

**NATIONAL**

# Life stories

**LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH  
COMMUNITY**

**ANNA LOUBA RUBENS**

Interviewed by Jennifer Wingate

C410/086/01-06

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F508 - Side A

5th June, 1990.

Would you like to tell me your name please?

Anna Louba Rubens.

And where were you born, Mrs. Rubens?

I was born in Baku, in the Caucasus, Russia.

And when was that?

I'm going to be, wait a second, 1898.

1898?

I shall be 92.

That's wonderful. What was the date?

19th November.

And you say you were born in Baku?

Yes.

What do you remember of your early life?

Only very happy memories. I can remember my childhood, and adolescence, right up to the moment when I left Russia in 1919. It was a one happy memory. I had wonderful parents. I had four sisters and two brothers, and it was, we grew up. I had four sisters and two brothers, and endless numbers of cousins and so on, which were all, like, in Russia, they were all, were very close to us, and all assembled in our home. And my parents, although we were Orthodox, strictly Orthodox, they were not at all bigoted. Very broad-minded, very enlightened, very loving, trusting, understanding, and gave us several opportunities to get the best of the culture they could provide. Although my father owned oil wells, and he was, at that time, a millionaire, we never, that never touched us. The money was never made clear to us how important it was. On the contrary, they always told us "the money was to do good with". And that impressed us all. And all children, and although I haven't seen my family afterwards for 27 years, when we met, it was just as if we left the day before. They so instilled in us the same values, that we felt completely close when we met.

You mean when you re-met your brothers and sisters?

Yes. And the parents. I met them eventually. After I left Russia, my parents went through a very bad period. Although we didn't have Bolsheviks when I left, we had, after the Revolution, but we had Mensheviks, the mild ones, so we didn't suffer that much, except my money was, the account was closed, I wasn't allowed to take my money with me, which was, I had £30,000 which were left there, I wasn't allowed to take it. There was a moratorium, and I was under-age. But my parents suffered a great deal after that. The whole house was taken away from, the place was invaded with various groups of Bolsheviks. My father was arrested and kept in the most terrible conditions, and threatened with being shot, many times. It's only because he was such a charitable man, and good to his employees, they petitioned for him, and eventually, they let him out from Russia, they went to Israel, to Palestine then. But they went through a very, the whole house was taken away, and the family were left in one room. We had a ballroom in the house, which is where my wedding was held there, in my own home, and they had to have curtained off places, and it was just like a Punch and Judy show, but that's how they had to live. And gradually everything was disappearing, priceless pictures, and carpets and silver, and everything, but they couldn't say a word. They wanted my mother to scrub floors, and do the menial things.

Which year are you talking about?

I'm talking about 1920. 1920, yes.

During the time of the Civil War?

Yes. The Civil War, it was already, you see, what happened, why my husband happened to be in ... I'm wandering, not giving you a proper picture of it. But why my husband was in Russia, because Churchill sent the armies there to guard the oil wells and copper mines, and he was sure, with their help, then the Bolsheviks would never penetrate into Caucasus, but they did, soon after I left.

In 1920?

1920, the Bolsheviks. Unless you ask me questions, I will be wandering, really, you won't get the continuation.

I would like to ask you, you talk about your parents. I'd love to know some more about them. Would you tell me, first of all, their names?

Yes, yes. My father was Mark Markovitch, and my mother was Pearl Alexandra.

And would you like to tell me a bit more about your home?

Well, my mother was a very beautiful woman. Beautiful. Serene. Very modest. Kind, understanding. She ran, she wasn't a strong woman. She had to go every year, well, she had so many children, and she had to go every year, to Austria, to Carlsbad to drink waters and have treatment, every year, so used to take two or three children

with her, because she'd taken her personal maid, and the children, perhaps the younger one, perhaps a nurse or governess went with her, because she'd miss the family. But she was a wonderful woman, in that sense. Very charitable, very understanding. And my father was the kindest man, the most loving, affectionate man. She wasn't so demonstrative. She rather was restrained, although, of course, she loved us deeply. But father was demonstrative, and very affectionate, and however busy he was, he was a very busy man, he never once, in a moment, unless he visited the nursery to see how we were, and at night to see that we're tucked in and so on. He was a, I can't tell you, and he was very modern. Very very modern in his ways.

In what way?

What?

What do you mean by "modern"?

Well, he appreciated things, modern things, beautiful, if I was dressed, for instance, even when I met them in Israel, I was going round somewhere, and he says, "Don't you think you could wear different kind of jewellery?" or something. Or if he saw a pretty girl, he would notice, my sister brought a friend, and he said, "What lovely hands she had". And when he was dying, looking, so he was 96, but mentally he was quite a young man. Quite a young man, in his brain, because his great-granddaughter was very sorrowful when he died, and they told her, they said, "You mustn't grieve, Grandpapa was an old man", she said, "No, he wasn't an old man, he only looked old." And that's how it is. I danced with him the year before. He was a wonderful, I can't tell you how young and jolly, you can't say gay now! How jolly he was, and how everything appreciated, and he was dying. He looked through the window of this nursing home where he was in, and he looked at the Jordanian Hills, and he says, "Look, what a beautiful sunset. What lovely foliage outside." He just loved it. He never gave anybody any trouble. If he wanted anything passed, he'd say, "Do you mind, darling?" He'd never sit down without opening, moving the chair for my mother, or opening the door. He was a thoroughbred, that's all I can tell you about him. And we adored him. Adored Mother and him. But with him, he was demonstrative as I say, and he brought up, really, his grandchildren. He taught them French and Hebrew, and Russian. He loved them, he looked after them, he was a lovely person. I know all children, many children say they had the best parents in the world, but I really can say that, we all say it, all the children.

What language did you speak together at home?

Russian.

Can you describe your home to me?

Well, it was a beautiful home. The houses there were, in Baku, especially. You see, where we were, there was no racism at all. It wasn't, there were minorities there. There was Albanians and Tartars, the men were Muslim Tartars, Russian Jewish population were small, and there was no distinction either at school or anywhere, you

know, we weren't made to feel that we were different. Our home, and the buildings were, you see, Russia is a very strange country. There's no, they were either very very poor, or very highly literate people. At that particular time, I believe it was only 7% were literate, people who could read and write, but, every opportunity was given to young people, to get near the art, theatres, and the ballet, and concerts, were specially for the schoolchildren and the students. Every opportunity. Strange, isn't it. And the house, our house was like a bank here. We had huge stone buildings. And you can imagine the size of the rooms we had. My wedding was held there, and we had several hundred people sitting down to wedding breakfast.

Did you have a lot of servants?

Yes. We had about 12 indoors, and then, of course, we had coachmen, and the laundry people used to come in to do. But, we had a Jewish cook, who supervised the kitchens. She didn't have a Jewish staff, but she was brought in from the part of the, the Jewish part of Russia, and she supervised. And she was with us for years, and became part of the family. And what to tell you was, the strange part, my parents, who were so Orthodox, were quite reconciled that my sister didn't have a kosher kitchen. She had not a kosher chef. And they knew they were not keeping kosher kitchen, but they gave her all the Yom Tovim, they came to our house. But we, they were so Orthodox, and when we used to go to our summer, my mother's summer residence, which was in the mountains, in Russia, distances were nothing. Twenty-four hours we had to travel, the whole, children and everything. We used to take our own shechet and his family, because, well, we went in the mountains, there were no, no kosher meat, so we used to take him to kill birds. But at the same time, you see, my best friend was not a Jewish girl, and we had no Jewish friends, always at home, and I stayed with my friend always for Christmas and holidays like that. They were not bigoted, that's why I say they were enlightened, in this way.

Was your house unusually large among your contemporaries? Among the people you mixed with, was it an unusually large house?

Well, it was bigger than, bigger than usual, much bigger.

Can you describe it a little bit more? For example, did you have a music room? What sort of rooms did you have there? Bathrooms?

Oh, we had bathrooms. My mother had a bathroom which was with sunken floor. We had a bathroom of course, there was about three, I think, in the house. Can't really remember. And we had a big ballroom. Dining room. My mother had her room and boudoir, then we all had our bedrooms. We had a room where we had desks and pianos and so on.

Did you all have your own? All of you children.

Yes, yes, yes.

And did you have a garden?

No. No gardens at all. We had, around all the house, we had eight balconies in that ballroom, so you can imagine the size of it. And round all the house there was a, like a gallery, like a verandah all round, with a very long table, and all the young people used to, our cousins and all that, used to assemble there every evening practically, we used to play games, or read aloud. There was great reading aloud of various authors. But we had, as far as education, we went to school, and I don't know how we managed, because now, when I talk to my son, when his own child, I said she should have extra lessons, he says she's got enough work to do. We had, once a week, an English governess used to come in. Once a week, French. And we had a German governess living in the house. Then we had music lessons, all extra-mural, outside our school work.

What interested you most at that age?

I think theatre and music. I remember my very first concert, my cousin took me. I was about 12, I think. A real concert. I went before to various things, but that was Hubelman, the famous violinist, Hubelman, who afterwards they had a, in Israel they've got a, a home in his name he opened. And he played Mendelsohn's Concerto. My cousin was a student already, and he took me. And I remember, I was so moved that I couldn't speak. And Gordy asked me questions, and I just burst into tears. So much ... music played a great part in our ... and the concert, and my parents had a season, what we call season ticket, to the opera and the theatre.

In Baku?

Yes. And, as I say, it was very strange. A small town like that, but we had very famous artistes used to come, like Pavlova, and Schaliapin. And all, everybody came to our town.

Can you remember something that you saw Pavlova dance?

Well, she always loves the Swan Lake, of course. She danced that. I can't remember, and many other famous dancers, Shushinskaya, and Tamarova, they all came, Gelsa, can't even remember their name now. And all the same as in Russia, the singers, the tenors were beautiful. I never liked Russian women's voices, sopranos, I don't like them at all. I prefer German lieder singers or Italian, but the Russian voices seem to be very sharp. But men's, tenors, are wonderful.

Tell me, we were talking about your home. What was it built of? Was it a wooden, or a brick house?

I tell you, stone buildings, like you have banks here.

And inside?

Inside, very large rooms.

Did you have wooden floors?

Parquet.

Parquet?

Yes. And we used to have parquet, we used to have men coming at certain times of the year, they used to come in, and have brushes on their feet, and wax the floors, dancing so they polished in that way, that was, they didn't have like now, electric polishers. And the same they did with the chandeliers, taking them down.

Did you have candles in the chandeliers?

We had electricity very early, because of the oil, we had electricity very very, much before they had it in Europe.

And before electricity, what did you use then?

Kerosene lamps, I think. I can't remember. But when chandeliers must have been candles, I can't remember that. Do you know, I don't remember anything about my childhood, as a little girl? I can't remember at all.

Well, in that case, I'm sure you can remember about your brothers and sisters. Could you tell me your brothers' and sisters' names, and what their ages were in relation to you?

Yes. They are wonderful. I have the most, I sound, perhaps, too, what you call, euphoric, or something, but I do say that. There's a tremendous affinity between all of us. Tremendous. And they are absolutely wonderful. I can't tell you how they spoil me, you see, I was really very much spoiled, in that sense, most spoiled, being naughty. But people gave me so much love, and still do. When I go to Israel I completely revive.

Would you like to tell me their names?

Yes, of course, I tell you. My brother, eldest brother was Sasha - Alexander it is, really, diminutive for Alexander. Then I had a sister, Sonia, who unfortunately died in Russia, that's another story, a tragedy there.

These were older than you?

Yes, they're older than me. Then I'm giving you in rotation in ages. And then myself. Then sister Rachel, and then after her, my brother Eugene, they called him in Israel, Jona - Eugene, Genia, we called him. Then Esther, and then Lilian - Lily. I think you've got them all. Have you got seven there? Have I missed any of them?

I have seven down, yes. And what is the age range between Alexander and Lilian?

Oh, quite a bit. Quite a big range. I couldn't tell you exactly, but quite big, because I was, my brother was already studying medicine in Leipzig when I still was a young child, there's a big gap.

So Alexander would have been how old, when Lilian was born?

Honestly I couldn't tell you, cos I still work it out. There's a big gap, because now, for instance, there is a gap between her and me, 10 years, over 10 years, so must have been a very big gap.

About 20, maybe?

No, not 20. Wait a second, I tell you, perhaps 20, perhaps 18, perhaps 18, because he was in Leipzig when we were, we were caught in the War in Carlsbad, and he was caught in Leipzig there. That is quite going back. Yes, it must be about 18-20, I never thought about it. But when I met him, you see, he remembers me only as a little girl. But I met him, eventually they got him, my father managed to get him out of Germany just before Hitler, in 1933, or 1935, he got him out just before Hitler had the full swing, through the Swiss Ambassador, but when we met, you know, there was so much love, I can't tell you. I can't explain to people. My own children don't understand the affinity and love that we have. It's something special. And people will know, for instance, when I went and stayed the six months, people said to me, "How can you leave your family for six months?" To me, six months went just like a week.

And what was your family name? Your surname?

Surname? I gave it to you, Klionsky.

Yes! So you had this wonderful family life.

Wonderful.

Would you like to describe a typical ball that you had?

Ball?

A ball. You were talking about the ballroom.

Yes, but we didn't have balls. We didn't have balls. We had dances and parties, all lots of young people. How was like an ordinary, like a dance, what can it be? It was always very jolly and happy.

Would it be for one of your birthday parties? Or would it be for another reason?

Yes, birthday parties. Especially, we had one very big party, because my sister was born, her birthday was a New Year, 1st of January there, here, of course, it would be 13th, because we are in advance 13 days, and there was always, that was a very very big party. Otherwise we always had family, you know, the families were close. For instance, my mother's brother, or my mother's sisters. We had a cousin living with us, because her mother was a widow, she, they came, the mother and my cousin came to live with us. And she was brought up just like one of us. Just exactly, treated exactly

the same. And she went to university before I did. You see, there was another thing. She was taking a dental, she was a dental surgeon, long before women in England were allowed to do dentistry.

Where did she study?

In Kiev, the same university that I went to. And my other cousin was already qualified as a doctor, also in Kiev. So you see, it's a strange thing. Now, another thing very strange. In Russia, where there was so much anti-semitism in other parts, with us at my school, which was Empress Marie School, we had Orthodox Russian clergymen, who gave them instruction, of course. Armenian, and our Rabbi, who was also, he married me, and he was also a lawyer, very brilliant barrister, he came and gave us instruction on Judaism, at the school, which was never heard of in any other part of Russia then.

How many Jewish children in the school?

I can't tell you, not many. I had, for instance, two, two of my own group, there were two Jewish girls. One of them, her mother was a doctor at our school, and her father was a doctor as well. And eventually I met her after many many years, in Tel Aviv. They escaped eventually.

Are you talking about your very early schooling? How old were you?

I didn't go to school till I was 8, we went to school. You were taught at home. You started first of all at home, with a nurse, which was always a peasant woman, completely uneducated, but most devoted. They were very very devoted but completely illiterate. Well, she had you till about, you were perhaps 5 or 6. Then you had a governess who taught you elementary, until you were reading and writing and all those sorts of things, and we had somebody to come and teach you. And then at 8 we went to school, the first year. You stayed there, right through the school till I was 16½.

Was it just boys and girls?

Only girls.

Only girls?

Yes, only girls. A very very large school. Run very well, with very big staff. And different, there were various girls' schools and various boys' schools.

What subjects did you have, when you were 8?

Well, the subjects we had, of course, the three R's. And you had the history and geography, you started gradually doing that. Started straightaway. And great stress were laid on literature, not only Russian, but they always studied, afterwards, French literature, English, I mean, I read the English classics all in Russian, all the

Shakespeare, yeh, all in Russian. And the same French literature, we were very much acquainted with French literature. And German.

In French and German? Or translated?

No, in Russian, translated. But we had, we were taught French and German at school. We weren't taught English at school. I was taught English at home.

Because you had a special governess who came once a week to teach you?

Yes, yes, yes. Eventually, my eldest sister was teaching English at a college in Russia. She was left there, you see. When we, when my parents left, I left in 1919, in July. They left a few years afterwards, but my two sisters weren't allowed to leave, because one sister had a husband of military age, and the younger sister was just finishing university, and she had a fiance, a man, they weren't allowed to leave at that particular time, and they hoped to join them. But they never joined them. They were very much persecuted, very much, because they were, my younger sister especially, because she was a scientist, and they were persecuted because they were Klionsky's daughters. Right up to the age, when my sister was over 80, just 80, she wanted, she applied for a permit to go to Israel, to visit her parents' grave, and she was refused. Can you understand such cruelty? She died within a year or so, from cancer. But my younger sister was very much persecuted, to such an extent that I think she really couldn't stand it any longer. She died, the man she was, when her own first husband disappeared, and the man she was going to marry, Golda Meir went to Russia, and she said if anyone wanted to go to Israel they could put their names down. Well, she and her man friend put down their names, soon afterwards, her man friend was arrested, and she never met him again, and she really, she died. And she had two daughters. One of them so hated Russia from, because she was only 13 when her mother died. She could remember that every night they packed their things in case they came from the KGB to arrest them, from Cheka then. And that she, as soon as she had a chance, after she'd been married so on, she came to America, she's in America, been in America the last 10 or more, where she brought her daughter there, who studied ballet. And she, well, the other one stayed in Russia, and I believe now they want to get, they stayed in Baku, and last year, I met them in Israel, they came for a holiday, for the first time, to meet the family. And I think they hoped to leave Russia. It's very hard for them, because they established them and they're just pensioned off. But anyhow, that's another tragedy. But my sisters were, my mother could never get over it. You see, we never saw them again.

You never saw the sister, the sister you were just talking about?

Yes, the two sisters.

You never saw her again. What was the date, can you remember, when that date was, when Golda Meir visited Russia

No, I can't.

Early sixties, was it?

No, no, I think it was before.

Before?

I don't know, I couldn't tell you really, it's no good me giving you dates. I'm never good at dates in any case, but this I never enquired, you see. Unless you, you do it for some sort of a purpose, one doesn't ask for them. I don't, I wouldn't remember.

No, I understand. We were talking about your home life before ... I'd love to hear a little bit more about your life in Baku, could you tell me ... sorry, I don't want to interrupt you.

No, no, no, no. You see, this ... you say about this position of the rooms. I took it so much for granted that it's difficult for me now, to think, you see.

Yes, I understand. Maybe it'll come back. But I'd like to ask, for example, what was your style? Was it a Russian style, or would you say it was an international style, at home?

Well, I can't say. Well, we, we kept all traditional holidays very much so, all Jewish. It was a Jewish atmosphere, I must say, yes. Very much so.

Tell me about your Jewish life, did you go to Synagogue?

Not, no, I didn't go, not very often, perhaps, I can't even ... and my parents didn't insist, no. My parents kept it very much, even to, yes, my parents did.

Did your mother wear a scheidel?

No, certainly not. She was very modern.

And your father, did he wear a Yarmulka?

No.

No. Did you go to Synagogue on the High Holy Days?

I think I must have done. I can't remember.

Were your brother Bar Mitzvah?

Yes, of course. Yes, very much so.

You girls did not have anything similar?

No, well, well, in England they didn't until quite recently.

F508 - End of Side A

F508 - Side B

Did any of your brothers and sisters, or you, marry in Synagogue?

Well, there's only one sister who got married before me, because the others were younger, and my brother was abroad, he wasn't married till he was, very old bachelor when he got married. And I was the only one who, after my sister, and I was married at home, they brought Chupa to my house, and the Rabbi came to our house. It was a wedding in our house. And we had the proper wedding, we had the dancing, just like a proper Hassidim.

Do you mean with handkerchiefs?

Well, they were dancing. I can't remember whether they had handkerchiefs, you know, really, I'm not observant. I am very unobservant. If you came to my house, I couldn't remember, my own house perhaps I would, but when I stayed with my sister, she lent us a flat in Tel Aviv, for a year, and there, you know, they have these stone floors, and rugs. And when the woman came to clean the floors, I couldn't remember whether I was in, and things like this never bothered me. People, yes, with people I am conscious with, but things like details, I can't remember they had handkerchiefs or not, but my father was pro-Hassidic.

So you mean the men danced with the men, and the women with the women?

Oh no, no, no. No, they just, the men were dancing, the men usually, there were no, that wasn't special then. I'm not talking about the dance. But amongst the festivities was the celebration, I remember men dancing.

I see. So where did your father come from?

My father came from Vitebsk, I think.

Where is that?

Well, now I don't know whether it is Lithuania, I should think, must be Lithuania. And I think my mother came from more of the same kind, from the same place. I remember about what my, they told me about my grandfather, the only, I have never met him, but he was a very saintly man. Very clever. He was sort of like accountant, and they were prosperous, but when, he worked in the Mayor's office, principality, a book-keeper to the Mayor, and they so respected him that he was allowed to sit with his little Yarmulka, in front of the Tsar's portrait.

This was in Vitebsk?

Yes.

This was your mother's father?

My mother's father. And when the coachman came to collect him, he used to very often send him back home. And when he came, my granny used to say to him, "Why are so late?" He said, he walked round the poor district, and distributed some money. And he said, "When I looked at their homes, I used to think how blessed I am to have ..." He was a wonderful, charitable man.

And that was his work, as an accountant?

Yes.

In the Mayor's office?

Book-

A book-keeper. It's funny, we've got brilliant mathematician in my family. Not my family, but my sister's. My sister's boy came to England, by the way, to school, to Dr. Halevy's School, Witchingham College after his Bar Mitzvah, and he stayed with us, and he was brilliant mathematician. And my sister's grandson, at 13, was accepted to university.

Where?

In Jerusalem.

That's very interesting.

Yes.

Do you remember your grandfather's name?

Yes, must do, wait a second. Alexander, I think he was. Yes, of course, my mother's name is Pearl Alexandrov, you see, it's,

And the last name?

Yes, Abetshous.

That sounds like a German name?

Well, the German name, Yiddish is very much,

It was, yes.

It's really like saying Abel's house, isn't it, something, Adam's house, how you pronounce that. In Russian, you say, it's not H, you say Abetsous, you see. There's no H in Russian, it's always said a hard G - Abetsgous.

Your family life sounds absolutely wonderful.

Oh, it was.

Did you take holidays together?

Yes. The whole family used to go, we used to go for three months, because the heat in Baku was tropical in the summer, and we used to go for three months. School was closed from what was it, June, July and August. We used to return on 1st September, I think, the school opened again. And we used to go, the whole lot of us, with governess, and my brother's tutor. Oh, we all went.

Where did you go?

There is, in the Caucasus, a spa. There are four spas. They're called "Pyitsiagorsk", means five mountains, and we had, each one of them had special water for special purpose. One of them was where there was iron water, and it was, they used to take the children there, because it was good for them. One was for, there was like, what you say? Gases, like you have soda water, you know, bubbly thing. That was for arthritis, for rheumatism, that was another spa. Then there was a one spa, Pyitsiagorsk, I think it was, Kislovodsk, and then there were waters, if you have, for the internal, for Essounteki. Four, the different four spas, with different waters. Each one catered for some, some sort of complaint. And Kislovodsk, in addition to have the for, I think it was, for internal, for digestion, things like that, it was a very fashionable place, and people used to come there from all over, from Moscow, and better, to drink waters. And there again, famous artistes used to go there, and famous coutouriers used to come there with their, to show their models. My sister always bought their clothes. She was older than me. She was already married, very very young, but being a married woman, she could indulge she buying from (INAUDIBLE), she was like Worth in their time, like Molyneux, that sort of thing. My mother always had her clothes made by a French dressmaker.

The French dressmaker used to come to the house?

Yes.

Baku?

No, my mother used to go there. She had a salon. Now, we children had a dressmaker coming to the house, weeks at a time, making our dress.

And how would you choose your clothes? Would she show you designs? Or would you just tell her what you wanted?

Well, I think she did bring some designs, we drew designs, or we knew what we wanted, we'd seen, perhaps, in somewhere, I don't know, I can't remember, but I knew, we knew what we wanted.

And did you have a lot of clothes?

No, we weren't spoiled, no, we weren't spoiled. In fact, that French dressmaker only made for us, when we were about 15, then she started making us one suit a year, and one party frock a year. The rest was made, no, we weren't spoiled at all. In fact, I was very unspoiled in that way. I never wanted anything. My sister was very conscious of fashion, very conscious, and she had, she was always beautiful and elegantly dressed. When she was married, they went for a few months honeymoon. Her marriage was not a happy one eventually. But anyhow, to start with, my parents didn't want her to get married, because she was only 17, and he was about 8 years older, and he was a man, a bachelor, a "roué", who lived abroad a lot, and my parents were very much against it. But she was in love, and anyhow, he came from nice family, which mattered very much. To my parents, money didn't matter, but what is called "ichus", you know what it is? That was the most important thing. When I got engaged, they didn't want me to really, they said, "Had it not been war, they would have come to down to England, to find out the family." But they liked him very much. And then they were very worried, because, at that time, some of the British officers and so on, got entangled with Russian girls, and they were married already at home. But, they made enquiries, and we had his superior officers down, and they made enquiries through the right quarters, and they were quite satisfied.

Sorry, where did you say he came from?

He came from?

Yes.

England. Warwickshire.

So he was Englishman?

Of course.

Jewish?

Jewish. He was Captain, he went to Sandhurst, I mean, he was a Regular, so, and he had a very important job in Russia, very important. He was ADC to the General in charge of the whole area. So he had his own train, his own staff and everything. And he was the handsomest man in British Army. We met on Tuesday, on Saturday, and by Tuesday, we decided to get engaged, much to my parents' annoyance. Anyhow, that's again ... I met him at a party, a friend of ours, a Georgian Princess in Tiflis, gave a party, and invited British Officers. She gave a party for them, you know how they gave them, and that's where I met.

What year was that?

1919.

I'd love to ask you a bit more about your days at the spas. What were the other spas called, you've told me about Pyitsiagorsk.

Pyitsiagorsk.

And Kasnavorsk?

Kislovodsk.

Kislovodsk. It doesn't matter, you spell it out. Essounteki, did I say Gelesnovodsk? Gelesnovodsk, Pyitsiagorsk, Essounteki, how many? There were four.

I've got four.

Four, I think there was the four spas, Pyitsiagorsk means "five mountains". There were five mountains surrounding those four spas. And that's a lovely life.

I'm sure.

Because, again, I say strange, for a country like Russia, all the games were organised for the children. There were parks with the proper supervision, with the organised games, riding, climbing mountains, because there are beautiful mountains there. All for the children. That's why in Gelesznovodosk, where there was for the children especial.

What sort of other things were special for the children, other games?

Well, what they do? The same games as they play here, with the, what is it? You have the swings, and merry-go-rounds, and ball games.

Swimming?

Well, not swimming, there was no sea there.

I wondered if there might be a pool.

No.

A swimming pool.

No, no, but you see, you'd got to have those baths, special baths. And, of course, (INAUDIBLE WORD).

What about tennis?

No, not tennis. Riding, a lot of riding.

You rode?

Yes, yes, oh, since I've been a little girl. My father rode every day, because they kept stables at his oil station, and they used to, the coachmen used to call for him, to take

him there, and once he got there, he used to ride. My father rode a lot, he loved horses. His family were of own forests, they were forest.

Where?

In, outside Minsk. And his father died very young, and he, at a very early age, ran the estate with the help of a bailiff, and he would have continued, he loved it. He loves country, always loved country. He would have left, stayed there, but I can't remember which year, a new law came in, the Jews couldn't keep any property, so, a friendly, very friendly police official, warned him about it, that they're going to take, confiscate the property, and the only thing to do is to put it in a name of a non-Jewish bailiff. Well, he consulted his family, uncles, what, he was about 16, or 18 when he took over it. By that time, he was older, he was already married man. And they decided it was very unsafe, because if the man became, turned to be unscrupulous, he could've easily appropriated it himself. So he decided, and my father's brother, at that time, was already in Baku, so he advised him to sell up and come to Baku. And my father who knew nothing about the oil business at all, he came, he sold up his farms, whatever he had, and forests, and he came to Baku, and he, through, again, through his brother-in-law, who was also an accountant, you see, it came through his father, the knack, he got attached to a firm, not like Nobel, Nobel, or Rothschild, who owned the oil, and as I put, articulated, apprenticed there, to learn about the oil business. And when they found that he had enough, he bought a piece of land, and it happened it was oil.

That was near Baku?

Yes, just outside Baku. And eventually, he was, in a very big way, not only in oil, in steel and foundries, he had. He built, his firm built all the lines from Baku to the Black Sea, you know, and he was eventually in a very big way, and very very clever.

What sort of oil was it? The oil that's drilled,

Drilled, yes,

With very large,

Yes, yes, you sink the shafts in, but instead of, they do it in the sea, they did it in the ground.

How many oil wells did he have?

Oh, I couldn't tell you. One would be sufficient if it's prolific. But he had other businesses besides that.

And he supplied oil,

And do you know that oil people, the natives there, in Baku, the Tartars, where they would come from very very poor families, and literally, they couldn't sign their name. Well, they were multi-millionaires, because they happened to have a little bit of land, who eventually was found to contain oil. They really were illiterate, but they were

great benefactors in that sense, that they built theatres, and patronised arts. And when an actress pleased them on the stage, they didn't send her just a basket of flowers, they would send perhaps a diamond inside the roses. Because they endlessly were rich. You see, that's the thing, either they were, the Tartars were either terribly poor, very poor, or they were millionaires.

Because of the oil?

Because of the oil.

How did your family get on with your Tartar neighbours?

Very well. My father had many friends amongst them.

Did you yourself have friends?

Not of Tartars, but Armenian girls went to school. Tartars educated their children, they didn't like, like Moslems, they didn't want them to, like here, Muslims, they didn't want them to mix with, you know, but Armenians did. Oh yes, no difference, and my father ...

You were at school with Armenians, did you say?

Armenians, and Georgians, and Tartars, we had no Tartar girls.

But, who did your father supply the oil to? Who did he sell it to?

I've no idea. I've no idea.

You don't know if it went to Moscow?

Oh no, I don't know. I shouldn't think so, perhaps the Rothschilds bought it up, or Nobel, it was they had shares there, that side didn't interest me, and I don't know.

Was your father in the oil business just with his family, his close family, or did he have partners?

No, himself. He had partners with one business. He was Prince Dadiani, a Georgian, a great friend of his, who, when Georgia first became an independent state, part of Russia, Georgia just started, he was one of the first Directors of the Georgian Bank, because his friend asked him to invest money, and he invested money there, which, unfortunately, a very unscrupulous Swiss Consul, pocketed it, and disappeared with it.

What was the name of the Bank?

Georgian National Bank.

Georgian National Bank?

Yes. And he did it because this friend asked him to help them out, you see, this Georgian. And my brother-in-law, when my father was in prison, my brother-in-law, brought this Georgian Consul, and to sign, gave him authority to collect the money in Georgia, and my younger brother was going to America, they'd meet him there, and gave him the money. Well, the man collected it and never turned up. And eventually, when my father was in Israel, through lawyers he tried to get it back, but Swiss Government said they weren't responsible for him, because, at that time, the Swiss severed their relations with the Bolshevik Russia.

What year are we talking about now?

It must have been 1922, 1933, something like this.

When your father, you say, was in prison?

Yes, up to his neck in water. They arrested him.

Do you want to tell me about that?

What?

Would you like to tell me about that?

Yes, yes, it doesn't upset me now. He, together, he said he was in good company, because all the people that he was arrested with, were all of the same status of, I can't say, class in society, it sounds ridiculous, but people of the same time.

Who arrested him?

The Bolsheviks, he is a Capitalist, and while they were arresting, the excuse was, they closed all the synagogues, you see, and all the churches and everything, and he allowed one of his buildings that he had, he allowed it to be used as a cheder, and provided them with books and things. Well, somebody reported him, and there he was encouraging the Jewish religion, you see, and on that ground, they arrested him. And there was a very big, afterwards, a very big case, an Armenian lawyer defended him. And so they were going to send him to Siberia, originally, but then they put them to prison in Baku, and because my sisters followed him, right, to see where they were going, as a punishment, they put him in water up to his neck for 24 hours. You can imagine. Anyhow, I mean, it's no good talking about it.

Where was he imprisoned, in Baku?

Baku, yes, Baku prison. And my younger sister, you see, we had a, my mother had a carriage with horses, and they used to take her to school. So one day she was in the carriage, and they stopped it, they threw her out, the child, she went with a governess, but anyhow, threw her out, confiscated, they confiscated everything, you see, you just, you couldn't say a word. You daren't say a word.

They were confiscating just from Jews? Or from other people?

Oh no, everybody. Oh no, not Jews, it wasn't any big racial, whatsoever.

Until then, you hadn't encountered, you said you'd not encountered anti-semitism.

And even then, it wasn't anti-semitism. It wasn't because we were Jews.

It wasn't?

No. It was just because they were Capitalist. Oh no, never on the, because they were Jews.

I thought you said it was because, your father was imprisoned because he'd started up the cheder?

Oh that was, no, no, not because there was anti-semitism, all the churches were closed. The churches weren't allowed either.

It was because he was going against their decree?

That's it.

Who was arrested with him?

All sorts of millionaires.

And how long was he in prison?

Quite some time, quite some time.

Weeks?

Oh no, months and months. Oh no, much longer than that.

What did you children and your mother, what did your mother do?

Well, you can imagine. She used to walk miles to take him some food. For miles, to take him with the food. What can they do? Sit and wait, and watch and do the, my cousin that was in our house, she had to scrub floors.

Your house was taken over?

The whole house, except that one room.

Except the ballroom, you said before?

Yes.

And so all of you who were left, I know you had left by then, but your family who were left ...

In one room.

All lived in the one room.

As I say, they put curtains up in between. They'd taken the curtains from all the masses of windows and balconies, and they separated all this room into little cubicles.

And this was in, it started in 1923?

Oh no, no, no, soon after I left, it must have been 1920, I think. The room was divided into cubicles. And my sister told me "it looked just like Punch and Judy show". They felt it was like that.

But, was your mother very very worried at that time?

Very worried. They were worried for a very long time, even before I left. We had, before we had actually Bolsheviks, during the Civil War, during the War, during the War, it was, when Turks were coming near Baku, and they approached it, they were given 24 hours free hand, and they, in those 24 hours, they massacred so many Armenians, loadfuls, like you've heard recently. But the Jews were left alone, but, anyhow, through, we saved one Armenian boy, who was working, he was an indoor servant, he was a boy who answered the telephone and opened the doors, and he used to valet my husband when they were staying with us. And they dressed him up in my brother's uniform, because, in Russia, schoolboys wore uniform, and kept him in the, our schoolroom, which was there, till the 48th hour, or 24 had elapsed, and when we saw that the first Armenian priest was in the street, then we let him out, and he fell on his knees, and kissed my mother's hem of her skirt. He said, "I'll never forget it." And he didn't. He didn't forget it. He was the only one who knew when my family left Russia. By that time, he was already a grown up man, and taken away from us, we were not allowed servants, and he was working on the buses or something. But he was trusted, because you couldn't trust your best friend. But I wasn't going to say about that, I was going to say about something else. Now, I've forgotten! Something completely different.

About your mother's life in the house?

Oh yes, what I was going to say. Before even that, the Armenians were always trying to, they used to kidnap any rich people, male. And my father and my brother, walked with a guard, a bodyguard, for a long time, because they used to kidnap them and keep them, demanding such absurd sums of money, which a rich man couldn't lay his hands on, because, as they explained to me, my parents, you don't have money, you see, if you're in business, it's used. You don't have half a million stuck in your bank, and so that's why he had bodyguard. And you say, had he had friends amongst the Tartars? He had such devoted friends, that one Tartar lent his nephew to guard my father or brother, wherever they went. And, one day, they broke into our house. What

happened, the bell rung, and my, the boy, this boy, opened the door on a chain, and he could see a familiar face.

The Armenian boy?

Yes. He opened the door, and there was a group of people, and they just pushed him aside, and walked straight in. The one wing of the house, where my father's offices were, there were three rooms, one was the one he had his typists and things like that. The middle room was where he was himself, with his secretary, and the third room, was where his book-keeper was, and the bodyguard was in there. And they pushed, they came into the middle room.

They were Bolsheviks?

They were Armenians, or Tartars, I don't know who they were. No, no, just demanding money. If you were rich, it was either Armenians demanding money, or it was Tartars were demanding money, so you never knew any peace. Well, he, the people who came in, obviously they were masked, they obviously knew the position of the rooms. They past the first one, straightaway in my father's office, but my father wasn't there, but his secretary, who was slightly deaf, was there, with his back to the door, and they came in, and they said, "Open the safe", you see. And pushed a revolver into his back. He said, "Don't be silly, don't fool about." He thought it was some other ... anyhow, after a few seconds, he realised that they weren't fooling about. In the meantime, this guard heard the commotion, came out with his revolver, and they flew. He went, but not before they shot him in the arm. Anyhow, so my father was very lucky he wasn't there. But in the meantime, you can imagine, my aunt, who witnessed the arrival of them, went hysterical, and you can imagine the shock my mother had. They all had. That was one occasion. But you were never never safe, you see. They were always demanding, either one person or the other, the one group of people or the other.

They were using as an excuse,

Of course,

The fact that the Bolsheviks were there,

It wasn't Bolsheviks,

You were Capitalists.

They weren't there?

No, no, it wasn't before. No, it was still War.

During the First War?

Yes. Yes.

Oh, I see.

Yes, during the First War, it was just the end of it, when the Turks, that's why the British there, to guard, to stop Turks coming into Baku.

So this was after the Revolution?

After the Revolution.

Right. Right. So there was no trouble until the Revolution, was there?

Oh,

Not until 1917?

There was always demanding money from rich people.

In this violent way?

No, no, no, no, not violent, but threatening, of course, always threatening.

With guns?

Of course. With the War, and the element, you know how always the scum comes, any criminal taking advantage of it, as you say, the situation.

So I misunderstood you, I thought this was as a direct result of the Revolution.

No.

They had threatened you before the Revolution?

Well, the Revolution was, but before the Revolution again, it wasn't, they used to kidnap. There was a threat always, before the Revolution. But, after, that happened, when they came to the house, it was after the Revolution.

I understand. But this was not anti-semitism,

No, no, not at all, not at all.

It was because you were wealthy and they wanted to steal your money.

Well, you see, during the massacre of Armenians, they came to the house, and they said, "Have you got any ...", they were led by the local Tartars, they told them to go round the houses, and they said, "Have you got any Armenians hidden here?" So my father says, "Certainly not." He said, "Who do you think is here?" And the local Tartars said, "If Mark Markovitch says 'There are no Armenians', you can take his word." So they never searched. You see, had they found them, we'd all have been

shot. I can't tell you the cruelty of those massacres. Well, it's like pogroms with the Jews. But I have seen, myself, through the window, loadsful of bodies, Armenians.

How do you mean?

They used to go from house to house, drag Armenians out, and mutilate them and kill them.

You have seen that?

I have seen, not actually in the act, but the bodies. I've seen it.

F508 - End of Side B

F511 - Side A

July 10th, 1990

Last time, Mrs. Rubens, you were in the middle of telling me about your daughter's Jewish education. Would you like to just clarify that a little bit?

Well, the only thing is, she never had Jewish education. First of all, with my husband being in the Services, we travelled a lot from place to place, so there wasn't, with the boy, somehow, it was of the period when we were more or less permanently in Warwickshire, in Birmingham, in Edgbaston, and we had, were very friendly with Dr. Cohen, who was the Rabbi there. And he, of course, put us in touch with the, it is a equivalent of cheder, for Jewish instruction, and my son had Jewish instruction. But the girl, they never suggested it, and I never, I don't think, in those days, they had Bat Mitzvah, they didn't. Which was quite different to, I think I believe I told you, I don't know whether it's been recorded, in my grand-daughter's day, she had Bat Mitzvah, that was so many years afterwards. But my daughter didn't. She, of course, as I say, my mother-in-law didn't keep any traditional holidays or anything at all, in complete contrast to my own home.

Did you teach your daughter at home, about Kashrut and various other ...

We didn't have, we didn't have kosher kitchen, nothing, no. I did, I knew it was done at home, but I, myself, didn't know how to approach it. I know we had different kitchens, one for milk kitchen, and one meat kitchen. And it was strictly kosher, of course. As I told you, we used to take our own shechet to go when we went for a holiday, to that extent. And our cook was a Jewish cook, but no, I never instructed her in anything. She knew there was kosher food, she knew about that, but we never kept it at home.

But did she have a Jewish identity? Did she feel Jewish?

Yes. Oh yes. She would feel even more so, but unfortunately, her husband doesn't, doesn't keep anything, doesn't believe in any, keeping up any tradition or anything. That's a great tragedy really, because she'd have been quite willing. And yet he came from a home where there was kept very strictly. Whether it's a reaction, I don't know, but neither his brother nor his sister keep it up.

What did your husband feel about ...

My husband was very Jewish in his heart. He was a great patriot, British patriot, a great one, and he felt very much Jewish in his heart. He wasn't assimilated a degree. He was assimilated in the fact that he adapted himself entirely to the English way of life, completely. And, of course, passed it on to me. But, and my children, I always say, perhaps with a slight pain, that my son is more English than English!

Can you tell me what your husband's name was?

Yes. We called him Jos - J O S. It was Joshua Ernest. My son, by the way, didn't eat any, the food that he wasn't allowed to, even when he was at Sandhurst. Until he went to Sandhurst, he never ate anything, and at my home, although we didn't keep Kashrut, we never had bacon or ham or anything like that.

How was it that your son came to go to Sandhurst? What was his decision?

Well, I tell you. My son, well, because my husband went to Sandhurst. And soon after the War, he was sent on some military mission to Germany, and while he was entertained in an Officers Mess there, they were all saying, "Ah, you wait, you have beaten us, but in 20 years time, we should beat you." And when he came back, he said, "There's going to be war. I could tell by the mood." He was only young himself, quite a young boy, 24, perhaps, my husband, or something. He said, "I could tell by the mood, that they're determined to renew their position in the world." And said, "They might just as well be regular soldiers", so since then, he followed, he followed all the Scholarship to Sandhurst and so on and so on, that's the way he was destined to be, to go in the Army, from the beginning.

And his family background, did that lead him in that direction?

Not at all.

His father, for example, was he ...

Not at all.

What did his father do, your husband's father?

His father had a very large building business. Practically they build the one part of Birmingham, but, there again, you see [switch off for a minute]. He was a very keen, my husband was very keen on sports, and at school, he loved his school, and, by the way, the schools, in Birmingham, there is a King Edward Foundation School, which is a public school, which provides Scholarships, it's not a boarding school. Mostly they get all the Scholarships at Cambridge, but when Birmingham, King Edwards, and Manchester School, they had all the Scholarships at Cambridge and Oxford, even up till now. And he had a wonderful education, he went to a very good prep, kindergarten, run by two, oh, I'm talking about my son now.

Yes.

My son. He went to a school which was run by two old Girton girls, and the education was marvellous, even from the age of 5. Then he went to school, boys' school, until 13, and then to, also a very good one, they did Classical, very much stress on Classical education, and he loved this school, and he was a very good scholar. I don't think he was once late for school. And then he went to King Edwards, to his father's school. And both of them were great sportsmen. My husband was Captain of Rugger, Captain of Swimming, whatever it is, boxing, riding, everything he did. Just

so did my son, was Captain of Swimming, and chess, Captain of Chess, Captain of Rugger, they followed, and consequently I've got very interested. I've never missed a rugger match, even now. And as I say, they were very very Anglicised.

And did it follow on naturally, then, that your son would go to Sandhurst?

Yes. As I say, he was destined for it. My husband decided he's going to be a Regular Soldier, he said, "If he's got to be a soldier, he might just as well be a trained soldier, and not be enlisted."

Was he involved in the War, your son?

My son was very badly wounded. Very badly. He was for a year and 10 months in plaster. He's still got, he had, the injuries they sustained was at Anzio, Anzio. And I've got a snapshot somewhere, where he and his Company, just before going into the final battle, such a happy, lovely lot of men, and so on. He was very happy in the Army. And next, the whole lot was wiped out except three people. He was very badly wounded. He had with him, his batman, and his sergeant. And at that time, it was attacked with tanks, by Germans, and they had no anti-tank weapons at all. And he was wounded in his knee, badly, and the Germans were going and prodding all the bodies to see whether they're alive or not, and he told his men to lie still. And they lay very still until the Germans disappeared, and then he told them, "Go, leave me." Because he was so badly, but they wouldn't leave him, and they carried him, and while they carried him, he was wounded again in his chest, and elbow, and so on, so he wasn't that bad. When we got the telegram from the War Office, it was that he was on the "danger list", and so on, because he had wound marks on his chest, but they thought he was wounded in his chest, but he wasn't, it ricocheted, where he was wounded was in his arm. And his nerves, these nerves, were severed. So he was, lost the use of his hand. But he had a wonderful operation. They paired up the nerves of those two, of those two, ulna and radial nerves, and he uses it. It isn't perfect, but he uses it, and with his leg, they deliberately stiffened it, with an operation called "arthrodisis". They made a wedge, and stiffened it, so he's got a stiff leg, because, to save arthritis. And he perfectly, he climbs, and he swims, except he can't ride. But otherwise, he can do anything with it. And all the time he was ill, he never complained once. That I might say so. Never once, with all the severe injuries. And, of course, my husband didn't think that he would ever survive, be kept in the Army. He didn't think so, because eventually, they brought him from North Africa, up to Durham, and I asked, I really petitioned through the War Office, and so on, to let him come to Warwickshire, to Birmingham, there was a Queen Elizabeth Hospital, because I was working full-time in X-ray. We were very busy. They had not enough trained people, so I was torn, either to have to leave my job and let them down in the Hospital, or not be able to see him at all, to go up North. So, through some influence, and through my Matron of the Hospital, they brought him into Queen Elizabeth. So that was all right. I could have time to go and see him from Stratford-on-Avon to Birmingham. But he was desperately, very ill. But this has no, the main thing is, it has not affected him mentally, whatsoever. And I, of course, been X-raying all the time, terrible casualties, spinal casualties, and people who were blind. And all the time, I was praying, the only it shouldn't be his eyes, or shouldn't be his back. I had a very difficult time. That's when I say, when I look back, because my husband was in

the Middle East, and my son was out in Africa. I had no news from Russia at all, from people. The events in Palestine were very dangerous at that time, and so I was, and only the fact, I think, that I was so busy, terribly busy and involved with other people's troubles, that I, not only survived, I have never lost my spirit. As I say, going back, now I can say that. But I must have been very very strong.

You say your husband was in the Middle East.

Yes.

Could you tell me more about what he was doing there?

Yes, he was in, in charge of the Military Police all over the Middle East.

He was in charge?

Yes, military,

The Military Police?

Yes, yes. Because they was all too old to do active service. But I can't talk much about his, I don't, yes. I really don't want that put in, because it was very much, for instance [switch it off a second]. Yes, you can say that we had a very very close relationship, my husband, my two children and myself. And without any pressure, they spend all their holidays with us, right, they were in, not only 18, 20s, they spend their holidays with us, wherever they went. And all their leaves, if they had to come any distance, they came and spend it at home.

Could you tell me a little bit about your daughter's education?

Yes. She went to Warwick School, Warwick Grammar School, very good school. She was very musical. And she was, once she was stationed in Edgbaston, she was on a very brilliant teacher, and he prophesied that she would go very far. But when she went to Warwick, her school, music, she didn't like her, and she was put off really, by the other girls telling her how unpleasant she was, the teacher. She didn't practice, that's the thing. She composed a lot, and she composed words and music, and Ann Shelton picked her number out of 800, or 8,000, I can't remember, and broadcast it, yes.

When was that?

Oh, some years ago. I can't, before she was married. She was very, and she plays by ear everything, beautifully, but she wouldn't practice.

Did she do anything during the War?

She was in the WRNS. She joined as soon as she could, her name was put down, and she joined the WRNS straight away. In fact, she was very young, through, also through influence, they accepted her early. She loved it. Enjoyed it very much. She

was stationed in Liverpool, and then in Machrihanish, Scotland. You know Dicky Baker, the broadcaster, Richard Baker,

Richard Baker?

Well, he was a great friend of hers. They sailed with her at Machrihanish. She loved it, very much. And she, when she came on leave, she always brought one or two friends to stay with her. And still very close to them. There were four of them, are very very close. They live outside London, and one lives in London, and they're very very close still.

Is she married?

She married, yes, that's her. I said her husband wasn't at all, not only atheist, but just doesn't, doesn't even keep up the traditions.

And how many grandchildren do you have?

I've got, I've got two of my daughter's, and one of my, from my son. And a wonderful, wonderful great-grandson. I must show you his photograph sometime, because he really is something special. There's something special in his nature. He's so gentle, so sensitive, since he was a little boy. I'll give you an example, shall I? When he was about two and a half, not three, he couldn't have been, I was in the hospital with a very bad fracture, I slipped, I was shopping, running about in Upper Richmond Road, and it was raining, and then it stopped. I rolled up my umbrella, and as I walked, the end of my umbrella stuck between two slabs, throw me over, and I had a most dreadful supercondile fracture. I was, for four months, in the hospital. And he came to see me, with his mother, and then when he looked round, and he said, "Momma, everybody's got a visitor except this old lady opposite. Do you think I can go and speak to her?" That's not three. And that is how he is, and how he's growing up. She says, "Of course you can." He went across and when they saw him, he shook her hand, and put his arms round her, and he sat talking to her for about half an hour, and he's the same now, when he comes to see me. Unfortunately, they live in Buenos Aires, in Argentina, and I don't see much of him. He sees, talks to all the people, and the little old lady who is with me in the room, he strokes her hand, and he talks to her. He's a wonderful, lovable boy.

How old is he?

Now, he's 12. But then right through, when he was about 6, he stayed with me, and I got down, to get him his breakfast. When I got down, he was sitting in the sitting room, watching television, with his milk and cereal, all he got it ready, and I couldn't hear the television. I say, "Darling, it's so quiet, you can't hear it." He said, "Shh. Momma is asleep, I mustn't disturb her." And that is absolutely typical of him. He's lovable, and very intelligent. Very intelligent, without being a genius, like. Very natural child.

Have you ever been to Argentina?

No, they've only been there two years. They lived first in Spain, and I stayed with them. And he looked after me like, if he were my, a gallant gentleman. He's really, I miss him very much. I miss my grand-daughter, because I, she was in my care since she was 7, when her mother died. Her mother died at the age of 37.

I'm sorry, who died?

My son's wife, first wife, died. He was a widow for many years afterwards. She died when she was seven. And her mother's family really wanted her to go there, her mother's, her mother was a Beaufort, Duke of Beaufort, a Beaufort, her mother was a Beaufort too, Duke of Beaufort was her uncle. And really, they would have liked to have had Alexandra there, but she needed so much. She needed, firstly, she didn't want a staff of servants looking after her, she wanted really personal love. And I became what she called "Mummy Granny". And we've been very very close. Very close, up till now. I miss her.

How old is she?

She's a terrible, naughty girl. She's a very bad correspondent. When she writes, she writes pages. But she's a very bad correspondent.

How old is she?

She's 37. And then my daughter's got a son, and he was very active, when he went to university, the York University, he immediately immersed himself in the life of the students. And he was on the Committee Board, although it was very much Left, he was a Conservative. Then eventually he was Margaret Thatcher's blue-eyed boy. And he did very well. And then, yes, he was one who was allowed to speak at some Conference. He was going to speak for students, the student Committee, and so on, and he was going to speak on education, and then, one of the speakers, Conservative, was a racist, and had spoken very unpleasantly about the races, so they approached him, they said, would he speak instead of education, on race relations? And he did that, and he had standing ovation, all the Cabinet stood up. And then they gave it up. He was with, he started with Westminster Council, in what it was his job? In charge of the policy of the Social Services, and at a very high salary, I think £17,000, and he was only young, then he gave it up to do some good work.

Could you tell me who you're talking about?

My daughter's boy.

Your daughter's son.

Yes.

What's his name?

Paul. Paul Goodman.

Paul Goodman.

Yes, yes. And he was very close to me. We were very very great friends, since he's been a little boy. Very very close, and it's been a disappointment to me, that he's given it up. I can't go into details, but he's a wonderful boy in the sense, wonderful principles. Wonderful principles. Really, idealist. So he wasn't involved, nothing that we could be ashamed of, or nothing at all, but disappointment to me, because he was doing so wonderfully well. And a journalist. He was writing, a leader for Independent, they asked him to write. So he was talented, a very talented boy.

Yes, I'd like to ask you about,

I must tell you something about my other grand-daughter, Anna. My daughter's daughter. She's got a son Paul, and a daughter, Anna.

Anna Goodman?

She's also a lovely girl. Beautiful. Beautiful girl. And she's, but she's been drifting from one, she went to Putney High School here, but she's been changing one job, another there, and trying everything, and now she's doing styling. Styling. To me, what it is, when they want to promote anything, she provides the model and the background and all that. But she's again, very reluctant to form any relationship with men. I think she sees so much around, very, she's very fastidious. And she has lots of boyfriends, like Paul's got lots of girlfriends, but they never involve themselves. Paul once or twice, sort of thought about it, and he still has them, still keeps up the friendships. But she's, she's a very sweet, nice girl. I can only say, as a Jewish grandmother, a Jewish mother, to say they're lovely, and sweet to me, and we stayed friends, which is most important. Most important. We're all very, they're very close to me. And they never treat me as an old grandmother. You know, my grand-daughter, she is, they, both of them, very keen I should have nice scents, and all the latest, and discuss everything, the latest, they don't treat me as an old fogey.

You're not!

No, well, to you maybe, I don't know. To myself, I am! No! You want to know about my nursing?

I'd love to know about how you started your nursing?

Well, you see, I never intended, I knew nothing about medicine, although I had people in the medical profession in my family, I wasn't interested in it. And we, as a home, we were very healthy lot. My children, my husband and myself. And I never intended to do nursing. But when the Munich Crisis, my husband was called up again, just, just before the Munich Crisis, and my son was ready to be posted abroad, my daughter was going to join the WRNS as soon as she was 17, and I thought, "Well, how ridiculous. I'm going to sit in that large Elizabethan house, all by myself, doing nothing." I had to do something. So I attended the local, it was a little village, really, Henley-in-Arden, was a small place, and there was a meeting of the Red Cross, in the local hall, and I attended it.

What year was this?

'39. And she was a very loquacious Commandant, and I thought, "Well, I'll join." And I joined, and I might tell you, I found it most difficult when I attended lectures, to remember the name of the bones. It was so strange to me, when we had a very (INAUDIBLE WORD) doctor lecturing as well. But anyhow, we had to pass very strict examination, and attend the Stratford-on-Avon Hospital, to know the run of the hospital, had to do so many hours there. In case of emergency, they would call us up, which they did, as soon as emergency arrived, and we were called at a moment's notice, and I did six weeks night duty, without a single break. So you can imagine it. I found it very hard. But I liked it. I enjoyed it. I started on a ward, and I did 12 months on the ward. And I think it is because I was older than the usual age of nurses, and of a better education, I must say it. A different, different type from those nurses. That I would be given greater opportunities. It is because it was a small cottage hospital to start with again. Had I been working in a large hospital, I would have never had the training and the opportunities I had there. So I started with the ward, and I was relegated jobs, really, far above ordinary nursing, and where the other nurses were moved from one ward to another, by the way, by that time, they'd built six emergency cabins, what it is.

Cubicles?

Not cubicles.

Wards?

Wards. There were 36 patients in each ward. They were all called after the military dignitaries, famous people, like, after Churchill, and Alexander, and Douglas, all those people. Anyhow, I was on one ward, and they never moved me. Sister would never really let me go. I stayed with her. I say, though, it's because I made very good coffee and toast, because my first job was, when the Sister and the Staff Nurse came, is to make them coffee and toast, and I swore it was because of that. But we had a marvellous team of Red Cross and St. John's nurses. Really, they worked very very hard. In fact, the Matron said she got better work out of us volunteers, than from the nurses in training, because we all did it, not because of the money. I think we were paid about half-a-crown a week or something like that! Anyhow, it was a hard job, but I enjoyed it very much. Well, then I used to usually go round with the Staff Nurse, before, to prepare the patients for operations, and used to take the patients to the theatre. I was interested very much in that. By the way, it's another story, but once I stopped an operation, an unheard of thing. And I couldn't have done it if I were properly trained. Because they were going to operate on a boy on the wrong side for a hernia.

And you noticed?

I knew.

Well,

Well, I'll tell you afterwards about it. Or would you like me to tell you now?

Yes, tell me.

I'll tell you now. Well, what happened, we had, at some time, we had a Czechoslovakian group of doctors who escaped from Prague, joining us, and they were all specialists. One was the Head of the Prague University Medical School, and so on, and five grades, they were absolutely top men. The physician was a Jewish man, absolutely up-to-date, a very very wonderful man. But, in those days, people didn't travel very much, English people, and they looked on them as foreigners, you see. Didn't treat them really, with the due respect that they should have. And we had, they were only allowed to attend to their own Czechoslovakian patients. And we had, on one side, older foreign patients, and on one side, eighteen beds were English. At that time, we were periodically changed. One time we had women, and then we had geriatrics, and then we had soldiers, and so on. At that particular time, we had soldiers. And very often, the Sister used to say to me, instead of going and doing the round with the doctor, she used to say, "Oh, Mrs. Rubens, will you go with him?" You see, Czechoslovakian. They never treated me as a foreigner. That was the funniest part. I used to say to them, "Well, don't say that, I'm a foreigner." "Oh no, no, you're not." Whether because I was married to an Englishman, and they liked my husband very much, and myself, I don't know, but they were all wonderfully kind to me. And although I lived amongst entirely Gentile population, I've never once had any signs of anti-Semitism. Neither has my husband or my son. Never once. And I mean, we didn't conceal we were Jews. On the contrary, I always tried to tell them exactly the nice things about Jews, because they didn't know anything about them. Well, anyhow, so that particular morning, the Sister said to me, would I go with Dr. Schlachengrover, there was a Czech doctor, she was also an anaesthetist. Would I go with her to see, examine the patients, which are due for an operation. Which we did, and we came to that particular boy, a young Czechoslovakian soldier, and she was examining him, and they're very, what shall I say? Crude about it, not delicate at all. When our doctor examined anyone, they just exposed the part they need to, but she just lifted the shirt, and, you know, examined him. And she asked him where the pain was, left or right, and as it happened, the same things are in Russian, left or right. And he said, "It was left." And she, but instead of writing down, immediately, the notes, she went on with, all round that side. And that was that. Next morning, when he was due to go for operation, again Sister say to me, would I go with the Staff Nurse, while they were preparing him? So I went, and I looked at his case notes ...

F511 - End of Side A

## F511 - Side B

... "Oh", she said, "Better go and tell Sister Simpson", which I went, and told Sister Simpson. Well, Sister Simpson was a darling, but very vague, a very vague person. "Oh", she said, "It must be a mistake. Surely, Dr. Schlachengrover is giving anaesthetic, she'll know, in the theatre. It'll be all right." Well, I reported it and that was that. And so we took that boy, and before they got, used to take them into the theatre, they do the same now, he went in a little room where they gave them pre-med injection. So, by the time they take them into the theatre, they're already under it. So, at that time our theatre staff was very much like League of Nations. The surgeon who was going to operate was an Englishman, the Registrar assisting him, who was a Swedish man, the Sister was Irish, the nurse, Staff Nurse, was Belgian, and I was Russian. So you can imagine, everybody! Anyhow, when it was ready, the operation to take place, the surgeon said to the specialist, the surgeon say to the Registrar, "A right hernia." My heart fell. Well, of course, I couldn't just remain silent, and here, it's a terrible crime. You don't even talk to, in those days you would never address yourself to a doctor, because if you want to speak to a doctor, you had to speak, no, you wouldn't speak to a Sister, you would speak to the Staff Nurse, and Staff Nurse would speak to the ... and so on, and so on. There was terrific etiquette. And to speak in the theatre, a theatre is absolutely sanctity, but I couldn't help it. I said, "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Hall. It is not a right hernia, it is left." He said, "What do you mean?" He wasn't very pleased. "How do you know?" So I told him what happened. And he said, "No, no, no. Do you speak Czech?" I said, "No, I don't speak Czech, but it happens exactly the same word." So he, he knew that the anaesthetist was, I mean, what happened the nurse? He said, "Dr. Schlachengrover", she said, "Is it so?" He says "No, it's right." So he said to the Registrar, "Right." I said, "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Holland, I must repeat it is left side. If you would like to check it, telephone to the Ward. You will see that I reported it to Sister." Well, of course, there was terrific commotions. Matron came, and everything, you can imagine the atmosphere. And the Matron said, "Well, if Mrs. Rubens says it's left, it's left." And they said, they took it, so he say to the Registrar, "Right." So they did, "Right. On the left side." And so they, he started, and my heart fell then. At that particular, I was absolutely firm, but at that moment my heart absolutely fell. I thought, "Supposing I've made a mistake?" You can imagine. It was an agonising moment, because I could've made a mistake. Anyhow, he nodded his head to me, and so, afterwards, he came and thanked me, the surgeon. He said, I said, "Well, you weren't very happy when I said so." He said, "No. But, no", he say, "We could have learned it in a very unpleasant situation, because, being in an Army person, we were responsible, in their heart. Anyhow, and when I got on the ward, Sister said, "How could you?" she said, she wasn't cross with me. She said, "How could you? I've been a nurse for so many years, I wouldn't have had the courage to speak up in the theatre." I said, "Sister, what good would it have done to me. They could have only thrown me out. And it's not my profession, my life didn't depend on it and", I said, "Even so, my conscience, it was a question of, of one's conscience, and a question of etiquette, wasn't it?"

What did Dr. Schlachengrover say?

She came and apologised to me, but she wasn't friendly with me for a long time afterwards. Until then, she was great friends with me. But, after that, she wasn't friendly for a time. She mellowed afterwards, because I put her in a very unpleasant situation, but I couldn't help it, I knew I was doing it. I was discrediting her, but anyhow, that was, I diverted it. I go back, I did a year on the ward and I loved it, and the patients were very fond of me, and so very very nice coming into the ward, and everybody welcomed you. And then they wanted an extra nurse in the theatre, and Mr. Holland, the same surgeon, asked for me to be moved to the theatre, which, in a way, I liked it. I was fascinated with the work of the surgeon, absolutely fascinate with it. I can understand why the nurses, or the Sisters, fall for surgeons. It's such a marvellous, marvellous work. And funnily enough, until I went, I started there, I couldn't bear the sight of blood, and that never worried me. It, although, and they acted as though the medical profession, is very flippant there. They have to, I suppose they can't, they have to relax. One thing shocked me, I tell you a little anecdote. Do you mind? We had a patient, a huge woman on the table, and you know, you've got to go through so many, they hate fat people, by the way, on the table, they have to go through so many layers. And there it was, a body there, and the anaesthetist, not Dr. Schlachengrover, but the Englishman, he and the, at that time, the surgeon, they both were St. Thomas' men, and very close. And he said, "Mark, Marko", he was Dr. Marks, Mr. Marks, he said, "What were the biscuits we had for our coffee? I must ask Matron. Weren't they good." And they looked at me as if it, you think, sort of thing, "How can we talk about?" He said, "Well, Mrs. Rubens, we have to forget other things." But it was so strange to me, as I say, to listen to it. At that time, though, I must remind you, at that time, it was not National Service, National,

Health,

National Health Service. And everything was, all the doctors were voluntary there. Very devoted people, and they'd all sorts of jobs, they were not specialists like they have now. And when the Czech people joined us, it was all, the same man did surgical operation, this operation. We had two Scotsmen, one was a surgeon, and one was anaesthetist, nice old boys, both of them, and one of my jobs in the theatre was to help him, he was, in those days, they used chloroform, you can imagine, and I used to get more chloroform than the patients! But it was a great, a great experience, being in the theatre. And nothing upset me, operations, except one. And simple one. There was a child, that was before I went as a part of the theatre, there were, on the ward was a little girl, a girl of 15, who had to have all her teeth extracted. And that was terribly sad to me, and she say, she was very frightened. And she said, would I go with her to the theatre when she was .... (INAUDIBLE). I said, "Yes," I would hold her hand. Which I did. And while he was extracting the teeth, one by one, I was getting hotter and hotter, it was the thought. I thought, "Poor little girl, she'll have to have false teeth." And to me, dentures were very important. And when I finished, the doctor noticed, and he said, "Would you like to go out?" And I said, "No. I promised her, and if she opens her eyes and finds I'm not there, she'll feel let down." But when they finished, I went outside, and I stood, I remember it now, it's, well almost a trifle, really, to tell you. I stood by the wall, and I was absolutely wet

through with perspiration. That upset me. Otherwise, I faced everything. Tremendous operations in the theatre. And then, so I was there for 12 months.

This was a General Hospital?

Cottage Hospital. A General Hospital.

General?

Yes. It was, I don't remember, only several hundred people, but, in the meantime, there were six wards with 36 patients in each (INAUDIBLE), so the work grew and grew and grew.

And was this for civilians and for soldiers?

Yes, yes.

So there were war wounds being dealt with, and other operations.

In the original hospital, was only for civilians, but those other huts, emergency huts, were for civilians and for military.

What was the name of the hospital?

Stratford-on-Avon Hospital.

It was the Stratford-on-Avon Hospital?

Yes. And, but we served about, the region about 30 miles radius, you know, because they were all country places, and they used to send them 30 miles to our place. So, by the time I finished, I X-rayed everybody! Either a child, a parent, a grandparent, or great-grandparent. So I had personal contact with all, within 30 miles, of people!

How long had your original training been?

Well, I can't tell you, several weeks till we passed the exams. And we had to pass very strict exams, tests. Very strict. And why they called us on night, because our contingent got the highest marks. I told you, we had a very keen Commandant, who kept us very, at it! And the girls who weren't, St. John's were Stratford-on-Avon, and I found the St. John's nurses are better trained than Red Cross, between ourselves, that's my personal opinion. Very well. But all of us were terribly keen. Very very keen, and we worked the hours we did. And awful lucky for me, we had one nurse who was very nervous about patients, and she'd taken on herself the jobs, like cleaning the bedpans, so we were relieved from that, and I never had to do that! And ....

Were you called Auxiliary Nurses?

Yes.

Yes.

And, but Matron thought a great deal of us, she did. She was a charming, charming woman. A young woman, with completely white hair. Very sociable. Loved parties. We were always having parties. She kept, but she was very very keen, and strict disciplinarian. She knew everything that was happening. And, but at the same time, she gave us a wonderful time. There were always dances and parties, which my husband always attended. He was the heart and soul of it. And one was very interesting, when I was on the ward still. We had a dance, and our patients were very keen, they couldn't do, they were bedridden, the others could stand outside the ballroom and watch it. So the people who were bedridden couldn't. And they said, "Couldn't we," they would like to see us in our evening frocks. So we brought our frocks and dressed ourselves there, and my daughter was, first time I'd taken her as well, and we paraded. And they were thrilled to see us all there. It was, I missed my patients when I went to the theatre, because they were bodies. In a ward, it was a personal touch all the time. And it was nice to know they were pleased to see you.

When you followed a patient into the operating theatre, did you follow on their care afterwards? You cared for the patient after the operation?

Not when I was in the theatre.

No?

No.

You were only a theatre nurse?

Theatre nurse. Oh, let me think. Let me think. I never thought about it. No, I must have been theatre nurse only, because we were busy the whole time.

What sort of operations were they generally?

Well, very big orthopaedic operations, because there were terrible casualties, and the spinal operations.

For soldiers?

For soldiers, yes. And accidents for civilians, always accidents. And also things like abdominal operations, appendix or what. If they were very very serious operations, and I think we had properly, proper staff increased, not only when the Health Service came, for a very big operation, the facilities weren't there, they were sent to Queen Elizabeth in Birmingham, or Warwick Hospital and so on. But at that time, our work increased tremendously, because we had various Canadian Air Force Stations outside, Polish Squadron outside Stratford-on-Avon, at Warwick and Leamington, all those places, and they were sent, they were divided between Stratford Hospital, Warwick Hospital, and Leamington Hospital, and Solihull Hospital. All those hospitals. And

they were sent to us. So X-ray work, when I first started, it was a very small department, very small.

Did you have extra training for X-ray?

Afterwards. The work increased so much, that we had, at that time, at which point did I go? At first it was a very small hospital department, X-ray, and then, of course, it increased so much, and we had a very brilliant German radiologist, who got away from Germany. He was well-known in Germany, joined the War Recruit Group, and he wanted more staff, so he interviewed, they put my name down, and interviewed some of the people, and he chose me. And this, he trained me, from the beginning. And he was a very difficult man, but you could forgive him anything because he was so brilliant. And he demanded perfection. And, not only did he train me, but he allowed me, knowing me, that I was very keen, I mean, by that time, I got very much engrossed in medicine, very much so, that he allowed me to attend all the seminars which he held for the General Practitioners, and the medical staff, the housemen, and so on. So I was there while he was lecturing, and reading the, of course, you know, at that time, X-ray wasn't that so very much developed, in the sense that the General Practitioners couldn't read the films at all, I don't think they even do now. It's a very specialised job. And so, very good, he made me read the films, and he made, many a time, he left me to read the films for small things and so on. And very strict supervision about radiation, we had. And as I said, I had a wonderful chance that I would never never, it isn't because I was clever, don't think because I was so clever, it was because it was a small hospital, and I had the chance to do it. And again, I was older, and I had a higher education than the others. But they gave me opportunities. Also, I was very lucky with clinics. I learned very much the diagnostic work, because Stratford is a very, has a very fluctuating population. People visit us, foreign visitors, and they can't, in the Hospital, no one could speak French. At that time, you see, forget it! I'm talking about 50 years ago, about. And so I was called upon to interview people, because you can't do much unless you know the history of a patient, and to interview them, speak to them in German and French. At that time, I still knew a little bit Italian, not now, I've forgotten it all. And so I learned to ask, give the history of the patients, and, of course, it helped me very much with diagnosis. And afterwards, it stood me in wonderful stead. I [now, switch it off]. Many a time my husband used to call me "Professor Rubens"! And people, really, I still do, my nephew who is a lecturer here at the London School of Economics, came here the other day, to see me, and he brought me a parcel from Israel. So I thanked him, he said, "No, really, it's a personal visit as well. I want you to tell me something. I've got a pain in my shoulder, and so on", and he said, "The doctor doesn't seem to know it." I said, "Well, why come to me?" He said, "Well, you know when I had glandular fever, the doctors didn't diagnose it for a year. When I told you the symptoms, you told me straight away." It's something that I've missed very much, I could've done.

Did you think that you might have started to do medicine yourself?

I would've taken then, if I hadn't, but I had a child to bring up, my daughter. It was a full-time job, you see, I couldn't have done that. But I love it now. My best reading is anything to do with medicine. I love it. I'm very very interested in it. But as I said, I've had people, I diagnosed my own husband. Now that is a thing. I diagnosed his,

when he had thyroid. He was being treated all the time by a doctor, nothing being done. And I said, well, the doctor in our village was a friend of ours, and I said, "When you go and see Tom, don't say I said so, but tell him you'd like to see a specialist on glands." So he did. And he send him straight away to a glandular man, specialist in Birmingham, and it was thyroid deficiency, which he was taken to Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and they gave him five day treatment, it was radium, iodine, not injections, they were, I think it was drink, iodine or something, for five days, and after that, they had to check up all the time. So when I met the doctor, he said, "You know, you were right. It was thyroid." I said, "Tom, I didn't, I wouldn't presume", I said, "I wouldn't presume to say that. I simply said, 'You know, when he comes to see you, you see him for about half an hour. What do you talk about? About motor cars. About golf. About this and the other. It is true, they don't tell you.'" I said, "I watch him, and I could see him." You see, the fact was, we went for a holiday to Cornwall, and he had, he had tremendous appetite, and he had lots of cream and so on, and he was losing weight all the time. [Are you recording?] And then I noticed also, he also noticed a slight shaking of the hand, and double vision. Well, I know all those are symptoms of thyroid. That put me onto that. And then, much more serious. Oh no, so the doctor said to me, "Oh, I thought it was much more serious." Well, if he did, why didn't he do something about it? Because he was losing weight all the time. Well, if he thought he had cancer, which obviously he suspected, but he did have cancer afterwards, and it happened, he had an appointment for X-ray in my Hospital, and my chief, who was away, and we had a locum, a man of good reputation, but who'd been out of practice for some time, and [am I talking too much?] And we had, we X-rayed him, he had this barium enema, and our chief surgeon, consultant, Mr. Lord, a very charming man, I did a lot of work with him, in the middle of the night, emergencies, came in and said, "Well, Mrs. I've got good news for you, it's negative." I said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Lord, come and have a look at the films, I'm not happy. Look at that shadow, there." He looked, and he said, "No, I'm not happy myself." He said, "When Dr. Israelski comes back, we'll X-ray him." And Dr. Israelski came back, and we took him to Warwick Hospital, they had latest machinery, and X-rayed him, and he had, and Martin, the doctor, said to my husband, he said, "Do you want to know what it is?" He said "Yes". He said, "Well, you've got cancer." He just, being a German, a typical German, but my husband took it very well. And they operated, Mr. Lord operated on him, and he said, "If you want him to be private room, he can be in a private room, and he can have a private nurse, but, if you follow my advice, let him have it on the surgical ward", because the Sister there was very experienced Sister, post-nursing. So I said, "Of course I fall in with you." They weren't going to charge me anything, and the Matron said, "Of course, he can go private." And after six hours operation, he came straight to my Department, and drew me a diagram, he showed that they excised about 24" of it, so that he shouldn't have, they cleared the whole area and they didn't do colostomy, which is wonderful. Usually they do it. My husband couldn't have stood it, he was terribly fastidious. Very fastidious. Anyhow, he didn't repeat for 20 years, it never repeated, it was such a successful operation. But twice after that he was in danger if I weren't there, he would have not survived.

What was the date of that operation?

1964. 1964. And he died five years ago, he died in '85.

As a result of the ...

No recurrence at all. Oh, he led very active life. He build gardens and did all sorts of things. He was a great gardener.

How old was he when he died?

88. Completely control of himself, and mental and so on, but very much in pain, I'm afraid to say. And all through what happened, he developed arthritis very badly. First of all he had around the knee, which was arthritic, and he had, he kept on complaining very, just as my son never complained, he was not a good patient, not a good patient. I looked after him, and I could handle him very well, but he was impatient, very impatient man, and the doctor kept on giving him stronger and stronger tablets, till he collapsed with the perforated duodenum. And he was taken to the hospital, to Queen Mary's, Roehampton. He passed the operation successfully, very well, but he got an infection there.

From the operating theatre?

No, not the theatre, in the ward or where. That happens very often, and that finished him. But, but while he was, as you say, did we do post-operative nursing? Which is so very important. Very very important. And twice, I noticed the symptoms, I used to go lunchtime, of course, to go and see him, whenever I could find time, I was so busy to be with him all the time. And I, on two occasions I noticed that he wasn't right. There was once, I noticed there was something, and I don't know, talk about it or not talk about it? Should I? Well, I tell you. I went, I saw him, I remember, lunchtime, or after, I think, for teatime, so he was already sitting out. Sister, who was this excellent Sister, was away, on her holidays. And I so noticed him, that he was, his hands were ice cold, and his head was hot. And I knew it was wrong. So I called the, we had a young houseman, a lovely boy who worked nearly 24 hours a day, and he looked over, and I called him, forget his name, and I said, "Look, I'm not happy at all. There's some sort of septic point. Where is Mr. Lord?" He said, "Well, Mr. Lord is operating at Warwick." I said, "Will you telephone and tell him?" He telephoned, and he came back and said, "We put him on the drip at once, and take him to the operating theatre", no, "take him to X-ray, I'll X-ray him." I was at X-ray then. "X-ray him, and we take him to the operating theatre, and Mr. Lord will come straight away to see." Because I said, straight away, I thought there was subphrenic abscess, something there, and they drew nearly a pint of pus, you see. And there was another occasion when he was brought home, you see, fortunately, I had such wonderful surgeons as Mr. Lord, he was marvellous, so attentive and so, that sort of thing. I might tell you, after the operation, my husband send them two bottles of champagne. One for the staff and one for him to take back, and a box of cigars, and we send them for Christmas, a beautiful set of Georgian plates, and so on. He wasn't forgotten. And his children had presents for years! Because you can't repay. You can't repay anything to a man who saves your life. People don't realise really, they take it for granted. The surgeon operated. But we ought to know. I've got great admiration for medical profession, tremendous admiration. Shall I tell you? When he was already discharged and brought home, as I say, he was eating very well and so on, but he

complained of pain all the time, in his back, and I said to our doctor, local doctor, about it. And he said, "Oh no, it is because he was lying such a long time, and so on." It went on for a few days, and I wasn't happy at all. So again, I got in touch with Mr. Lord, and Mr. Lord said, "Get an ambulance. Get him straight away to the hospital." "Well", I said, "There's no need to, because a friend of ours (who had a Daimler car) he said he'll take him." He was only a few doors away from us, and I went across, there was a Police Station across, and I told them, would they free, get the place free, for the car to come down, because it was such a busy street in Henley, it was on a main road, and then how kind they were. He and his sergeant, the sergeant and one of the policemen, came, came up to the cottage, and brought my husband down, carried him. I'm telling you that to show you how kind people were. That is what I think. And they took him over to the hospital. And it was a very serious, again, pus accumulated. So they put him on the drip again, and kept him for another week or so, and then it went down all right, after all that. But surely, it isn't so simple. And I dread any operation, because I say, "Any operation is likely to have complications." Any operation.

I wanted to ask you where you were living, during the War? Where did you live, during the War.

In Henley-in-Arden.

Were you in a house?

We had an Elizabethan, old Elizabethan house, 600 year old, with original floors, original ceilings, and everything, fireplaces, yes.

When did you buy that?

We didn't buy it. It was not for sale, it was a property, scheduled, you know, the property was not for sale, oh no, we were renting it.

When did you move there?

1937. We moved in 1937, and we stayed there until 1975.

Did you look after it yourself?

I had a very wonderful woman, a country woman. She stayed with me for all the time, 35 years, really part of the family. Wonderful woman. And I tell you, you will laugh now. We saw her, next to our house, it was on the main road, and there were more pubs in Henley-in-Arden in the one street, than you get, well, I can't tell you, originally, I believe they had about 15 or more. More than that. Which after have been converted to private houses, they were ..... (INCOMPREHENSIBLE). Anyhow, next door to us, there was a little antique shop, and one morning, when I opened the door, there was a woman standing with a laundry basket, and she was delivering laundry to the man who owned the place, and I said to her, "Do you know of anyone who will come and do housework?" She was a very bonny woman [switch off for a second]. She said, "I will come." She will come. So she came, she used to come up,

her cottage was at the bottom of our house, there were about six or seven cottages at about 5 shillings a week. And she came, and when I came to pay her, I said, "How much?" She wanted to charge me 6d. an hour.

That was in 1937?

'37. But even so, I couldn't accept it. It wasn't, but she'd been many hours, lots of it talking and all that, very amusing, lovely ...

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## F512 - Side A

10th July, 1990.

Would you like to tell me a little bit about the holidays you took as a family?

Yes, we, when my little girl was three, and that is, she's now 64, so that's a long time ago, we went to a little village, Welsh village, North Wales. It's a place, we came quite accidentally across it, just round, looking round, between Barmouth and Harlech. A beautiful little village, with a river in front of the cottage which we had, and fishing there, and a few miles away, was exquisite sands and bathing, and we met there, a whole crowd of very interesting, charming people, mostly from London, lots of them artistic people. One of them was a painter, she exhibited in the Royal Academy, and she had two sons, one was my little girl's age, and the other one was, there was already at Oxford while my boy was still at school, and they, we got very great friends, and they gave us an opportunity for the boy to go with them climbing, and walking and so on, and the country's so beautiful that we spent part of the time bathing, and part walking. There were lakes and mountains, they made there, by the way, there is a famous lake there, called Cwm Bychan (??), and they did, when they did the Elephant Boy, you know what it is?

The Elephant Man?

No, not Elephant Man. I can't remember the name of it, it's Indian thing, they are in India, it reminded very much of the same area as the Khyber Pass, it was so much before your time, you won't remember. But anyhow, so, year after year, we used to rent that cottage, for the whole year, and we'd spend there our holidays, when the children, Christmas time, and any time that we could. And they welcomed us just like if we were a family, they used to meet us on the bridge, and say, "Welcome home", you know, and of course, their voices are so remarkable. The singing there, on the bridge, of all the local boys and girls was beautiful. We personally, are very very fond of Welsh people. They're great stickers for culture, and there is no such thing as a class distinction. You found that in the same family, there were sons professors, and sons miners, but there was no distinction, and great respect for old people. And terrific thirst for knowledge. I had discussions with the men digging in the road, about books and things, which, in England, sorry to say that, that type of man, would be reading racing paper, nowadays. We were very very fond of it. Well, that was while they were growing up, and even afterwards.

And what was the name of the place?

Llanbardarn. And the only thing, at the beginning, the food there was very very poor. No choice of vegetables, and so my husband used to bring, every weekend, he and his friend, who used to spend the time, a man who was, a single man, he spent the holidays a lot, a Naval Officer, used to spend a lot of time with us, and they used to bring a lot of food. So we had, I had a maid with me, so we did the cooking at

home, and then when they were growing up, we came year after year after year, with the same people, we met the same people.

What sort of facilities did you have in the cottage?

Well, they had four bedrooms, but there was no bathing facilities inside the cottage. There was a shed which, where we had a bath, and, but we had to improvise with buckets and things, but, of course, we swum every day, so it didn't, we could keep clean. And outdoors, in the same place, we had a loo there, as well.

So there was no running water?

No running water inside.

Inside. Running water in the bath-house outside?

Yes.

Hot water?

As far as I remember. I can't remember, honestly! How can I? So, so many years have passed, I can't really remember. And then, when the War started, of course, lots of the children who grew up, been away in the War and so on, but while, during the War, even afterwards, we used to go there, the children always joined us. And stayed at the small hotels, in the village, just outside the village. We didn't, we gave up the house, of course, during the War. And so, that's how we spend the holidays there. But after the War, after the War, of course, by that time, the children got married and had their own children, and in 1964, my husband was due to have an operation, no, it must have been before that. It was before that, anyhow, before that I think. Anyhow, so let me see, go back. We were offered a few days holiday in a caravan, in a different part of Wales, somewhere that was by Portmadoc, Portmadoc, the town was, and outside there, there was a very wonderful site, caravan site, where caravans were very much distanced one from another. It was never invaded by, sort of, casual people. People who owned it were mostly professional people from Liverpool, because it's near there. And at the hospital where I worked, we had a blind physiotherapist in charge of the Department, who was really a chartered accountant, but as he was prisoner-of-war in Japanese hands, he, through lack of vitamins, he lost his sight. And St. Dunstan's trained him, of course, and he was a marvellous man. Altogether, wonderful family. He had a devoted wife, and two children. And they spend all their time, because he knew the ground, just as if he were a seeing man, every step, they went there all the time. And he offered us, he said to us, "Well", as he can't go, waiting for the news from the Hospital, he can't go very far, would we like to have his caravan for a few days, as his guests? Which we did. While there, my grand-daughter, and my husband went for a walk. My grand-daughter was about 7, I think. And she, while walking, they saw a little caravan, small caravan, with pretty curtains, it looked very attractive. Red curtains with little black and white lambs scampering about, and she says to my husband, "Grandpa. Buy that caravan!" He says, "All right." It was, just like that. He loved buying and giving, buying spontaneously, or giving presents or anything. She want it, he agreed at once, and he

bought it. He found the Manager of the estate, and he bought it. And it was a great joy to him for many many years. He built a garden there, and the situation was, at one side we could see the mountains, and the other, through the other windows, there was the sea. We got down, wonderful bathing there. And he became the Doyen of the caravan site. And he saw the whole generation of children grow up, when they were born, and by the time we finished, they were about 17 and so on. And he loved it. And he used to spend there, a lot of time, with a little dog, which we also bought on the caravan site. There was a caravan opposite us, and they, their dog had a litter, bitch, should I say! I don't make distinction! Had a litter. And again, this little girl said, "Grandpa, could I have a puppy?" Because she knew if she asked me I would say "Yes", so she had to get his permission. He said, "Yes, you can." So she went across, and she asked the girl who was in charge, au pair, they had Swedish au pair, she said, "Would they sell her a dog?" And they said "Yes", and when she said how much they wanted, they said two shillings, and she said she only had a pound, so they let her have it for a pound! Anyhow, I'm telling you the silly little details. And that little puppy was a joy to us, so many many, for 14 years, he was the most wonderful, wonderful person. More than a person, intelligent, kind, gentle. Didn't I tell you it was like Bedlington? Oh, must have been talking to someone else. He looked like a little lamb. And he was a pet of all the region, because he used to walk on the hind legs. As soon as he saw another dog, he used to go walk, so everybody in the town next to us, Portmadoc, knew him, and spoiled him.

What sort of dog was he? The breed?

Bedlington.

A breed called a Bedlington?

Bedlington. It's a Yorkshire one. They look grey and white, they look just like little lambs, small dog. In fact, when we had him, my husband used to carry him under his arm.

What happened to the dog when you weren't at the caravan? Did you take the dog home with you?

Of course! Of course! He was like a child, he was exactly as a child.

And this caravan stayed where it was the whole time? You didn't trail it on your car anywhere?

Oh no, no, no, no, we had, no, no, we had, we never, we let, sometimes let, free, of course, to the young doctors and nurses from the hospital when they wanted a holiday, we let them have it. But no, no, no, it was, and my husband was a perfectionist. And everything in the caravan, he made it so that it, he papered, there was a folding bed, so the walls he papered with the most beautiful wallpapers, roses and things. He made proper ventilation. He build a little loo, with looking glass, and proper carpet and rugs, and everything, he did perfectly. And the china was absolutely, well, not, not sort of anyhow, I don't know if you've heard of Suzy Cooper's china? Well, we collected all that. In Stratford-on-Avon, there used to be

a market, and Suzy Cooper, every weekend, she used to bring china, and if you wanted something, she used to collect it for you, certain sets. So everything was perfect, the china, the cutlery, everything had to be, he never believed in sort of anyhow, everything had to be ... at home, for instance, we never used something for the best, we used our silver and china every day, because we felt that if children get used to it, they will appreciate it. We didn't believe, and in the caravan, he had, everything had to be absolutely in the best of taste. He had very good taste, and I told you he was an antique collector. So, it was really a home, and I joined him, not every weekend, because the weekends I was on duty, I couldn't. But he used to collect me, the weekend, and bring me there, and so on.

How many people slept in the caravan at one time?

Well, we had two bunks at the side, and then in a little small place, that was in the big room, that served us as a bedroom and dining room. You could have dining room, but we didn't use it, because there was a small room out of it, where there was a table which we used for meals, and two bunks, behind the curtain, there were two bunks, one above another. One was relegated to the dog, he slept there, slept there. And then there was a kitchen, and a loo, out there. It was a small caravan. As today caravans go, now, for instance, a friend of ours still got, well, I told you, Ruth died, her husband still goes a caravan, has a caravan there, and he's got, he had a bathroom and shower, telephone. He had a garden laid out by the proper expert and so on, and his caravan is worth thousands. But ours was, I think, £500 or something like that. We were quite happy in it.

How did you travel in those days?

By car.

You had a car?

Used to take us from Warwickshire, only about three hours, two-and-a-half to three hours, and my husband could drive it blindfolded. And that's why we gave it up when we came to London, in '75, my husband found he couldn't, it was too much for him to travel six hours, from here. And he disliked the motorways very much, he couldn't get used to that. And he was, by then, 85 or 80, or something like that.

When did he have his first car?

Oh, a long, when the children were very very small.

Can you remember what it was?

I remember, very well. The first car we had was a Renault, which could open up into, you could make a bed at the back, and we had a wonderful holiday in Devon. A friend of ours had a house there, a very eccentric man, English people, very eccentric, who never made friends with anyone, but the man, Leigh Wright, got very attached to my husband. They worked together in some job, and they, they lived, they had a house at Bigbury in Devon, and they said why don't we come and spend the holiday

there? So what we did, we took a tent, and that car, and had the place out just by the sea, not far from a farm. So we could go and have baths at the farm, and have our produce. My husband and the boy slept in the tent, and the little girl and I in the car. They were made in two beds. And it was the most wonderful holiday we ever had, because my husband played at Boy Scouts again. He was, by the way, he was one of the first Boy Scouts in the country. And he loved it. He did, at home he didn't do anything, but there he used to have barbecues, and you know, do sausages and this sort of thing, and he loved it. He was one of the first Boy Scouts.

How did you take to holidays like that? Because, after all, in your young years, you'd had luxury.

I loved it. I loved it. Yes, I regard myself, I am very adaptable. I adapt myself, I enjoy this holiday. As long as I could have a bath, wash, that's what I miss here, very much. One a week.

Because there are only showers, you mean, here?

No, not even showers. I shower myself, I do every day, it's much more trouble than going in the bath, but actually going into the bath once a week, which is terrible. But whenever I go, as I go every weekend, or during the week, to my family, I always have an extra one there!

Did you ever go abroad with your family?

No. No.

That was through choice?

Well, we were so happy. We loved the Welsh so much, and they loved it. We did go to Cornwall one year, not with the family, with my daughter and her husband, and their little boy, he is now 30, he was 2. And he, they had no car, my husband collected them in London, and drove from London, and I was working, and I got a train. I went by train from Stratford-on-Avon, and we joined, we went to Cornwall. It was a lovely holiday there. We took a cottage there. That was about 1960, just before the operation, I think, afterwards, just, yes, before the operation, that's why, yes, longer, before that. It's now 28 years ago, what year was that?

1958.

Yes.

Did you drive yourself?

Yes I did. I didn't like it. I never enjoyed it.

When did you learn?

What year? I can't remember what year. The children were very small then. Must have been in about, more than 30 years ago.

The early thirties?

No, before.

Before?

Yes, before that. I'm mixing up the children and grand-children ages, that's the thing. If Irene were 5, that's 60 years ago.

But at that time, you didn't have to take a test?

No. No. Lucky for me! I'm not a good driver! Not only that, I can't orient myself very well. Did I tell you what my daughter said when she was a little girl? We went for a walk on the hills outside our cottage in Henley-in-Arden, and I went some way, she says, "Mummy, it's the wrong way. You'll never be a Girl Guide." And she's quite right, I'm terribly dumb about orienting myself, direction, and so on, so I would never have made a good driver.

When Hitler came to power, in 1933, did you read much about it, and talk much about it at home?

Yes, yes, yes.

What were reactions?

Well, what can it be? I, I had a discussion with a cousin of my husband's. You know, Michael Balcon, well, he's a cousin of my husband, and his brother, much older brother, very intelligent, charming man, very intelligent man, and at the time when they start burning the books, I said, "Something must be done for the rest of the world, because the man is a Madman. They must stop him. And any person who could burn the books is not normal." He said, "Oh well, we can't interfere in somebody else's affairs in some other country." I said, "Well, it won't be one country involved. We shall all be involved." That was my reaction, of course, absolutely freezing inside myself. What can it be? Horror. I had, at the time, a brother in Germany. He was studying in Leipzig when the War broke out, I think I told you. And when, during the First War, he wanted to come, after the War, to Russia, return to Russia, but my father didn't want him to, because there were, the Communists then started Communism, and he didn't want him to come, he thought it would be a terrible time for him to come, so he stayed down in Germany, but he wasn't allowed to practice.

Practice?

Medicine. He studied medicine there. And he and two or three other Russian students, I think they started some sort of Co-Op, I don't know what it was, a business, some business. And fortunately, my father, at the beginning, he uses his

influences, and they got him out in time, I don't know which year, but they got him out of Germany, and he came to Israel. He was an old bachelor by then. But in, I tell you which year, again, I've lost count, about 57 years ago now, what year would that be?

Well, the mid-thirties.

In the thirties, my sister from Israel, came to stay with me, and she went first to, through Germany and stayed with my brother, and then, already there were all the rumours of .....?? (INAUDIBLE WORD) and threats and so on, and, by the way, in the meantime, my family always say to my brother, "Why don't you get married and have a family?" He said, "Never a German woman. Never." He was very much against the Germans. They were very, perverts, animal, in every respect, he wouldn't marry a German woman. He had a mistress, not unnaturally, but he never would marry. And, anyhow, he got away from there, and he married at very great age, and made the most wonderful father. Wonderful father. The way he brought his little boy, he was quite old by then, and he was a lovely, lovely person. I show you the photograph of him. I don't think he ever punished his boy, he just talked to him. And there was a wonderful relationship and friendship.

And they all live in Israel?

Yes. My brother is dead now, and the marriage was not successful. She was married before, and she had a child, a lovely girl, and she was accepted just, he treated her as a child, and my parents treated her as a grandchild, and she's now a very brilliant woman. And she and that little boy, wonderful friends, they're still, now, he has been through a lot of service, he went to Haifa Technion, and eventually, he was in the Air Force, but he's now, he's an architect. And very happily married. But he, his marriage was successful. She had a nervous breakdown, she heard the news that all her family were buried alive in the Baltics, in Riga, and it was such a shock to her, no wonder, of course, that she really had, she was mentally ill, and that was, but they stuck together.

What was your reaction to all the anti-Semitic activities in Germany that you read about, as the

Now?

No, as the thirties, 1930s progressed, and you heard more and more about the regulations against Jews, and the restrictions?

Well, what can you ... what you, tell me, what would your reaction be? It's unbelievable, of course, because German Jews were so assimilated that, you see, they were so assimilated, they were part of Germany, too much so, too much, they forgot their Jewish roots, some of them didn't know they were Jews, and whenever, my cousins, several of them, studied in Germany, so we had quite a good knowledge of German people. I never liked them. I liked Austrians, but I never, when we spent holidays, we were, before we went to Austria, we always went to Germany first,

because Mother used to see a specialist in Berlin first. And we knew several German families, and I didn't like the people, I didn't like the food. There was something about heavy, something I couldn't find, a rapport, rapport with them, at all. But, of course, it was obviously a case of sheer jealousy, because the best specialists were Jews, the best musicians were Jews, and that was the root of all the jealousy and envy, plus unemployment, that's what it was. And I remember the very first picture I saw in a paper, about, apart from burning books, another picture appeared in one of the papers, Daily Mail, or whatever, one of the papers, about the Jewish doctor being made to kneel, and they carved a swastika, they shaved his head, and did with a scalpel, a swastika on his skull. What could your reaction be to things like that? And we knew that the Jewish people weren't allowed to practice. The Germans weren't allowed to go to Jewish doctors. All those sort of things. It was just one mass of terrible, terrible reaction. And another thing, one felt so frustrated, and mad, absolutely, that the whole world stood by and did nothing, because I do hold the whole world responsible, absolutely. And Jews as well. Very much so, because English Jews, for instance, they didn't want to do anything because they were afraid of anti-Semitism here. You see, everybody thinks about their own flesh. That is a terrible thing. They could have done so much more. The whole world. And they, they're quiet now. Look what's happening all over the world now. What happened the other week, in Leeds, 55 graves were desecrated. All over the world, it isn't only Leeds, exactly the same repetition. All the slogans, "Kill the Jews", and all sorts of things, and in Russia, the paper, and society called Pamits, means "Memory", they opened this, the songs they sing, and the ditties, is something you can't imagine the venom, and the horrible, horrible things they say about Jews. It just is repetition. And I still say that, that it can happen in any country, because masses are dangerous whether it's French, English, German or Russian. Masses. A mass of people. Not only in the Jewish question, any question.

You have seen oppression, you had seen oppression before, when you were living in Baku.

Baku, never.

Not against the Jews.

Oh yes.

You'd seen people acting unreasonably and killing people.

Periodically.

What was your feeling?

Well, again, horror. Horror and pity. And, of course, as I say, my father did what he could, he hid several families in our house, in the basement, and we hid that boy, who could have been responsible for the life of all of us. But what, that's the only thing you could do, you couldn't do against men armed up to the teeth.

When refugees started coming out of Germany, before the War, and sometimes during, did you meet any of them?

Yes, yes, I met quite a lot, because they joined the Liberal Synagogue. We then started Liberal Synagogue. My husband was a founder, one of them.

Could you remind me which one that was?

Which year?

Which Synagogue?

No, our one we started. We had to hire rooms to have our services, till we actually afterwards got a Synagogue, but in the beginning, we just had rooms where the, and then we had no preacher, we had someone coming from, I forget the name of the woman, Montefiore, I think, she came from London to hold services at the weekend, and then, and a well-known Reverend, I can't remember his name now.

Was this when you were living in ....

In Birmingham.

In Birmingham?

Yes. And they were, that's why I have so very much against the Orthodox Jews, Jewish church, I was going to say! The Jewish Orthodox, because they not only ignored them, they refused to have anything to do with them. For instance, now, that very enlightened Dr. Cohen, famous for his brain and so on, he wouldn't accept him in the Masonic, for instance, he was Mason, wouldn't sit with him at the same meeting, as the Reverend.

Who wouldn't sit?

Dr. Cohen.

Dr. Cohen would not sit,

With the Liberal, the head of the, whatever. And we had very interesting, we had one very interesting Reverend in charge, American. Wonderful, charming man, very jolly, very wonderful dancer, wonderful, I wouldn't say womaniser, but very keen on girls, and he was very great friend of ours, and funnily enough, and then he, he married an English Jewish girl, and went back to America. And I think he went to the, not to the Liberal, to the Reform, a bit higher, a bit more Orthodox than Liberal. And one year, my sister was invited by the, a cousin of mine, who came from America, and went to Tel Aviv, he gave a dinner party, and a man sat next to her, and they got talking, and he said to her, "How do you speak such perfect English?" She says, "Well, I spent a year with my sister in Birmingham." So he said, "What's the name?" So he says, "What? Louba and Jos? My great, great friends." He was so  
....

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And then we had a little man, I think it was Reverend Tsouka, his name was, Tsouka, his name, and, who was, to look at, very insignificant little fellow, but he was a wonderful, awesome man. Great, man of great morals and great understanding. And he married a non-Jewish girl. What happened. One day, a very glamorous blonde called on him and said she wanted to study Judaism. She was, I forget what she was, a Christian, but one of the branches of Christianity, Methodist, I think she was a Methodist. But she had, in her family, far away, somebody Jewish. And she was very interested in Judaism, it appealed to her very much. And she studied, and she decided to convert. Before she married him, she converted, and some time afterwards he married her, and she held the Sunday School Cheder, because my grand-daughter went to her Cheder. My grand-daughter, my daughter, I can't remember. One of them, anyhow! She was a very ... and they held very interesting talks and discussions in their private house. And then eventually went to Jamaica, and was a Reverend there for a long time. And he came back, he was a Reverend at the Wembley Synagogue, Liberal Synagogue, here. He's in England now.

Can you remember his name?

I forget the first name. I should remember because we're great friends. I think it's Tsouka, Tzouka or Tsouka, Tzouka or Tsouka. I've got it in my book somewhere, his address and so on. A lovely man. A really lovely woman, she was a beautiful woman, in every way. But she was a glamorous, glamorous person.

And this was when you were living in Birmingham?

Yes.

And then you moved to,

Must have been my daughter who went to her Cheder, yes, must have been, of course.

And then in 1937? Was it? You moved to Stratford in Arden.

Yes, yes. How long were you there? How long did you live there.

Until '75, '75.

And then where did you go?

To London.

Where in London?

East Sheen.

East Sheen?

East Sheen, yes. What happened? Well, my children were rather worried, my husband wasn't well for some time, and they were very anxious, and they wanted us to come and live in London. It was a great mistake. A very great mistake. He was frustrated here. And so my husband said, "All right, if you can find us the smallest place you can."

A house?

A house, the smallest house, you can get it. Not expecting it to happen so quickly. About a week or two afterwards, we had a telephone call from my son, and he said, or from my daughter, I can't remember, to say, "We've just found a place, we'd like you to come and see it." So, my husband said, "If you think it's right, I'm not travelling six hours to London to see it. If you think it's right, sign it on our behalf." Which we did. But when we got there, after a very large Elizabethan house, the rooms so spacious, it was a tiny cottage, beautifully, what attracted my children was, well, the couple who were selling it were both very artistic, and it was very attractive, I must say that. It was very very attractive little cottage, and done so much. There was a small sitting room, with a window, sort of broken into, like a bar, with a window to the dining room, and then there was a bathroom, kitchen and a bathroom, and two bedrooms, which was all right, but the rooms were very small. And a tiny garden, which wasn't, tiny in comparison, which wasn't cultivated. I think I showed the photographs of the garden my husband made. He made most exquisite garden then, at his age, he was then already 80 something, must have been 80, yes, just about 80 he was. He build the most glorious garden. He was a very keen gardener and he knew every blade and he read every book, and he had a book which I called his "Bible", and he occupied that, but, he missed being a VIP. You see, in Henley-in-Arden, he built that, he voluntarily worked a local Hall. There was a Hall, very much neglected, as every village got a Hall, and he had it completely renovated and rebuilt. He got them, he scrounged everywhere. He got them a stage, lights, every utensil, every chair, he, he stayed, he was with an architect from morning till night, during the week. Weekend he away, but during the week he was there. He was very, as I say, being a perfectionist, he wasn't very liked by the builders and things, because he expected they would, for instance, he made specially for old people, a proper ramp, so that they should be able to go down, you see, extra things.

Was this for lectures, and theatrical events, the Hall?

Theatrical events, yes, lectures, anything. Anybody, they played badminton there, and, oh yes, it was full, it was very good dramatic society. And they held competitions from all round villages there. And he provided everything. There wasn't a thing that he didn't get them. And they made a special room in his name, they called "Captain Ruben's" name. And everybody knew him. And everybody knew me, because I X-rayed, I told you, for so many years, within 30 miles radius, so I X-rayed everybody, grandparents, and grandchildren, and babies, and everyone. And it was as, if we went to any shops, we had wonderful treatment, wherever we went, we had marvellous treatment. It was really a kingdom of us own, one's own.

And he missed all the, he was very friendly with the people there, with the local doctor, and the local bank manager, who was marvellous to us. For instance, every weekend when we went, we packed our silver, if we went anywhere, in a big, it took me all morning to pack it in a suitcase, and the bank manager used to send one of his clerks to collect it and leave it there. And anything he wanted, he bought loans from them, for the home. They were marvellous. And there were parties all the time. And the local people, there were no Jewish families, except next door to us, was Michael Balcon's sister, she was there. She married eventually, but she was, really, we should have had it, but she lived in a part of Birmingham which was blitzed, so we let her have it.

The house next to yours, did you say?

Yes. It was a small place, antique shop. And the man gave it up, so when we had our cottage, we had it on condition that if ever the cottage next door got empty, we should have advantage, because we wanted to enlarge it, the extra bedrooms.

You're talking about in East Sheen?

No, no, no. Talking about Henley.

Yes, oh I see, yes.

In Henley. Although, as I say, we were the only Jewish family apart from Netty, the people here were most welcoming, we never felt any sign of anti-Semitism. There were parties, and house parties, and all the time going. Christmas time we had, for weeks, we had invitations everywhere. We, not only, they didn't know we were Jews, we stressed the matter, that we were Jewish people, and, but we, as I say, we never, never felt any feeling against us at all, whatsoever.

Was there a Synagogue in Henley?

How could it be? There were no Jews.

I would have imagined not.

No. No Synagogue in Stratford. The only Synagogue they had was in Warwick, or Leamington.

Did you go?

No, we used to go to Birmingham.

You went back to Birmingham?

Yes, it's about, what, about 30 miles, or 28 miles.

How often did you go?

Well, one time when Jos was away, I used to go practically every Friday, because by then, we had another Jewish family, well, he was a barrister, Jewish boy, and he was married to convert, and she was, kept up Jewish absolutely. I went to her Yom Kippur, before and after. And they used to go, he was, they took very active part in the Liberal Synagogue, and they collected me, and I went with them. Very funny, they came to London, to Henley, and they never saw me, of course, because I was never there, working. But they saw my husband, and they heard that there was a Jewish man, from the Liberal Synagogue, so they approached him, and he made great friends with him and his wife. She was a lovely girl. Lovely, lovely person. And then they moved afterwards, to a village, about 10 miles away from us. And then, I stopped going. But at that time, I used to go with them, and Jos went. And, of course, my daughter had, my grand-daughter had Bat Mitzvah there, at the Liberal Synagogue.

What was your life like in East Sheen, once you had moved?

Well, you see, the thing is, it's different for a woman. I had grandchildren, which I'm, I was very devoted to, and very close to, and I am self-sufficient, as long as I have got good music and good books. And then, of course, my family, my son and my daughter, and I was close to my daughter-in-law, and my son-in-law, so there was friendship and so on. But my husband missed it very much. He is not one who likes to read fiction, or listen to anything light. He definitely, he read a lot, but mostly either War memoirs, or autobiographies, or on gardening. And he was perfectly happy watching the games and so on, because he was a great sportsman, himself participating and appreciating. He loved athletics and riding the horse shows, and in Henley he was one of the stewards of all the horse shows there, he loved it. He couldn't ride himself then, he used to in his youth. And there he had very large circle of friends there, and my daughter was very thoughtful. I can't tell you to what details she went before we moved. Found various societies for us, apart from organising doctor and dentist, and newsagents, and everything, she provided everything, every little thing, she thought of, apart from getting ready the addresses of this, that and the other, and she found societies, sort of societies that we used, he was very interested in the history of East Sheen and so on. He went several times, but he could never make friends, close friends there. They were strangers to him. And he had no, the people around us, they were tiny little cottages. He had nothing at all in common with them. We had made very good friends with next door. Next door was let off to three Australian girls. There were two university girls, who went to university together, and the third one, they met in Australian, it isn't an Embassy, Australian, Australia House.

High Commission?

Australia House. And they were wonderful girls. We started friendship. They called on us and said would we mind if they had a party? And we said, "Of course, we didn't." And then they said, "Would you like to join us?" And from then on, they included us in everything. They were lovely, lovely girls, and all those three girls, they got on so beautifully together, and they had a large circle of Australian, mostly students, or ex-students, and every one of them was nice. And when one of the girls, she, she did a job here with Rotarians, and one girl did teaching at some

school, and then eventually she went to the Commissioner for Australia, to look after their child, who was a smartie. And they were all mad on theatres, and they used to stand all night in the queue to get into the opera and concerts. They were lovely lovely girls, I can't tell you. And when one of the girls' parents came, they made friends with us as well. And every year they came, they visited us, even after the girls had left. And I still get great correspondence with them. I'm afraid I don't answer them. And those three girls, they kept up, in Australia, although in different places, just like a one big family. I can't tell you, I can't speak too well of them. If they are an example of Australians, they are wonderful. And they always say about being the crude, and lack of interest in culture, well, I can tell you, they were not that type. So we made friends. And then we had, we both love young people, and that's the only compensation we had. But, with the older generation, we found nothing in common. They were not, there was no grounds on which he could find a common, he couldn't find common ground with them. No interests. They're all very nice. And the next door, one side, a very tiresome woman, but she was a marvellous neighbour. Right to the end, really, when he was ill, every morning, first thing, she used to come in, want to know what we wanted. She intruded too much, as a matter of fact, too much, but with good intentions. She, every morning, anything we wanted. If I wanted something done, she would run the other end of London to do it. She still, we're still friendly, but she's a very tiresome person, woman.

And, of course, where you were, you saw more of your children and grandchildren?

Oh well, of course, that was the idea.

That was the idea, yes.

Well, of course. When we were in Henley, they could only come, children only come holidays, they were at school, boarding school, and again, my, as I say, they were worried all the time. And if they came, they came to us in Wales, because the friends of ours, next caravan, used to let us have their caravan when the children came, so they spent with us, a week or a fortnight. A week at a time. But it wasn't the same as it being, in fact, when I gave up my work at the hospital, my grandson said, on the telephone, "Granny, when are you giving up your hospital? We never see enough of you." You see, they wanted. And so ...

Did you have any help in your new home?

At home?

Yes. Did you have a maid?

You see, I must have told everything to some other person. Must have been.

No, in East Sheen, did you have a maid?

No, no. Oh no, it was tiny little place. When my husband was ill, they send us, they did send me Home Help, yes, I did have Home Help, once or twice a week.

To do the daily work?

Myself?

No, the Home Help did the housework?

Oh yes, yes. And I had every, and afterwards we had more help, Home Help, and everyone was wonderful. I never, all the, the few years I had them, I've never missed a thing, I've never locked anything up, and they are kindest, absolutely kindness themselves. Every one of them, of the Home Help.

When did you make the decision to come to the Nightingale House?

Well, originally, when my husband was so ill, I was advised, again, his cousin's daughter, the cousin I told you, to whom I complained, and I told about burning books, his daughter. She, her mother was in a home, a Jewish Home, a very very nice home, somewhere in Hampstead, I think, I don't know. And to me, it was horrible, to think that her mother should go to a home, when she's got children. She had a daughter there, two daughters, both very comfortably off, and to go, not to have her at home, I couldn't understand it at all. But, eventually, you see, it happened to me. And she heard about it, and one, she was very very good, Dorothy, and she lived in London, she was a widow by then, and she said, she heard of the Nightingale House, that we should go and think about my husband going there, that we should go there, because he was getting to a state when it was difficult to manage him at home. He was never, right to the end he was not incontinent or anything, but he was, suffered with arthritis terribly. So I came to see the place, and they took me round, and I thought it was very very nice, but not, it was really thinking about him getting towards, if he got bad enough that he wanted to look, have full-time looking after, that he should come. But he died before. I didn't intend coming here at all. And what happened, in 197, in 1980, no, three and a half years ago,

1987,

'87, yes, towards '87, yes. '88. '86, towards '86. It was a terrible winter, and my pipes were all frozen, and the ground was frozen, it was dangerous to go out there. And then they found we had a, something wrong with our damp course, so all the floors had to be up. I was away in Israel. When I got back, I found the house in a terrible state. Anyhow, they thought they found it, covered the floor, then again it came, the dampness came through, and every time we had to, I had to pack my china, because they were very valuable antique china, and there were shelves on the walls, it was a very attractive place, there were two alcoves, large alcoves, and one was for the library, and one was for the china. Every time, everything had to come down, and it was terrible. Had the winter been good, I might have not considered. And while I was moving the books, I lifted something up, and I got impacted fracture in my spine. So they decided I should come here. You see, my children did offer me, either of them, said they'd like me to stay with them, but I wouldn't, no. I didn't feel I should intrude on them. I wouldn't, I didn't think it was fair.

So you came here in 1987?

Must have, '86, or '87. I must look at the dates I've got. About, it would be, it was three years at Christmas, so three and a half years now, I have been here. And before that, I had to go to St. George's, for assessment. Not St. George's, no, Roehampton, they had to assess you, whether to come, to be fit to come in or not. And I was, you're supposed to be there a month, but I was six weeks there because I wasn't really fit to come. I'm afraid I had a very bad experience there. First of all, which was very clever, when I went in, I was examined by a doctor, was an Armenian, by the way, very keen on ballet and so on, and immediately, he said I was thyroid. Something doctors, although I complained about swollen glands, and the fact that I was, my skin was getting very dry, when I used to take my jumper off, if it were black, it was covered, just if I had dandruff. The skin was beginning to, a sign of, a sign of thyroid. Dry skin. Some people have double vision. I did tell you, I think, I diagnosed my husband's thyroid. Well, this, and immediately said, how he could tell, I don't know, so they put me on a thyroid, you know, tablets for thyroid, and then, after so many weeks, of course, they're only supposed to have you a month, and a doctor one day, he saw me walking out from the bathroom, the chief doctor, consultant. "Oh", he said, "you're quite fit to go back to your cottage." Well, I was far from it. I fell only two days before, in the bathroom. So I said, "I'm sorry, you can tell me my condition of my health, but you can't tell me how I feel. I certainly don't feel fit enough to go. I couldn't go back there." Anyhow, so they kept me a fortnight. In the meantime, Irene got in touch with Nightingale House, and I came here for the interview, with Dr. Lasserson, and then they accepted me straight away. So, in about, I went home, I think, for a, or, to my daughter's, for about a fortnight, and in the meantime, she got everything ready, everything had to be marked, and you know, all the necessary, to sort out what I needed, and have them all marked here and that. She was too wonderful. I must say, she has been too wonderful.

And you see a great deal of your family, don't you?

Oh yes, I do. They telephone every day. And I see them, I was on Sunday at Irene's. If my son is away, I go to her, and in the week, she used to take me out a lot, to see some of the National Trust houses. Once a week she used to take me out, and I go there, or, for instance, on Thursday, I'm going to my son's, because at the weekend, they will be away. Otherwise I got alternate weekends, and perhaps during the week, just for a few hours, for lunch, or something like that.

And you told me that they take you to Aldeburgh?

Oh yes.

You've gone to Aldeburgh, you've gone to concerts.

Oh yes, yes, yes. Oh yes. They're very good. I must say, I'm lucky, because had my son wanted me to visit him, and his wife was not very welcoming, I would feel it very much, but she is wonderful. She looks after, I call her my "lady in waiting", she really does look after me marvellously. But, of course, I don't call on her for things, like, for instance, my daughter does my laundry for me, or shopping, things like that. I ask Joan certain things, little things, but I wouldn't put on her, because they lead a

very busy life, and she is between two places. She has no help in the house, she does everything herself. Washing, and ironing, and everything, sewing, mending, gardening, she's really a marvellous woman, but she makes me very welcome. And I feel it. My son-in-law makes me welcome. He's not an easy man, but I enjoy his company because he's very intelligent, and very keen on, my son, for instance, doesn't discuss serious matters. He says, when I go there, "I must relax and enjoy it. Why think about things that upset me?" He won't discuss anything that's going to upset me. But with my son-in-law, I discuss various problems. Not my own, the world problems. Very much so. And he supplies me with very interesting books. My son supplies me with interesting books, but not the modern stuff. He's very, very steeped in the old literature. He won't read, well, he does read modern, but nothing that's got any sordid matter.

You're implying that you like books with sordid matter?

Yes. Very much so. Very much so. I don't like light fiction at all. And, at the moment, I'm reading Bruce Chatwin's books, but I don't enjoy, no, I can't say I don't enjoy it, I enjoyed it, but I don't find as absorbing as I find other authors who travel, like Theroux, or Eric Newby, or Theroux, I like his books. People, I like, they absorb me much more. And Rabourne, have you heard of Rabourne? A very interesting writer. I find that Chatwin interesting, but it's not, the other books I would read without leaving, but this, I had two books at the same time, reading it, and my son-in-law and my daughter have got lots of books on food, every expert in cookery.

Are you interested in that?

What?

Are you interested in that?

Very much so. The whole thing, my husband was a gourmet, and my son is an expert on wines. He advises people, various firms, advises them, doesn't buy, advises them on wines, and he was, on their behalf, he goes to Spain, France, Italy, and he stays at all the castles and chateaux and so on, tasting wines, and then writing up about them, and that is his profession now.

Sounds delightful!

Yes. And it's a very strange thing. In their marriage, how they contributed to one another. She was, she is a, I told you, she's a, [switch off a minute], was brought up with a father, very strict Quaker, she was, her mother was, went to Quaker School, the same as Joan and her whole family, for generations there, and they were Quakers, and they were very, her father believed in frigidity, not frigidity in the sex sense, but not to indulge in food and drink, you know. Everything had to be home grown, and, but she adapted herself marvellously. When she got married she knew nothing about cooking in that way, but she read up, the first book she got was a Jewish book, you know that famous Jewish cookery book, what is her name, the woman?

Oh, Mrs. Beeton? No, no, Florence Greenberg.

Greenberg. She got her book, yes. And they've got every book on cookery, and she's superb cook now. They're very interested in cookery books. Are you interested in cooking, in food?

Yes. Yes.

Last night, not last night, the night before, they had a marvellous, you know, you've heard of two, the Roux Brothers, they had one of their demonstrations, they are wonderful people, wonderful. It's a pleasure just to see them work together, and last night they had competition for the amateurs, that was very clever. Three people, they tried to find the best amateur in England. It's the second week. It is brilliant. They're brilliant. They're really as good as any professionals. Marvellous. Oh yes, I'm very very interested in cookery. So they've got, but usually, all those cookery books are written with such wit, and anecdotes, for instance, I've got one book written by Paul Levi, who is a, who's got four degrees, two English universities, and two Americans, he settled here, but he concentrates on food and cooking, and writing about food and all that. It's a most amusing, interesting book. If you'd like to borrow sometime, I'll lend to you with pleasure.

Mrs. Rubens, when you look back on your long life, it's been a very very eventful long life.

Yes, yes. A lot of it I'm not telling you. A lot of sadness, and a lot of traumatic experiences, which involve other people, so I'm not telling you about. But I've survived, I say myself, I'm lucky. I, when I was, I said I came first, I cried for the whole year into my pillow, and I was saying all the time, "Thank goodness it isn't Rachel, my sister, because she's much softer. Much softer and not so strong."

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