jewish population felt that they had - our Jewish population. That is to say the borjui. The borjui. And that's the ones that I mixed with, I didn't know the others who were dreaming of a better land and a better future and a better life. Our life was all right. And they were all - they all came under the heading of K-Dets. Constitutional Democrats. Whether it was because my father chose them as his friends or whether his friends automatically were that, I don't know. But all the people that were in the house and any discussion came up, you know, about - the

government or what has been happening or what has been done, or so on. And if we were listening to it, it was always they were in agreement on K-Det. Constitutional democracy. They wanted the constituent assembly, they wanted - they wanted pure democracy.

But the movement wasn't strong enough to have any effect?

Of course not. Of course not. You see - I think I started at the beginning to say mine is a minority. And it's a minority not only in life style, it's a minority of political outlook as well. See we weren't - I didn't belong to the social - they didn't belong to the socialists wanting equality, wanting this, wanting that. They had their lifestyle. And they wanted a nice democratic solution.

Did your father at any time ever consider going to Israel?

No. He didn't. My sister went. Oh yes. I might have gone, but - I would have gone, but the outlook was different, my brother died and I didn't feel like leaving my parents alone and I got married. A variety of not acceptable reasons. I mean I should have gone. I should have gone. But I didn't. My sister did. Most of my friends did. I went so far as to learn Hebrew. I speak it.

When did your sister go?

My sister went in 1925.

From England?

From England. She went at the age of 16. To an agricultural school in Israel. She married a man who was an Israeli. A Jewish student from Rehovot, who was studying engineering in England. She married him, made him give up his job here. They went out and settled in Israel. He was one of the top engineers. My sister died 3 years ago. She was run over by a car in Jerusalem. My brother-in-law and I keep in very close touch. I just got a letter from him. I've got to write back to him.

(End of F321 Side A)

F321 Side B

When did you leave Petrograd?

After the Treaty of Brest Litovsk, which was towards the end of 1917. At least I think it was then. I maybe a couple of months out. And then we got to Vindau eventually. Having travelled literally by cattletruck. And we got back to our own flat, which as I have said before, was left in good condition. In fact there was a picture on the wall signed by von Hohenzollern thanking my mother for being an unknown hostess to him. When we left for England I hated the Germans so much that I tore up the picture. Stupid, wasn't it.

What sort of picture was it?

A picture of the German fleet.

A photograph?

Yes. Or some of the ships in the German fleet. I wouldn't know. But they were ships.

It seems an ironical thing for him to have left under the circumstances?

They hadn't been defeated yet. It was - the war was still on with the allies. It was only with the Russians that they had made peace.

Was the flat in good condition?

Oh yes. Oh yes, as far as I remember.

Nothing damaged?

No. No, no, no. Definitely not.

When you went back had a lot of other people also returned?

Yes. A number of people who had the possibility of getting out of communist Russia did so. And we were the ones who had the possibility. By having been originally residents of that part of the world.

So you returned to your home town?

Yes.

What was it like getting back there. What did it feel like to you?

To me. Very natural. I was only - about 9 or 10. And as long as I had Mummy and Daddy and everything around me I was perfectly happy.

And you went back to school?

Yes. Now school - was run by a German Major. He was the headmaster. And he was - a real terrible anti-semite. That is where I first encountered anti-semitism in its most virulent form.

Could you tell me some incidents?

Yes, sure I can tell you incidents. I was greeted by being told that I could not attend singing lessons. Because he could not stand crowing Jewish voices. The words used were 'Krahende Judische stummen'.

Were you the only Jewish child in the school?

No, no, none of the Jewish children were allowed to go to singing lessons. We didn't mind. We didn't like singing anyway, so - And we didn't regard it as anti-semitism because that hadn't yet - we hadn't yet realised what it was. We did very shortly afterwards. But at that moment it was just fine, so we won't sing, so what.

Was this the same school that you were in before?

No. No. Before I'd only been to sort of kindergarten school. This was proper school.

Was it a large school?

It was the only school in the town. So you just had to go there or you didn't go to school, whichever way you liked.

So what proportion of Jewish children were there?

That I couldn't tell you, but there were quite a few of my friends who were Jewish. Children of my parent's friends with whom I mixed at home. And they were all there.

And when you told your parents about what the headmaster had said, what did your parents say to you?

I don't think they commented much. I don't even know whether I told them. The next thing that happened was that - I got myself expelled from that school because I brought in a piece of homework which was really quite disgusting, full of - stains and badly written and wrong sums, anything you like. A really disgusting piece of homework. And the teacher sent me to the headmaster to be punished for it. And he had one look at it and told me that only dirty Jewish girls could produce homework like that. By this time I didn't like him, so I smashed his glasses and scratched his face. And was promptly expelled. And was a bit afraid of going home to see how my parents would react to that story. But my father picked me up and kissed me. And said "Well you don't have to go to school. We'll take a private teacher". And I had a private governess to teach me until the Reds came in and the school changed hands.

Can you tell me why you attacked him?

Because he had called me a dirty Jewish girl.

That was the reason, not because of the homework?

No, the homework I knew about. I was entirely wrong to produce that kind of homework. That I was fully aware should not have been. What I objected to was being called a dirty little Jewish girl.

And when you told your father he ..?

Picked me up and kissed me.

So after that you were educated at home?

No, not for any length of time. Because there was civil war between Reds and Whites. And each time the Reds came in the school had different teachers. And then when the Whites came in again it changed hands again. So immediately the Reds came in I went back to school. I went back to school. And then of course there was Lettish very shortly after that. I don't know when, but it was, when the - no, that must have been later. That must have been later. The Whites and Reds. And when the Whites came in different teachers were there again. So my expulsion didn't last for very long.

A matter of weeks or months, how long?

Weeks I should say. The governess remained at home to supervise my homework.

When the Reds came did they make good teachers?

The usual.

But were they fair to you?

Oh yes.

How did they treat you?

Same as any other children.

And the Whites too?

On the whole yes.

How frequently did they change?

I think three or four times during the period of a year.

How did you react to that?

We took it as it came.

Were you treating your schoolwork seriously?

Yes, I was made to treat it seriously. Because my parents did believe that children should be educated.

What were your parents' feelings at the time with these tremendously rapid changeovers of power between the Reds and the Whites. Were they worried?

Yes, they were. Because the Reds being communist - the sort of communist principles of - grinding the faces of rich in the dust - remained. And we were - financially in a poor community, upper class.

Did you feel uncomfortably exposed because of that?

Not me. Not me as a child. For that I was too young.

Did any of your friends ever say to you anything that made you feel different?

No. No. My friends - which came to the house were mostly Jewish. I think all of them were.

Would they have been quite comfortably off?

Yes. Mostly.

And when they came to the house what sort of games did you play together?

Oh - we were out in the fields. We got hold of some horses which we could ride. Bareback of course. Farmers' horses, they were grazing in the field. Otherwise the normal - the normal kind of games.

What sort of games?

Can't really remember - anything in particular.

Did you play with dolls?

Oh no, I personally hated dolls like poison. It was one of the punishments inflicted on me "If you've been naughty you have to play with a doll". Oh no, not me and dolls. I hated dolls. Because it wasn't - I wanted to be like my brother and join in with my brother's friends. Because that was going up and dolls was going downwards. So I wasn't going to play with dolls. No. No way.

Did you play with your brother?

Oh yes. We were very close.

And did you go riding together?

Well riding, if you can call it riding. We would catch a horse and we would get on to it, we could manage to do that, yes.

Where did you go on your horse?

Round the field of course. We couldn't take the horses away from the field.

You didn't go into the woods for example?

No, the woods were further away. They were much too far for us.

Did you ever go fishing?

Yes, once or twice. But not as a steady occupation. Because we were oversupervised by a governess or whoever there was to look after us. A French teacher or someone.

What language were you speaking at home?

Mainly German. Mainly German. Although we could speak Russian of course.

When you read a book for pleasure would that be in German as well?

No, that could be in any language. That could be in German or in Russian. Oh yes, that we read. Very much. And on that I was supervised to a great extent by my grandmother. Her books were all in German. And she read with me.

What about synagogue?

My grandmother took me to synagogue.

You started to go back?

Yes. Started to go back. Yes, not very often, but occasionally.

So life went on quite smoothly. And this was?

It was - right through 1918. Right through 1918.

And then?

And then there was the - coming to England at the beginning of 1919.

How did that come about?

It was after the treaty of Versailles which was in November 1918. By that time Latvia was established immediately as a country. My parents claimed Latvian nationality.

And - as Latvian citizens we could come to England. Especially as my father had business connections and some money in England. I don't know how much. But there was some, enough to buy a house in Hampstead presumably.

He applied for visas?

Yes. And got them immediately.

There was no problem?

No problem.

And who went with you?

My father, my mother, my brother, my sister and my grandmother. Not my grandfather, but my grandmother.

What happened to the rest of the family, your aunt for example in Riga?

They remained. They remained until a much later date.

But they eventually came to England too?

No. No, they eventually went to Palestine.

So tell me about your journey to England?

My journey to England - We went - it was a long, long thing. Possibly it was because of visa - we waited for visas, I think, but I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But we went from Vindau to Libau. And from there we went on to Berlin. And from Berlin we went on to Stockholm. From Stockholm we went on to what was then called Kristiania and is now Oslo. And then came across by boat from Bergen to Newcastle. And it took I think a month or so, if not longer. And there were four days of crossing from Bergen to Newcastle because the North Sea was still mine infested. And they had to chart the journey very carefully. In this connection I must tell you a funny story. One day at school a year or so later, when all the class was asked to write a - an essay on something which the teacher thought I wouldn't be able to do, she asked me instead to write how we came to England. I sat down and I wrote a long, long essay describing in detail all the journey to Berlin, our stay in Berlin, our stay in Stockholm, our stay in Kristiania, our journey across the North Sea from Bergen. And at the end of that I said that we eventually landed in Newcastle. Where there was a train journey of course to London. When she gave me back that essay she said "so you landed in Newcastle". I said "Yes". She said "Wasn't it a very long journey from Newcastle to London?". I said "Yes". And never wrote her another essay. She couldn't understand why. That was - that was an English schoolteacher at Hampstead High.

She made no comment about ..?

No, her comment was "Wasn't it a very long journey from Newcastle to London?".

The whole journey in Europe hadn't impressed itself upon her at all?

Not at all. The only thing that she could understand was Newcastle to London is several hours. It's a long journey, very long.

How did you travel from Vindau. By train was it?

Yes. By train to Libau and from Libau to Berlin. From Berlin to Stockholm. From Stockholm to Oslo. From Oslo to Berlin. From Berlin to Newcastle. And from Newcastle to London. And it is the last bit that impressed my English teacher very much indeed.

I'd like to know about your journey?

Well, there's very little to say. Because it was really very interesting. In Stockholm we stayed - we didn't travel like emigrants. Like immigrants. We didn't travel in poverty. We must have had money, because we stayed in good hotels. In fact I was very impressed to have a bathroom attached to my bedroom. So that must have been a certain standard of hotel.

That was in Stockholm?

Yes, that was in Stockholm. And we went also for a couple of days to some seaside place from Stockholm. And had lunch in the restaurants.

Your first stop you said was in Libau?

Yes.

Where is Libau?

Oh, not very far away from Vindau, on the Baltic. It's also a Baltic port.

How long did you spend there?

Just a few days. Presumably only to get train reservations. Presumably the train to Berlin must have gone from Libau and not from Vindau.

Were there many other people doing the same journey as you were?

No. Not at the time together with us. But I do know quite a few families who came out of Russia to England at the same time as we did.

Would they have taken the same route or a different one?

They would have taken a different one. Because they do not necessarily come from Latvia. They may have come from Odessa or from somewhere - from the Black Sea

or from somewhere else. And they may have gone via Switzerland and stayed in Switzerland for some time. I do know a family or two who did that. But there were quite a few families that arrived March, April, May 1919 in London. And they were - and our parents somehow always met and they were a kind of a Russian Jewish circle.

As you travelled did you feel that you were running away, that you were escaping?

No. No. No. We felt we are going to a new life and we are going to have a new education and so on. When I got to England I didn't wish to speak any English, because I couldn't see any reason why I should have to learn another language when those stupid English didn't speak anything that I could understand. Surely it wasn't fair that I should have to learn another language when I already spoke three or four and they didn't speak anything except English. No way. Point blank refused to learn.

Had your father managed to sell all his property?

I don't know what he had in the way of property. But I'm sure that if he had any forest or anything like that it was left behind. That I'm sure of.

Or your flat, was he able to sell your flat?

It was a rented flat. There was nothing to sell there.

There was no lease?

No, there's no such thing as a lease. No.

We did get some of our furniture moved to London. I don't know why. Eventually we bought different - mother bought different furniture.

So you don't know what happened about the forests?

If there were any forests. I really wasn't sure that there were. There may have been, there may not have been. I don't know. These things just weren't discussed with us children. Children basically should be heard - should be seen and not heard.

You got to Libau and you spent three or four days there?

And then we went on to Berlin.

Again by train?

By train.

And what was it like in Berlin?

In Berlin actually we stayed with an aunt of mine who had been married to a German. And we stayed with her. In her flat. A very big flat. And we all stayed there. Or rather we children did. My parents had a room in a hotel.

How long were you there?

For quite a while. Must have been some weeks. And then we went on by train again via Sassnitz to Trelleborg, which thrilled us very much because the train went onto the ferry and went across the ferry from Sassnitz to Trelleborg.

It was immediately after the treaty of Versailles when the Germans maintained that the shortages were such that it had to end the war because the civilians couldn't take it any more. We were thrilled by the plenty in Berlin by comparison to Russia. In fact when we went into a cafe house we were actually given a lump of sugar. Which to us children was incredible. I think the cake that I remember most eating was a cake which was bought in Berlin. There were cakes. And - mother was able to buy a suit for my brother and a dress for - and dresses for me and my sister. In shops. It was there. To us that was incredible. To us children I mean.

And what did the streets seem like to you?

Full of plenty, full of people, full of people well dressed. And everybody had enough to eat, it seemed to me.

And was this the first time that you had seen a City like that?

Yes. Because in Petrograd you couldn't buy anything. And you certainly couldn't get a lump of sugar. Not that you could even get a cup of tea. In a restaurant there wasn't any.

Do you mean there was no tea or there were no restaurants in Petrograd?

We could get some tea supposedly on rations. But there was no - way in which you could just go into a restaurant to have a cup of coffee. At least we never did. There may have been some hotels, but - not at the last. It wasn't available. There was a hunger, which they didn't - which - was - beyond the understanding of the Western nation.

But as you say Berlin was different. What did you feel yourself when you were there?

I just enjoyed being there. To look in the shop windows and to see that there were things to be had. And even getting some of them. Or something much more than what we could get in Petrograd. As I say there was never any shortage of money. We were the minority who had - I don't say plenty. But some. My parents weren't rich in the sense that rich is understood in the West. But they had enough to live. And it was rich by comparison.

Did they buy a lot of things in Berlin that they hadn't had before?

I think we each one had a dress. My mother wanted a coat and got it. Oh and we had shoes. Shoes, shoes, shoes. Each one had a pair of shoes. New ones.

Where were the shoes made?

I wouldn't know. But they were there. Presumably in Germany. Because in the summer in Russia we children went barefoot. So as to save the shoes for the winter because you couldn't get any.

Even you?

Oh yes. My mother had a fur coat and no shoes. Money didn't play all that importance, it just wasn't there. And that is - a concept which is very hard for the West to understand.

Can you remember anything else that you did in Berlin?

I went in a taxi. I remember that. And when I wanted some flowers, and there was a street merchant with flowers, my mother bought me some.

What sort of flowers were they?

Lilies of the valley I believe. Nothing special.

Were they from the street?

Yes, from the street. Perhaps it wasn't lillies of the valley, it was something else. But that kind of flower anyway.

Did you go to the theatre?

I think I went to a concert once there. I don't remember much more about it. No, I think I was taken to a concert.

(End of F321 Side B)

F322 Side A

Now we went back to Berlin for holidays much later in the early 20's when the inflation was on in Germany. And then for 1 Deutschmark you got a suitcase full of money. And you could buy everything. And I very much enjoyed going for a holiday to Berlin to my aunt. And being given one or two deutschmarks by my parents. Which I then changed into a suitcase full of money.

What sort of things did you buy?

Oh, I don't know. Anything I saw I think. The inflation was horrendous. And then there were poor people. Then there were very poor people. And lots of beggars on the street. That I do remember.

You saw them?

Oh yes. And then I was much older, already I was 13 or 14. And I understood much more.

Did you get an impression of what sort of people these beggars were. Were they peasants, were they people from Berlin?

They were people from Berlin I think. And it was - a lot of the rentier class were completely impoverished.

What do you mean by the rentier class?

The people who lived on fixed incomes. The kind of person that I am now. Who is not working anymore, but lives from the dividends of capital. And the capital was wiped out in one - in one stroke.

For somebody with a lot of money there were things to buy?

Yes. For people with a lot of money there were things to buy. People who had foreign currency. It was paradise. But for the ordinary German who unless he had property - but just had money in the bank or something like that.

So you saw people begging on the streets?

Yes.

Children too?

I think so yes.

Did you give them anything?

Oh yes. Oh yes. I had lots. Because I had English pocket money. A few marks. My father sent my aunt some English money to - to let me have what I wanted. That is definitely.

So what years would these have been?

Well the inflation years.

The late 20's?

No, the early 20's. Oh the early 20's. '21, '22.

How often did you go back?

Once a year to Berlin for a holiday. We also went in the summer to - various places in Germany. Where my - father - had business in what is now called Gdansk and was then called Danzig. And we went to - seaside places nearby, but on the German side. And - they were very nice summer holidays.

In Berlin did you notice as the years went by - you say you went every year - did you notice any political changes and social changes?

Well we didn't go very much - after - the currency was stabilised by Schacht. The German finance minister who stabilised the German currency.

What year was that?

Oh, it was towards the middle to the end of the 20's. And then - in the mid-20's. And then we didn't go for holidays anymore. Also my aunt moved away from Berlin so there was no contact anymore. And - I didn't go to Germany again until the end of the 20's. When you did already begin to notice a - influence of - how can I put it - both anti-semitism and a strong nationalism and certainly a great - insistence on German nationalism. Now I spent a month in the summer of 1928 in the Black Forest of Thuringen. My mother had gone there for - to a sanatorium. And I went for my summer holidays to be with her. And there were a lot of young people, German, who had also gone to visit their parents or mother or father in that sanatorium. And because I spoke German in a way that nobody, unless I told them that I wasn't German, knew that I wasn't German. I merged into that group of young German people. And there I found the beginning of what I call Hitlerism. On one day we went - a group of us went for a walk in the Black Forest. And there was a statue of a German minister who was Jewish and who had been murdered. And I asked who that was. And they told me. And I said "Oh, wasn't he the man who was murdered?". And the answer came back "Yes of course and so he should have been the damn Jew". Now there had been no reason for anybody to know that I was Jewish. There was no reason for anybody to know that I wasn't a German. They weren't my friends, they were just a group of youngsters like myself. I was 20, 21. Not quite 21 in this June '28. I wasn't quite 21. So I mixed with a group of youngsters who went dancing together. And also on one occasion we were dancing and somebody came up and asked me to dance. And I got up and went. And the group with which I was told me

why the heck did I go dancing with him, didn't I know that he was a hairdresser. And I said "So what?". And they said "We don't mix with hairdressers". I said "I do". But that incidentally, or that kind of thing, was incidentally also the kind of attitude in England at that time. You did not dance with a black man at college when he asked you, because it just wasn't done.

What was the reaction of your friends to you after you had danced with your hairdresser?

Oh, they just said they thought that I hadn't understood and I didn't know.

Was this the same group that you had realised were ...?

I don't know whether it was the same group or a different group. But it was the same - standard of group.

But how did you react to this atmosphere?

I just left them alone. I couldn't as yet take it very seriously as a national threat. So I had met someone anti-semitic. Big deal.

You didn't see a trend in it?

No. Not then. I saw a trend to it by Christmas '28.

And how did that come about?

I had a friend who had been studying in England and had gone off to complete his studies at Vienna University. He was Czech. And he wrote to me Christmastime '28. That he had gone to a lecture a few days previously. Given by Rabindranath Tagore. Who at that time was the hero of our youth, you know - And could I imagine that the hall was practically empty because at the next hall was a demagogue by the name of Adolf Hitler and all the students had gone to hear him instead of Rabindranath Tagore. I could not understand how anybody could go and hear a demagogue called Adolf Hitler - when there was Rabindranath Tagore speaking.

Was this the first that you heard of Hitler?

Yes. That was Christmas '28, '29.

And where was this?

I was here in London. He was in Vienna when he wrote me that letter.

So this was in Vienna that this had happened?

Yes.

Which friend was this?

Just a man who afterwards qualified as a doctor and I lost sight of him for many years.

A Jewish man?

Yes.

Did you go back to Germany after that?

I went - No. I went through Germany on my way to Latvia once. I had to because there was no other way of going. But that was already in '34. A year or so after Hitler had come to power. And I had to go through Germany in order to get to Riga. Where my family were. They had taken a villa on the - from England on the Baltic Sea. Because my mother had her sister there, you know, and all kinds of friends and so. And father had a lot of business still in Latvia. And - my family was there and I was going to join them. And I had to go through Germany. And I had an experience which is really quite funny. I was of course terribly anti-German, I mean I don't have to tell you in 1934. And - I was travelling in a sleeping carriage. And - customs came in, from Holland into Germany. And a German officer asked me - he saw a magazine or something, and he said "You shouldn't have that. You're not allowed to read it". I said "Well you take it and destroy it, but be careful not to read it". So then it struck me, after all he's only doing his duty, I'm just being mean. And so I picked up a packet of cigarettes and offered him one. So he said "We don't smoke. German women don't smoke". I said "Well I do". And lit a cigarette. He said "Have you got any more?". I said "Yes, they're in the suitcase up there". "Well", he says, "you'll have to pay duty". I said "Oh no, I'm in transit, I do not pay duty". "Yes you do". I said "Well in that case would you kindly take the suitcase down, take the suitcase into the luggage van and seal the luggage van, I'm not paying duty. So you take it to the luggage van and have the luggage van sealed". He says "You take it down". I said "Oh no, you want it, you take it down". So the conductor came along and took down the suitcase and we trailed to the luggage van. And there was a man sitting at a table in the carriage before that, was apparently the Chief of the Customs. And he said to me "What passport have you got?". I said "I've got a British passport". And produced it. The customs officer got a ticking off the likes of which I haven't heard. And they were flabbergasted because you see my German is way above tourist level. But way above. But he still had to find something. He said "But you also seem to have a pound of tea". I said "Yes". He said "Well for the tea you will pay me duty, won't you?". I said "With pleasure". So he says "2 marks", or something. And I gave him the money. And I said "Please can I have a receipt?". He takes the money. I said "Please can I have a receipt so that when I leave Germany I can reclaim my 2 marks?". He didn't die of apoplexy but he nearly did. And I held up the train for 20 minutes getting my 2 marks back.

Quite right?

I know. But my husband was furious with me when he heard this story. He says "You put yourself into some kind of position, they could have arrested you. You would have had to have the British Consul out". So I said "So what?".

It was an adventure?

Yes. One shouldn't really have them. It's not worth it.

When you say you went through Germany did you just go through on the train, you didn't stop anywhere?

I didn't stop, no. I went through by train, because the train was going through and there was no other way of getting to where I wanted to get to. I didn't stop. I haven't set foot in Germany since. And I wouldn't. And I wouldn't. I went round Yugoslavia. It was the quickest route that you can possibly imagine in order to avoid going through Germany or Austria, I wouldn't go to either.

Your aunt who was in Berlin and left Berlin, did she leave Germany altogether?

Yes, she married somebody from South Africa. Having divorced her German husband.

And went to South Africa?

Mmm. When she married.

Did you have any family who were in Germany or in Latvia or anywhere who were?

In Latvia, yes. In Latvia, yes.

Who were there during the war?

Well they didn't last in the war. They didn't last until the end of the war.

Who were they?

Cousins. And friends. I have got a photograph somewhere here of myself and my son aged 3. And about six or seven friends. Taken on the beach in Riga. My son and I are the only ones alive. The rest are dead.

And that photograph was taken during one of the holidays that you had?

Yes.

How often did you go back?

I haven't been - not to Riga I haven't been back. I went the last time when my son was 3, which was 1934. On that trip.

Did your parents go back after that trip?

My mother not. Most certainly not. My father - may have gone back for - on business there. I don't know, he was forever travelling somewhere or another.

Can you tell me more about Riga?

About Riga I can tell you very little. Because Riga is the centre and then there's a stretch of the most wonderful Baltic Sea. Beaches. And sandy dunes on which trees had been planted a hundred years ago in order to stop the dunes from moving. And it was gorgeous seaside, or at least it was the most gorgeous seaside anywhere in Europe. Or anywhere else that I have seen. There maybe something in the other side of America which I don't know, which may be better. But I can't imagine. Stretches and stretches of pure, pure sand. And a sea which has no tide. But I believe it's very polluted now like everything else.

Where did you stay?

You hired a house. At least we did.

With staff?

Of course. How else. It's only now that I haven't got any staff. In those days I wouldn't know how a - water in a kettle boiled. Not me. But it was the attitude in England as well in those days. When I got engaged in 1929 to the man I married in 1930, I said to him "I will take some cooking lessons". And he looked at me as if I'd gone quite mad and said "I'm marrying a wife and not a cook. You'll have a cook. Why should you want to learn to cook". He changed his mind very soon afterwards.

Times changed?

Times changed. Times changed.

What did you do when you were in Riga. What activities did you do. You had a social life?

A social life. I mean I was only there for a month or so. What do you do at the seaside, you go swimming. You talk to friends. You visit each other. You're young, you go dancing. You go to the band that plays in the evening. And you go for walks. You go and pick berries. You pick mushrooms. You hope that what you pick is an edible fungi and not a poisonous one.

When you swam what bathing costumes did you wear?

The same as English ones. Whatever I bought here. As a child I wore striped ones. And then a little bit later things made out of taffeta with a skirt. When I was about 15 or 16. That was very smart.

Did you ever have bathing machines?

No, but I met those in Brighton. Those I met in Brighton. Which went out into the sea and then you stepped out gently into the sea from there. Because otherwise it wasn't decent. That I encountered when my parents sent me off to boarding school immediately after we came here, when I refused to learn English. So they dived me into it by sending me off for a year to boarding school in Brighton. A nice Jewish boarding school. We were taught how to be a lady. But nothing of any other - kind.

A general education?

If you can call it education.

What did they teach you?

English. I think we read Haiwatha. I think we read an English play by Shakespeare probably, I can't remember which. A bit of arithmetic. I was 11, 12. I don't think we got as far as algebra. Geography I knew much more than they did so - it didn't matter.

What about languages?

I could teach them. We did have a French mistress.

Were they friendly?

Oh, very. Very. Very, very. They always wanted to hear about what happened to me, so as I didn't have anything particular to say I invented stories. I mean if I get a question by a 12 year old "Were there wolves in Petrograd?". The answer was "Definitely yes".

And they believed you?

Oh but of course. If they can ask that kind of question they can get that kind of answer.

I must ask you one more question. I'd love to know about your dancing days in Riga. What did you dance in the 20's?

The waltz. And a thing called a foxtrot. And a thing called a tango.

None of the American dances. Wasn't the Charleston in then?

No, the Charleston came a bit later I think. I certainly could Charleston. But I think that I did in London. I can't remember Charlestoning in Riga. Waltz, yes. Tango, yes. Foxtrot, yes.

And were these at the dansant?

The dansant or even in the evening. All very demure, very good.

And elegant?

Yes. Riga was always elegant.

What were the hotels like there?

I don't know, I've never been in a hotel.

What was the food like?

Marvellous. Absolutely marvellous. I still dream of food - of those days. Not the present day, but in those days. There was an awful lot of smoked fish. Not just smoked salmon. But all the smoked plaice - and - other kind of fish.

Sturgeon?

No, sturgeon is in the bottom of Russia, not in the North. Fish from the Baltic. Anchovies, lots of anchovies. Sprats. Smoked sprats. All that kind of thing.

Was this Russian cuisine?

No, I think specially Baltic. Lots of vegetables. Lots of creamy things. Lots of soured cream. Loads of mushrooms. Of all kinds.

And no caviar then if there was no sturgeon?

Well, caviar was imported. And the red caviar, a lot of it. And chickens and ducks and geese and all that. And jams of all kinds.

And pancakes?

Oh yes, pancakes. Very - very varied and loads.

And what did you drink?

What did we drink. Nothing specific. There was fruit juices of all kinds. Not orangeade and not oranges. Not lemons. They were in very short supply. But apple juices. Some kind of - cider I would say, you know.

And the adults, what would they drink?

They might drink some wine, but there wasn't a great consumption of wine drinking. Oh, there was of course social - social drinking, you know, you'd have a vodka, you'd have a - you'd have a glass of wine you know. But that wasn't - not in our circle at any rate - any kind of - thing. Not then anyways.

And did your parents play bridge still?

Yes.

Any other card games?

Some kind of - I don't know - kalooki? or whatever it's called. I don't play it so I don't know.

Kalooki?

I don't know, something like that.

Canasta?

Canasta. That kind of thing, yes. But there were no casinos. And no gambling. Some people played poker. I believe. I only play a little bit of bridge so I really wouldn't - be in on it.

So we were following your journey to England. We got you as far as Berlin. After Berlin where did you get to?

Stockholm.

Do you remember Stockholm?

Yes. It was lovely and it was bright. I don't know why but it was. But the biggest impression was from Stockholm to - to - Oslo. Because I saw mountains for the first time. There are no mountains in the Baltic. No mountains around - There is a sort of hillock in Petrograd.

(End of F322 Side A)

F322 Side B

It was the mountains that were so impressive. And they stuck in my memory. The snowcapped mountain.

Did you go up?

No, it was only passing through by train that I saw them. But you couldn't get me away from the window of the train. Looking at it.

Did you spend any time in Stockholm?

Yes. I was there about 2 weeks or so. I don't know quite how long but there were quite a few days. Possibly a couple of weeks.

Any memories?

No, except that we went down to the seaside for a day or so. We went - we were taken to varying museums, art galleries. Looked at the palace from the outside, not from the inside. It was nice.

And did you meet anybody there?

Yes, my parents had some friends there. So we went into their home. They came me some very nice chocolates - I remember. Because we were still very excited at having things like chocolates and cakes and - any pluses like that.

Was the food there good?

It was very similar to the food on the Baltic. Also the smoked fish variety. And - all kinds of smoked meats and fruit.

Did you keep in touch with those people?

No, they're all dead dear. My parents friends are all dead.

But did they keep in touch with them after they had left?

Oh yes. But they did. My father did. But - this is many years ago now.

I just wondered if they had kept in touch, I didn't mean you?

They probably did.

So it was from there that your father arranged your crossing in the ship was it?

It must have been arranged beforehand. The visas were definitely arranged and the entry permit was definitely arranged. It was - I think it was a question of when there

is a suitable boat going across the North Sea, which was still a dubious - thing to do. Because it took 4 days to get across.

So you all got on the boat together. Was it a British ship?

I doubt it. I doubt it. Because I remember being given some venison to eat which I didn't like. And I don't think that a British ship could have had venison on the menu.

So what nationality could the ship have been?

Norwegian. Could have been Norwegian. But I wouldn't know.

What were the conditions like on the boat?

Well we were all rather seasick. But we had cabins. And we had - very good food. Presumably we must have travelled first class. I can't imagine - I can't imagine anything else. Unless it was a one class ship.

And you had Latvian passports at this stage?

Yes. Yes, we had Latvian passports.

Did you have a cabin to yourself?

No, I shared it with my grandmother. My parents had a cabin. My brother and little sister had a - shared a cabin. And I shared a cabin with my grandmother. There were three cabins which we had.

What sort of boat was it?

Passenger ship. There were other passengers. Because we sat at big tables for lunch and for dinner.

And who were the other passengers?

I don't know.

Were they Norwegian?

Must have been either Norwegian or British or - or Swedish.

Was this a cruise ship?

No, it wasn't a cruise ship. Because nobody was cruising in the North Sea when it was still mined. It must have been business people.

But I wonder if it had been a cruise ship?

Must have been originally probably. Because it was - quite as good as a number of ships in which I have sailed. Not as good as the Queen Mary or something like that, but - just an ordinary ship.

When did you arrive then in England. In Newcastle?

We arrived in England towards the end of March 1919.

And what were your feelings when you landed?

I hated it. I thought it was dreadful.

What was dreadful about it?

We got onto the train and we got onto the train when they were serving lunch. So presumably we must have been travelling Pullman. As I say, in the minority. You will not find many immigrants travelling Pullman. But we were. And they gave me innumerable knives and forks. I was used to having one knife and one fork and then a little plate on which you put it for the next course. And here I mean I was just befuddled. Then I was served some fish. And fish was boiled. And it had no salt on it and it was awful. I said "I don't like it". I then was given something or another which I didn't like either and I refused to eat it. And anyway, what the heck did I want all those knives and forks for. I wasn't going to take any notice of that, so I kept - I took one knife and fork. And up comes a waiter and takes it away from me.

This was all on the journey from Newcastle to London. You went straight from the boat?

From the boat to London. But father had a sister who was married here. And she had arranged for us to be in a - some rooms in - in some kind of a house not far from where they were living. Because we couldn't all go to her. She took her mother, which was my grandmother, straight away to her flat. And eventually she took me as well. Because I had nearly gassed myself in the room where I was. Because - my parents had gone over to them. And I had a room in this - rooming house call it. And my brother and sister were in a different room. And when I wanted to switch off the light. It was of course in those days in gaslight. I pulled a few switches up there and the gas went off and I went to sleep. And then the next thing I remember on that one was that somebody was holding me with my face out of the window. Because I had switched off the gas but I had left the gas on. Because we had never met gas lighting. And in England that was the common thing. There were gas street lamps. There was gas in - oh, there was electricity of course in better homes, but not in a rooming house where my aunt had taken rooms for us until we bought a house or settled ourselves, you know, as a pro tem arrangement. And I had never met gas before.

So that was a close shave?

I don't know how close it was. I certainly survived to tell the tale.

So then you went to stay with your aunt. Where was that?

She lived in - she had a big flat at that time in Camden Hill Road in Kensington. Just off Kensington High Street in one of the big blocks of flats. And I stayed there.

Where were your parents?

They were still in that rooming house until they - they took a house in Hampstead. They rented one and then eventually bought one.

Where was that?

In Daleham Gardens. They rented a house in Daleham Gardens. Off Fitzjohns Avenue. And then eventually bought a house the other side of Finchley Road in Greencroft Gardens. In those days those were nice houses. Now they're little flats or rooming houses or what. But in those days they were big solid Edwardian houses, you know.

So your father had managed to bring a lot of his wealth with him?

No, he had it here already. Because he had a partner who was in England and who was doing business here. There was a certain amount - not very much I don't think, but enough to buy a house or to rent a house for us to live.

So do you think he had been planning to come over for quite a while before?

No, because this business had gone on from before the war. The money was here from before the war.

And you never heard him talk about what he had left in Latvia?

No. No. Probably there was. I don't know. I don't know. All I know is that we at that time - certainly had enough to - to buy whatever was necessary. I'm not saying that I was showered in diamonds, because I was not. And in fact I had a very strict upbringing moneywise. I was given pocket money which was way below - what anybody was giving. And told to manage on it. Until I started earning myself I was very skint.

And when you arrived here you didn't know any English?

No. I didn't.

When did you start learning?

Only when I was plunged into a boarding school in Brighton because until then I refused. Couldn't see any reason why I should.

So when did they send you to the boarding school?

We arrived in - when was it - March. And they sent me to boarding school in September. I didn't stay there very long.

What had you done in between?

In between they had - had given me some lessons. And I was looking round at London and - you know, getting more - oh yes, we had - there was my brother had a barmitzvah in between. Some time in beginning of June. So there was some rabbi coming to teach him. They bought me some clothes. According to my mother's taste, which was quite different to what my aunt thought should be worn in England. You know -

What sort of thing?

Well, my mother couldn't see any difference between - a low heeled shoe or a flat shoe or a canvas shoe or a tennis shoe, as long as it was white and you needed a white shoe. So what's wrong with a tennis shoe. My aunt had bought me a little silk dress. My aunt told my mother to buy me some proper white shoes, you know. And my mother was arguing that those shoes are perfectly alright, they're white, what's the difference. She didn't know. We were in a quite different - state. I remember my mother going into Sainsburys. And coming home in a taxi with about a ton of butter. I don't know, hundred weights of butter. And my aunt saying to her "Mary, what have you done? What on earth did you buy all that butter for? What are you going to do with that butter?". And my mother saying "Well there may not be any tomorrow, I have got to buy some while it's there". And my aunt saying "But it will always be there". "How do you know? It may not be there. You buy when you can get it". The butter went rancid. She bought up Sainsbury's. The whole big thing that Sainsbury in those days, you know, they used to have a sort of huge big mound of butter from which they would cut out pieces for you. And she bought the lot. Came home with it.

She didn't buy all the eggs and cheese as well did she?

I don't know, she certainly overbought. Because God forbid it wouldn't be there tomorrow. That is something - that just wasn't understood here. Any more than the Americans today can understand shortages here during the war. Any more than we can understand what Leningrad during this war suffered in food shortages. When I'm in America and I'm told that we suffered, on Wednesdays or Thursdays they couldn't buy any steak in America during the war, you know that don't you? It was very hard for them. There I will tell them about the shortages which we suffered. But my God I keep my mouth shut when I'm in Russia and I hear what shortages they suffered. And they ask me "Did you have everything". I said "Eat plenty". The answer is "Eat plenty".

Were you happy here when you first came?

When I first came, no. Eventually yes. Very. But - I always had a different point of view to what the teachers at school had. I had a bit of difficulty with them. Usually managed to survive.

In your boarding school in Brighton you mean?

No, in the London school as well. For instance they had German lessons. So the English woman who was teaching German said to me "You must participate in what the class is doing". And I had asked her to give me some German books to read or to set me a different thing, so that I could - carry on with something that was useful to me. And she said "No", she couldn't have anything that was different from what the class was doing. So therefore I can go on with the German as taught, at the lowest level, in an English school, by an English mistress. I thought "Well I'll settle you soon enough". So I was asked to write something in German. I don't know, the class was asked to do a translation from English into German. I don't know what it was, but something to be written in German. I produced it, but I produced it in Gothic characters. Which she poor fool couldn't read. After that I could choose my German books to read in school.

You made a very good point?

Of course.

What school was that?

South Hampstead High.

So you didn't stay very long then in Brighton?

No, in Brighton I stayed less than a year. Because I think my parents must have realised that I wasn't really being taught anything except a certain amount of snobbery. "You mustn't do that, that's common", was an expression that I learnt. You mustn't do whatever it is, it's common. And you really must change in the evening into another dress. I mean it really is essential.

It was really a finishing school?

I don't know what it was. There were children from 8 years onwards there, so it couldn't have been a finishing school. But tremendous stress was laid on what was correct and was not correct. My parents didn't put such stress on it. At that period of time they felt that I should learn arithmetic and how to read and a bit of literature and what have you. You know, they didn't really think that it was an absolute essence to wear a red dress on a Sunday.

Education was more important?

That's what they felt.

Where was South Hampstead High School then?

Where it is now. Where it is now.

How long did you stay there?

Until I took matric.

How did your parents settle down in London?

Very well actually. My father certainly. And my mother as well. She had her own friends. And she had a lot of people who came at the same time or were of the same - They were always - we were always being accused of being a closed circle. Very - a closed circle of Russian Jews. We were accused of being snobby. We weren't snobby at all. But what we did - we weren't snobby about money, no way. But we were snobby about - if you can call it snobby - was a certain standard of education and behaviour. And frankly I think I'm that kind of a snob still today. I can't bear ostentation. I can't bear - boastfulness, you know. I just can't stand it. I admire education. I admire correct behaviour. Somehow or another, I don't know why. When I say 'correct behaviour' I don't mean that you must write me a letter for each time that you've eaten - you've drunk a cup of tea here, I mean I don't mean that kind of correct behaviour. But correct behaviour regarding others. Correct behaviour of not being tactless in company. I mean I sometimes am, but I dislike myself for it when I do. You know. I don't mind the odd swear word, I use it myself of course. But when I say 'correct behaviour' - is - sharing what you've got. It's - making contribution to society as well and not only just living for yourself. I don't do it anymore and that I am - old and geriatric, that's a different matter. I tried to do it as much as I could before. But not now anymore.

What did your father do. Did he work?

Oh yes, he had a business here.

What was his business?

Timber.

He carried on in timber here?

Yes.

Do you know in what way. Did he import it?

Oh yes. Importing. And then during the war - our company was never on the stock exchange, you know, it was a private company. It wasn't ours, he had a partner here.

What was it called?

Leopold Behrman Limited. And then we had a factory called Park Royal Woodworkers? But that I do not wish to be - if you're talking tonight on the Leo Baeck or something, everybody there will identify me on that one. And that I don't want.

And your mother, did she run the house?

She looked after the house. Did a bit of cooking if she felt like it, otherwise the maids did it. And then during the war - we did - home grown timber. They bought forests here in London and used the timber and then immediately replanted trees. And - did a lot of things for the government, like rifle butts. Supplied timber for PLUTO under the ocean and all that kind of thing.

They supplied timber for ..?

There was a pipeline which went for the invasion. It was called Pipeline Under The Ocean. PLUTO. And it was a big war effort, you know. They worked for all that. Now you see that is what I call behaving properly.

Contributing to the society?

Yes. And not just money making.

So you enjoyed your school, South Hampstead?

Oh yes, because there was also one teacher who had a great influence on me. She was wonderful. And some of them, as I've told you before, were just idiots. But there were one or two which were superb.

And you made friends there?

I went right through school with one of the girls who had come out from Russia at the same time as we did. And we were close friends and still are. And still are. Only she lives now in Israel and I am here. But if I go there I stay there as of right. And when she comes here she stays here as of right. Sometimes the right is abused. You know. I will go there and I'll say "Well you know tonight Rosa, I've invited X,Y,Z, you know, and they're all coming for dinner. Now you sit back, I'll do the dinner", you know. She comes along here and she says "I have invited X,Y,Z, you know, and they're coming tonight for dinner". I said "Are you going to do it?". She says "You know I can't cook". But that one doesn't matter.

And now you can cook can you?

Oh yes, I can cook. Supposedly. I had to learn the hard way.

Did you learn at school?

No, I learned the hard way during the war. I found myself in Wales with two children. During the phony war. And a nanny for the children of course. And a maid for me of course. Came the outbreak of the war. You know. A week or two afterwards - I was there the week before war broke out. And - the German girl - The German Jewish refugee girl whom I had as a nanny was promptly interned in the Isle of Mann. And the English maid that I had as a maid was promptly decided to join the Land Army. And I was left with two children. And another cousin who came down with her son. And between us we looked at each other - and my mother who

came down from London - and we looked at each other - and I had to learn to cook. Had to. There was no other way to eat. I learnt very easily to put a chicken into lots of water and let it boil until it was edible. No, no, they didn't have very good food.

Was it easy to find food to cook?

Oh yes, in England of course. Of course. But then I decided that Wales was not the place for me. The war was phony. And the whole thing was absolutely useless. So I came back to London. Leaving my elder boy at boarding school in Wales. And taking my younger one back to London. In order to discover that - there was an invasion of the Netherlands and Belgium and Holland and the war broke out in - in - serious - seriously.

[INAUDIBLE].... generation who suddenly found themselves from - being - from doing nothing really of any importance to having to learn to cook, to look after children, to do the washing and to do the scrubbing and - and do a bit of war work or whatever.

Did you do any war work?

I worked in Bloomsbury House. From the day that Hitler came to power I worked with the German refugees. Voluntarily of course. Until - the outbreak of war. I did it full time. When I was in Wales I did nothing, except look after the children you know. Having been plunged into it. Then when war broke out - When the real war started - At the same time my son in boarding school got very ill. And I had to move him away from boarding school. And find a place in the country to be with the children. So we - found a place in Buckinghamshire, in Amersham. And I moved there with the children. And the first year I was quite busy just with the household. My parents came down to stay there. I had two children, one of them sick. And - a huge house with a huge garden. And - it took up a lot of my time. I did join the WVS. And did a bit of - things at the WVS, but nothing - of any - world shattering importance.

What had you done working for refugees before that?

I belonged to a thing called the Agricultural Committee.

(End of F322 Side B)

F323 Side A

As you know there were certain categories of refugees that could come into this country. They were domestics. They were trainees. They were agricultural workers. And - professional people like doctors. And people under guarantee from somebody who guaranteed for their upkeep here. I had joined a thing called the Agricultural Committee. And those were basically Hachsharah boys. Now the Hachsharah was a movement in Germany, or in the whole of Europe actually, preparing to go to Palestine to work on a kibbutz. So there were - and they knew something about agriculture, not very much, but something. And they were the ones that were taken over to England. And they - and they - there were one or two training farms established in England to which they could go to. Which were accepting them. Like the David Eder farm. And like Tingrith farm. It doesn't matter - the names don't matter. And also into private farmers who would take them. Now you can't put - take a man or a girl or anything, from Victoria and put them on a farm. You've got to sort them out first in England. In London. And then decide where you send this one, where you send that one. So there was a thing called hospitality, in which I had to bludgeon all my friends and every Jewish person to give them a home - for a week, for two weeks, for a month. And - or get somebody to give me your house in which to make a hostel for them to go in and then come out from there. And that was my department.

So what year was this?

That was - '34 to '39. I took six months off to have Richard in '35. But in between I did that.

So a lot of them were quite young children?

No. They had - the Agricultural Committee was between 17 to 22. At 17 they are very young. When they are suddenly uprooted away from home without a language - not knowing what's happening - and really - not - not really geared for agricultural life.

Where were most of them from?

Germany. Later on they came from Czechoslovakia and from - from Austria and from Poland and from wherever it was. But originally it was German. German Jews only. But after it was also Austrians and later on Poland and what have you. It was a big movement. And the head of it at that time was Teddy Kollek. He was here in England doing it. Yes. It was Teddy Kollek.

Where had he come from?

Czechoslovakia. And he was here doing the Hachsharah movement. And my God did he work.

He headed it?

Officially it was headed by one of the Waley-Cohens. But that was a titular head only. In point of fact it was Teddy.

And how long did he stay in England?

I think - until the outbreak of war or very shortly before that.

He went to Israel?

He had been in Israel before and he came from a kibbutz from Israel to head the thing here. There were several others as well.

So he went to Israel from Czechoslovakia?

Yes.

And then came here to organise the Hachsharah?

Yes.

What does that mean, Hachsharah?

It means - a return to the land actually, you know. Now with him worked a few other people who became quite well known afterwards. And with him worked Xiel Federman who now owns all the hotels in Israel.

You knew Teddy Kollek?

Oh, very well. I knew Teddy very well. In those days. I have - I haven't really kept up this acquaintanceship because I feel when I go to Israel he's much too busy to be bothered with me.

But they were exciting times I would have thought?

They were quite exciting times. Except that we didn't look at it that way. We had a job to do.

Was the British government helpful?

The British government - on the whole was helpful. And the one thing that they did do was they gave us - when I say 'us', the head of Bloomsbury House, Otto Schiff, the right to sign entry permits to the amount of which we had the money available. The undertaking was from the Jewish Refugee Committee that not one Jewish refugee will fall onto the government expense. So if we had money we could bring in more. If we didn't rats to you. So therefore money was of tremendous importance. Now there was a central British fund as you know. And that allocated to each department which was dealing with specific refugees like domestics, like trainee department, like agricultural, like - something else. X £'s from the global grant. And we had to keep within that grant. Therefore if we had a grant which in theory should keep - should

enable us to bring in a thousand refugees, if we could manage to squeeze our expenses down and bring in twelve hundred, that was twelve hundred people saved. We kept our refugees in absolute penury. That's the only word I can say. We were always trying to collect money, but it was absolute minimum standard.

But at least they were out?

They were out. They were out.

Where did you raise money from?

Anybody who would give us any. Anybody who would sign a guarantee. Now a guarantee had to be backed by a bankers guarantee. It was no use asking Xenia to write two guarantees unless the bank said she is good for it.

And how much would one guarantee be worth in money terms?

Whatever that particular refugee required.

Would it be the amount needed to keep them here for a certain length of time?

No. It would be the amount that would enable that man or that woman or that child not to fall onto rates.

Not to be a burden in fact on the community?

Not to be a burden. Or the British community. Jewish communities are a different matter.

So if they were going to stay with somebody that would be all right?

That's all right.

Otherwise they would have to have enough money for rent?

Precisely.

And food?

Yes. Precisely.

But were they allowed to work?

In certain capacities. They could take a job as a domestic. The professors' wives who were domestics. They could be trainees. For instance my husband and my father were signing left, right and centre guarantees for trainees and they took them into the factory as trainees who were working there. Fine.

During the time you were working there how many people did you bring out?

I didn't bring - I only brought out a few under personal guarantees.

I mean that you helped?

Thousands. Several thousand. Several thousand. But it wasn't me. That was not me. That was the committee that did it. Listen, there were 10,000 volunteer people working in Bloomsbury House.

What was your particular responsibility?

I'm telling you. Hospitality for the agricultural workers who came in before they get plonked onto the farm or into a hostel or into - into a - training farm.

What I mean is did you have to go and look at the farm?

No, no, I knew the farm. I knew the farms. I didn't have to do anything like that. Because they are grownup people and they can look after themselves. The children, the people who worked on the children's transport, they looked at every house to which they put a child. They had people going around to the homes which people offered for children. And they went to inspect them. Oh yes. That yes. But we had peculiar people coming and offering us help. For instance, in came a man who had been a missionary in Tristan da Cunha. An English clergyman. And he said he had a - a rectory somewhere. And he could put up some of our people. He had been to the children's committee and they had refused because they said that the children could be - turned into Christians, you know, the small children. "What about you?" I said "Oh, my lot isn't going to be converted. My lot is old enough to know their own mind. Please have some of mine". And he said "Yes, we would have some of yours". "How many can you take?". "We can take 5. But one must be a girl because the cooking my wife can't do any of it". I said "Fine". So they had five or six of our people in a rectory somewhere in - I don't remember where it was. That was that.

When was it that you met your husband?

I think somebody brought him to the house. I can't remember who and I don't remember when. But I definitely met him - in our own home.

What was his name?

Joseph Kahan. And I didn't like him. So I just took no notice of him whatsoever. I went off with my own group wherever it was. And then he telephoned me and asked me to go to the theatre. And I said "Yes, I'd like to see some play or another". I forget which one it was. He told me he'd already seen it, could I choose another play? And I admired him for doing that. And for not going - to go a second time to a play which he'd seen because he was asking somebody he'd met casually to go out with him. So I did choose another play and we went out and from there it started.

How old were you?

About 22. 21, 22.

Did you have a very wide circle of friends at that time?

Tremendous. Tremendous. Because we were at that time interested in one thing and one thing only, that was - what was then called Zionism. I think it's now a dirty word. And learning Hebrew. In order to be able to speak our own language if and when we had our own country. Our home and the homes of the Shalit were the centre for all Palestinian students who were here in England doing their various - degrees. And they were also teaching us Hebrew. And we also formed the first young Zionist Hebrew speaking society.

And Joseph was part of that?

No, no, no. He was not. He was much older than I. He was - I thought he was practically ancient. He was 12 years older than me. And he did not belong to that crowd. Although he was very, very interested in all things Jewish and - everything that was happening in Palestine and so forth. But he did not speak Hebrew. And the whole of this crowd was much too young for him.

But your interest with your friends was in Zionism as you say?

Yes. Definitely.

Were you thinking at the time that you might go and live in Israel?

At the time I thought so. My sister actually did go. At the age of 16.

How did that come about?

Well she wanted - to go and fought hard with my parents to allow her to go to Nahalal? to the agricultural school in Nahalal? Which she did. And then when she came back after being 3 years there - she married - her husband who she'd known for a long time. He was a - young engineer who had come out from Palestine where his parents had settled. And was educated in England. And they went back to Palestine.

How did you make contact with the Palestinians you were talking about before?

Oh, through the Zionist organisation. Through - we were quite a well known young group.

What was the name of the group?

It changed its name. It started off as El Heatid in the future. And ended up as Hatchayah, 'renaissance'. But only people who were learning Hebrew or could speak Hebrew joined up. I think it was either they didn't wish to or we wouldn't have them, I'm not sure which.

Did you meet in each others' houses or at the synagogue?

No, we met mainly at the shalits or at our place. One or two homes.

Was it a large group?

No, I don't think at any time it was more than about 30 or 40. But it did include all the Palestinians who were studying at that time in England. Who afterwards became - the leaders in their - in Israel when Israel was formed.

Can you remember any of their names?

Oh yes. Moyshe Sharett. Olshan who was chief justice. And all kinds of lawyers and so forth.

And these meetings how often did they take place?

Once a week.

And during the time you were active in this movement you were seeing Joseph Kahan?

No, he came up a bit later. We were still a group. And I still had all the friends of that group. But the group had disintegrated a bit because that group was - in existence from the time I was 15 to the time I was 19 or 20.

And when did you marry?

I was 22. But people from that group were still my friends. A lot of them had gone back to Palestine. A lot of them had gone to Palestine. The Palestinians had gone and so forth.

And what sort of wedding did you have?

All the standard Jewish wedding. With a reception at a big hotel, you know.

Which hotel?

I think it was called the Rembrandt in Kensington or something like that.

Were you married in synagogue?

Yes. Oh yes. Was married in synagogue.

Did you have a lot of family?

Yes. A fair amount. I had a brother and a sister.

Was it a large wedding?

Yes, quite large.

And where did you live after you married?

A house in Hendon. Which was then considered very small and very - and very - how can I put it - a first home it would be called now. It did have four bedrooms and it was detached and had a garage. But, you know - it wasn't palatial.

Earlier on you were telling me that you spent some time in Wales. When did you first go there?

Oh, at the outbreak of war. Of the Second World War.

In '39?

In '39.

You went because of the war?

Yes. I - rented a house in Wales when Czechoslovakia was invaded. And my father felt that I ought to have a funkhole? in case war broke out, for my children. So I took that house at that time. And - took it on a lease until the end of August '39. With my option of renewal for a further year. And sent - during the summer I sent my nanny and a maid and two children down to the - house in Llandudno. While I went off to Switzerland for the - Jewish Congress which was being held in Geneva. Because my uncle was coming from South Africa leading the South African delegation. And I felt that it would be a nice holiday to go. And I came back to England on the 30th of August '39. Helter skelter.

Because you knew what was going to happen?

Oh no. I wasn't going to come home. Because what did it matter, I had a British passport and I could travel whenever I felt like it. But my uncle insisted that I go back that day at the very latest because he didn't wish me to be stuck in Switzerland as he had to go back to South Africa that day.

What was his name?

Nicholas Kischner.

While you were in Wales - you say it was in Llandudno?

Yes.

Did Joe come at the weekends?

Yes. Mostly. Mostly.

And the children went to school there?

The elder one went to boarding school in Colwyn Bay. And the little one wasn't due to go to school yet. He was only 4.

Did you have a nice time when you were living there?

I made a lot of friends. And by - the spring of 1940 I decided I'd had enough of Wales. And came back to London.

How did you travel this time. Did you have a car?

No. No. I came back with the children and - I didn't have any staff anymore, that's right, because they all disappeared at the outbreak of war. My German Jewish nanny was interned. And my English maid went off as a land worker. And I came back to London.

To Hendon?

To Hendon. Came back to Hendon. Leaving my eldest son in Wales. And - landed in the midst of - the real war. The phony war had ended. And then my son in Wales got ill. And I had to move him away from there.

What was the matter with him?

He got pleurisy. And I went out and rented a house in Amersham.

What sort of house was that?

The one which we eventually bought and lived there for 20 years.

When you say you rented it. Were all these decisions made together by you and Joe?

Oh yes, all the decisions were made together, quite definitely. But he was busy. And somehow or another it fell to me like it always was to all mothers to go and collect a sick child or - or go and look for a house or to rent something.

What was Joe's work?

He joined my father's firm - when - my brother died.

And when was that?

In '35. But he - before that - all he was working for - an international quinine company. Working a lot with the global supply of quinine to the Soviet Union. And travelled a lot to Russia.

Where had he been born?

In Lithuania, Russia. And he had been studying in Belgium before the outbreak of the First World War. And in 1914 escaped from Belgium to England. Arriving here completely penniless. Unable to get any help from his parents who were stuck in Russia. And he made his own way here.

You said when you first met him you didn't like him?

No, he was too old and -

But then after that?

After that, yes, very much so. We had a very good marriage. Until he died.

When did he die?

10 years ago.

1980?

'79.

One thing I'd love to ask you is about your further education. We talked about your early education. What did you do as a young adult?

I decided to go to the London School of Economics. To do what is known as a - or what was known then as a journalism diploma. A 2 year course. Just before my exams, about 2 months before my exams, I decided to see whether I would get a job were I to apply for one. I saw an advert which the Jewish Chronicle put in. Applied for it. And to my complete horror I got it.

(End of F323 Side A)

F323 Side B

I then had the choice of either getting my diploma or taking the job. I asked my adviser of studies which I should do. It was a period of mass unemployment in England. And he said to me "The job seems to be certain and your degree I can assure you is not". The man in question was Dr Hugh Dalton. I took his - very sensible advice and took the job.

What year was this?

'26.

And what was the job?

It was to read all the foreign press like the Russian papers which were edited by Jabotinsky in Paris. The German papers which were coming in. Some Hebrew papers which I couldn't read. And fish out anything that was of Jewish interest for the Jewish Chronicle. And of course I did a bit of proof reading and a bit of reporting. That I kept on until I got engaged to be married.

That does actually sound like a very interesting job?

It was in those days a very well paid job. But I didn't do it very well is a different matter.

Why do you say you didn't do it very well?

Because I just didn't.

Do you think you were too young?

No, I wasn't too young. At that age of 20, 21 one knows everything. It's only later that you realise that you don't.

What was the Jewish Chronicle like in those days. Were there a lot of people working there?

No, there weren't so many. There weren't so many. And it was a very good period. The editor then was a man L.J. Greenberg. He was very interested in Palestine, in Zionism. And - was altogether steeped in - in Jewish - in the Jewish attitude shall I put it. And well I was there until I left. I wasn't given the sack, but I left.

And you were pleased to leave?

No. In those days you got married and a nice Jewish girl who is married from Hampstead doesn't have a job. Dear me no. That is the wrong attitude. The whole outlook has changed so much that one can't understand how one thought in those days.

So you stopped your work at the Jewish Chronicle?

Yes.

Got married. And after that what sort of things did you do with your husband?

Well - in the usual - had the usual kind of - middle class Jewish life as it was then led by the women one met. One met other women, one went out to lunch, one went out to dinner, one entertained, one went to theatres, one went to a dance.

But your husband had a separate group of friends from you?

No, we managed to mix a lot of them together. Some of course invariably drop out.

Were you still very much within the Russian Jewish community?

Very much so. Very much so. Because my husband had the same background as I did. He also spoke Russian. We had very many friends in common.

Did he become a Zionist?

He always was. But he didn't speak any Hebrew, he hadn't gone - he hadn't gone that way. He did whatever he could at all times.

Did either of you ever think that together you might go to live in Israel?

No. Not really. Because he didn't think that he had any - way of making a living there. That what he could contribute wasn't - of essence to the country. And also I was not going to leave my parents while my brother was so ill. And after that there were really the children and so on. It just didn't work out. In a way I was sorry.

Could you tell me a little bit about your children. Their names and what they do?

My eldest son is a civil servant here in London.

What is his name?

George. And my younger one is in America. They are both married.

And his name?

Richard. And as I don't understand what he does - not really. And it is so - difficult to explain. He is doing very well thank you.

Do they have children?

Oh yes. George has got one son. Who is here in London. Richard has got 6. Three of whom are married. And I have got 4 great grandchildren.

Who live in America?

Who live in America.

Whereabouts in America?

At the moment most of them are in Vermont.

Do you ever go over there?

Oh yes. Oh yes. I used to go very often. When the children were younger. I would go, I would babysit. If they wanted to go on holiday. But - now they can do each others babysitting.

When you look back on your life. It has seen many changes. Do you feel it might have been different had the First World War not occurred. Do you feel you might have stayed in Latvia. Do you think you might have had a different life?

I don't know what I would have done. In this connection I can only tell you that when I was interviewed by a Member of Parliament whose help I was trying to get to get a refusnik out of Russia, he said to me - it was Kenneth Baker - our Member of Parliament - and he said to me "What makes you interested - what connection have you got with this case? You're my constituent, but you're asking about somebody who has got no connection". I said "Here but for the grace of God go I". He was very helpful.

He was helpful?

Oh yes.

What did he do?

He got in touch with the then foreign secretary. He wrote letters. Eventually that particular refusnik came out. Whether it was due to pressure from here or what, I don't know. But he was very helpful, very kind. And - I can't speak highly enough of him.

Do you feel resentful that your life has taken one turn that was caused by an event beyond your control?

Which way do you mean that.

Because of the First World War you decided, your parents decided, to leave Latvia. Had that not occurred you might still be living in a prosperous Russia?

No, no. No, no, no. I'm very happy to be in England. Always was. Except that I feel rather more cosmopolitan than a Jew whose been born in England.

You still feel that?

Well I don't feel English, I am British, but not English. If I'd have been born in China I wouldn't have been Chinese would I. I am Jewish and that comes first. Because if - as I say if I was born in China I wouldn't be Chinese. I would still be what I am.

You say you feel cosmopolitan. Do you also mean that you still feel your roots in Latvia?

No. I haven't got any Russian roots because I was no more Russian than I am English. I am Jewish and nothing else.

But do you feel British Jewish or Latvian Jewish?

British Jewish. The Latvians have got nothing in common with me. The Lats. They're anti-semites, they're - they're a different culture altogether.

And how do you feel when you read, as we read today, that Lithuania has now decided to be independent. How do you feel when you read that?

Their business not mine. I'm only interested insofar as I would be interested if the Koreans decided to do something or another against China or whoever it is that they -

Do you see the irony of the way the world is going now?

Yes, I think I do. I think it seems to have made a full circle. I don't think I told you that my husband was trying to get his nephew and the nephew's family out of Moscow about 12 years ago. So - we made - we sent the correct applications with - from an aunt in Israel, for them to get an exit permit. But those - there was a long - pause and there was no reply. So - we tried to telephone. And each time that we said "Hello, we haven't heard from you for a long time. You didn't reply to our letters. How are you?". The answer came from the exchange "We are cutting off this call". So we decided that I would go over to Moscow and find out what is happening. I did. My husband wasn't well, he was already very frail. And we didn't think that he should go. So I went. And - I - I discovered that - I could not - go to the English Consulate without having my passport. The passport had been taken away, like every tourist passport is taken upon arrival. And handed out upon departure. So I found the woman eventually and asked her to give me back my passport because I felt that I wanted it. She asked me why. I wasn't going to tell her why. So I said I just wanted it. And she refused to give it to me. But then I - so I could do nothing about it, I couldn't even go to the Dutch Consulate to ask them to get in touch with the British. Because the Dutch were taking care of applications for Israel. Or at least so I was told. Israel not having a consulate in - in Moscow. But what I did discover there and then was that they were trying to - get two flats instead of one. Because they weren't going to leave simultaneously. The family wasn't going to leave simultaneously. Only one - first two and then the others leave. And if they - as they shared their flat - if one lot were to go away the other lot would have a strange family planted on them because of the housing conditions. And that's why they were not pressing at that moment. But during that time I went to their flat a number of times and all - their friends would come and ask me about conditions in England, conditions in Israel,

conditions in America. What was necessary, what they should do. I seemed to be an adviser for no reason whatsoever. And I managed to tell them a lot of things and disabused them of various ideas that they had, as to what would happen if they went to Israel or if they went to America. Too many of them thought that New York was paved entirely with gold. And therefore it was a much better place to go to than Israel. They also were afraid of going to Israel. Mainly because of - their would have to join up the Israeli army and after all they didn't feel Jewish at all. They just wanted to get out of - out of - I then also heard it expressed on a number of occasions that if - the Jews in the Diaspora? pressurised so much about Jews of Russia leaving, those Jews in Russia who wished to remain would feel a big whiplash. Because the idea would arise, and did arise, that the Jews were an unreliable element and really weren't Russians and they didn't wish to be Russians. And it would - and did - create even more anti-semitism than in point of fact was already in existence.

Do you feel that is also happening now?

It has happened. This is not the only reason for it of course. But the Jews who did not wish to leave, and I met a number of those as well - felt that this pressure to let the Jews who wished to go out go was a - an excuse - if not a reason for anti-semitism.

When you went there 12 years ago did they describe to you what their life as Jewish people was like?

Some felt that they - were slightly oppressed. Some told me that it was one heck of a lot better than under the Tsarist regime because under the Tsarist regime they were not allowed to live in Moscow or in the big towns. Now they can. Subject to the same conditions as exist for other Russians as well. Because not everybody is allowed to live where they wish to live. And that the Jews could now live in Leningrad and in Moscow, which under the Tsarist regime they could not. And they were not treated very much worse than under the Tsarists. Alright, they haven't got anything to eat, but nor has anybody else.

When did that change. You say under the Tsarist regime and then now?

No, after the revolution. There was no - there was no - exclusion from the big cities for Jews after the revolution.

What about their freedom of worship?

Tsarists didn't have freedom of worship either. Did they. And there was a synagogue in Moscow. And I went to it a number of times. On previous occasions. And - I spoke to a lot of people in the synagogue. Because up where the women are they - changed. And I had a different neighbour sitting next to me every ten minutes. And all the women came up to talk to me. And their attitude was something quite different to what we here imagine. One conversation was quite interesting. Which I think I'll tell you about. A woman asked me how I came to Russia. I said "Well by aeroplane". "Yes", she says, "I know. But what did you have to do to buy a - to get permission". I said I did not have to have anything to buy - to have permission. I

went and I bought a ticket and I came. I did have to have a Russian visa of course. Oh yes, that she knows. But what did I have to do in order to get out of England. I said "To buy a ticket". "Can anybody buy a ticket?". I said "Yes". "Has everybody got enough money to buy a ticket?". "No". "Well isn't it then better the way we have it that you go out abroad by desserts. If you have been a good pianist and an author or have done something for the country, you are given a trip abroad. And you're allowed to go out. It doesn't depend on money. Isn't it much better if things do not depend on money than if they do depend on money?". I said "Yes, it's a point of view". "How are - how many communists are there in the British Parliament?". "There are none". "Why?". "They just weren't elected". "Ah no, that is only because there must be a law against electing communists". "There isn't". "Ah, you can't tell me that one. So how do the communists educate their children?" "There is a Communist Party". I said "Yes, there is a Communist Party in England". "So how do they educate their children?". I said "Oh, by sending them to school". "Yes, but which school?". I said "Any school". "Are they admitted to any school?". I said "Of course". "Are you telling me that there is no specifically communist school in England". "I don't think there is". "Ah well you can't tell me that because that I can't believe".

That is fascinating?

But that is some years ago.

Twelve years ago?

No, more than that. Between the wars.

When you were there 12 years ago. First of all were there a lot of people in the synagogue?

Oh yes.

Did they intimate to you that it was being watched by the KGB, because that is what one hears?

It probably was. Lots of things were. It probably was.

Did you feel you were being followed at any time?

No. I probably was.

But you felt safe?

Definitely. My husband spoke - spoke to a lot of men about various things.

But the time you went there on your own?

The time I went there on my own I did not go to synagogue that time. I've been several times somehow or another.

Did you stay with your friends then?

No, no, always stayed in hotels. You can't stay with friends. At least not with the friends that I have who were living in the kind of conditions that I cannot quite describe to you.

They were refuseniks these friends?

No, no, no, no. My husband's family. They had what is known as 'a nice flat'. There was the nephew, his wife, two sons, a sister and a father. That is six people. They had three rooms. And that was luxury. My husband also had a brother who had a wife and a daughter. And they lived in two rooms. Sharing a kitchen and lavatory with the people next door. And that was good conditions.

Were they clean?

As clean as they could keep it. My husband's nephew who is now in America was and is a very good engineer, who is making a very good living in America now. His sons have finished college and are earning and are doing very well in the States. They have cars and they have bought a flat. They live the normal American middle class existence.

Your husband's family, are any of them still living in Russia?

He may have some cousins or something whom I can't keep track of. His brother died. The wife somehow I've lost touch with her. Although we've written and - tried to be in touch, but - it didn't work. And the daughter is in America.

Do you ever feel like going back again?

Yes, I'd like to visit, why not. But I don't want to go to Moscow which I know. It really doesn't - draw me. I wouldn't mind at all going back to Leningrad and I certainly would like to travel south.

(End of F323 Side B)

END OF INTERVIEW