

NATIONAL LIFE STORIES

ARTISTS' LIVES

Josef Herman

Interviewed by Paul Thompson

C466/04

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**National Life Stories**

**Interview Summary Sheet**

**Title Page**

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F1411 side A

The best point of starting might be about your family background. I mean perhaps we could start by talking about the oldest people in the family that you remember.

Well unfortunately there were very few of the oldest people that I could remember from childhood. There was only my great-grandfather, an oldish Jew who arrived one day, nobody recognised him when he declared himself to be our great-grandfather, my mother's grandfather. And he was a lovely, a lovely old man you know. Though my mother knew nothing about him, she took him in, and he stayed with us. And the best I remember of him was an old old man who kept to children, closer to children than to adults. And practically twice or three times a week he would take me to the old Jewish cemetery; there he would sit, and he would become a bit philosophic about his life. He would say, 'You know that [inaud] at the end I don't know what it was all about.' And I thought from a half literate person [inaud] a very profound observation, because we all [inaud] sooner or later. But he was an illiterate old man, you know, but a lovable, a lovable character, and the most moving thing which remained with me forever is his death. He used to go late afternoon to bed for a nap, and I would have said about four or five, and my mother sent me in to see how Great-grandfather was getting on because he should have been up. And I went in, touched him, no good[?]. And then, he used to have very red cheeks, a lovely kindish face with a beard, you know, and his face was completely white. So I was frightened, and ran back to my mother and told her this, and she came in. She said, 'You go out, you go out, he's dead.' And this is the first time that I actually witnessed a death as[?] it should happen, terribly[?] you know. Because only a few weeks[?] [inaud] the life. [inaud], what is it? What has happened to him?

And was there a Shivah after that then?

Oh yes, there was the usual ceremonial bits about him, but I didn't take part in those things, because [inaud] they were overcrowded, family in one room, so children [inaud].

Really?

So they were pushed out, at Shivah we were pushed out. But other festivities[?] we used to come and say prayers you know, etcetera, but we didn't take part in... And this is my greatest memory of this old man [inaud].

And what work had he done before then?

Quite frankly I don't know, because he never lived with us, he as far away. He only arrived one day and declared himself [inaud], he had no money whatever.

And, I mean your mother had been out of contact with him because he lived in a different town then, or...?

Oh yes. Yes, you know, but it's an extraordinary thing, that Jewish families live very close together, but the ones who went away, they're away, you know. If you may not have seen them, you may not have seen them for years, but when they arrived and they declared themselves as your family, so they are your family, expecting...just taken for granted. Nobody questions, and nobody asks for documents or what, you know. In fact, he wasn't an influence on me, but it was a profound experience, you know, and my first meeting with death. Of course the later deaths are much more objective, because people die, and funerals, and I saw them, you know, but this one was very near; it was the first face which turned from red to white.

How old were you then?

About twelve or thirteen. So this was the first [inaud]. In fact I can't say much more, I can't say much more about him except that there was a close attachment, because I always feel he has hung[??] around me, when I went down to this old Jewish cemetery [inaud], you know. And it's a very funny thing, that even today I am not frightened of cemeteries, you know, no fear whatever. What I have begun to look later is at the various types of monoliths. The rich have very ostentatious ones, the poor have very low stones, and the poorest were buried somewhere near the...at the very end, near the wall you know, no money at all. I remember one day my grandmother took me out to the cemetery there, and she lay down and cried [inaud] her heart out [inaud] grieves and this. And [inaud] she know who was buried there, there was no sign whatever! Perhaps she didn't know, but she had to weep for somebody and she imagined that this is the place, this close relative of hers, and just prayed.

This was your mother's mother.

Yes.

Who was called...?

Feigold[ph].

Feigold[ph], yes. Yes, so can you tell me more about her?

Well she was a great...she was a very great kind of, a very strong-built woman, and as I described it in 'Related Twilights', she was fascinated by gold [inaud]. She had none, she had nothing, but a gold watch was for her a supreme spectacle of visions! And my father you know...and she spent her days [inaud]. More than my mother, my mother didn't...my mother had had a very tragic love affair with a revolutionary [inaud], you know, and she never heard of him, but she was as a girl very much in love. She just waited for him to come back, she was absolutely certain that he would come back. On every occasion she tells [inaud], you know. And waited for him, but he never came back, [inaud]. And she was forced by my grandmother to marry this man with the golden watch.

Your father?

Yes. You see, my father was [inaud]. Of recent I have better memories of him than I had some years ago, you know; because, it is very unfair, I told[??] myself very unfair to him in my 'Related Twilights', I was very unfair, to abuse it you know, and to bring out only the negative side of his vulgarity, you know, [inaud]. They were true, but there was also another side to him, a very very caring side you see. And you must remember that the days of which I speak, the Twenties, were days of severe unemployment, and particularly the coming of Bata, the Czech term of making goods, had completely destroyed thousands of lives of poor little [inaud] you know. And you could see them walking around the street with little boxes [inaud], fighting over you to repair things on the spot, you know. And my father was very clumsy in these fights[??], because he usually gave in, you know. So he began to sell vegetables. Get out to the market about four o'clock in the morning, buy some vegetables, and then carry them from house to house in the better areas, sell them and come back with some bit of profit. He was a very very caring man, you know.

This was after the shoe business?

Oh yes.

Didn't he have a factory at one point?

No, he started, he started that; he had become very wealthy, he was the part-owner of a company, and being illiterate, I think he was one day [inaud] over by his partner Friedman, a document to sign, and all he had to do was make three crosses because he couldn't write, and

these three crosses, with these three crosses he signed off his part of the ownership. And one day he arrived and he wasn't let in, and Friedman in the meantime sold the factory and went to live to America. And my father was so [inaud] he never recovered from this.

He became depressed.

Hopeless, you know.

So how did that show itself?

No, just he deteriorated, couldn't make a living, [inaud] landed in the slums.

So when you were born you mean, you had a better house?

There was only one year of his good times, the other years were all [inaud].

So you don't remember the good times. No, of course not, no.

No. But I know only of what I was told by my mother, you know. Because whenever they were having quarrels, and I would say to my mother - [inaud] take always the side of my mother - and I would ask her, 'Why can't you leave him?' Oh, she would say, it was such a moving thing[??], it sounded like someone desperate[??]. 'He wasn't always like this. He wasn't always like this.' [inaud] in spite of this. But the good side of my father was really that he cared, you know. It was a technique[??], a very unlikely technical [inaud], the best way he could, you know. And he really did everything...everything possible. When my sister got ill, and the hospital wasn't far from where we lived you know, and this was the only big chestnut tree in the whole street. And this is why I remember this hospital [inaud], you know. It had a white wall, and a big chestnut tree, and always the mystery of what was going on behind this wall. And my father used to sleep there, [inaud] used to sleep against this wall when my sister was ill, she was in hospital; we hardly saw him, he was so concerned with her. You know, it's an extraordinary thing that the oldest [inaud] and the immense courtesy of the poor.

Did you feel that caring side of your father yourself, as a child?

Oh very much so, very very much so. Because you see I couldn't keep jobs, because my heart was somewhere else and I didn't know [inaud], you know, and went from one job to another. And you know, each...losing a job was for me personally not a catastrophe, but it affected the

economics of the home, and my father would say, 'Well Josef, you will never be rich, you will never be of great help to us, but perhaps one day you will find your way, and then we will all be better off'. No, a wonderful mind[??] you know. This is why I speak you know with such immense...it means to me so much to understand the natural courtesy of the poor, the natural caring for each other, you know. For example much much later, when I was already a youth and I was hiding from the police and I had to sleep one place to another [inaud], and I came once to a middle class family whose son was a friend, you know. Now, there were about four rooms, and when I asked for a place to spend a few nights, he said, 'Of course, I'll ask my mother'. His mother came out and said, 'We have no extra bed.' (laughs) You know. Now this is a thing which would never happen with the poor. They will sleep on the floor, they will sleep on the table, they will sleep under the table, you know. There wouldn't be such a middle class reply, you know. 'We have no extra bed'!

Was your father's family originally wealthy?

No no no, I know nothing about my father's family.

Why is that then?

Because he never talked about it, so I know absolutely nothing about his family, he never mentioned their existence. I knew only that he came from outside Warsaw, a rather small village, you know, that he came from there. But what his family did, and the way he left home, I didn't know. And I don't know even how he came to line up with this man Friedman and became such a wealthy... You see, the whole wealth [inaud] one thing, this Friedman was a very very capable businessman; my father was a craftsman, so he ran the workshops and Friedman supplied the [inaud]. He got himself supplying the Russian army with boots. So this was immense, and when he made enough money, and then the Russians were really [inaud], you know, he just gave them [inaud] signed document and he ran away with all the money to America, and my father was...[inaud].

Your father continued to try to make shoes?

Oh yes, yes yes, but he was not a very good craftsman you know. If the truth be said he wasn't a very good craftsman you know, and he very seldom got good work. There were better cobblers in the district than him, you know. But nevertheless he did his best. And do you know it's a very funny thing, that people with gifts do their best well, and people ungifted who do their best badly, you know. So, he did his best but it was bad. He never even



understood whether it was bad, or why it was bad; he had no sense of quality whatever. But he was a decent human being.

Did you talk to him a lot as a child?

No, not as a child; as a child we lived mostly in the street, there was no conversation at all. With my mother I had some conversations, because my mother was a very reflective kind of nature; you know, she did a lot of thinking. And if she would have been a little bit literate, probably...there was some poetry in her you know, but she just couldn't...materials, books, there wasn't the vocabulary, there was nothing, you know, there was nothing [inaud]. But I remember she was already quite an old woman just about forty, when she learned...she began to learn to read, you know. And once[??] I helped her then, and I thought, this was immense sweetness[??], and she was a lovely woman, she was really a lovely woman. Not only is it that I was the first son and therefore she was my first great love of a woman, and this is quite natural, this is quite often, but not only this, there was only[??] an objective feeling towards her in her own right. She was a splendid person, a splendid person. You know, for a time, when I was already quite advanced in my work as a graphic designer I used to earn a lot of money, and I lived [inaud]... I never liked really the work as such; I wanted to...by that time I knew that I wanted to be a painter, but painting, I cannot make a living from that. So, I [inaud], and I had the illusion that if I work through the winter on the graphics, make enough money, in the summer I will go, I will remove myself to the Carpathian mountains, and there paint. Well it didn't work, for the simple reason that by the time you had cleared your mind from applied thinking to more abstract thinking, thinking which is painting, the summer passed. It was a very...it is a very very difficult thing. When today sometimes young painters come to me and tell me of the same illusion, 'Well I have to make money so I will do this and that', I don't discourage; I have no right to discourage, because what can I...how can I help them; I don't discourage them. But deep in myself, my God yes, here it goes again! No, it's a difficult picture, a different problem, to combine several jobs. I mean the writer[??] certainly, you know...

Absolutely.

Many writers, there is hardly a poet who can live from poetry, it's ridiculous, so they do have jobs, and they know it. And some of the best writers did have [inaud]. Then you read in his[??] autobiography, you know, how many hard jobs he had to do. Because he couldn't make a living of his poems. Oh, this is an understandable dilemma, you know, it's an understandable dilemma. But this is why, when Soviet Russia started, and declared that every artist and every writer, you know, has to have a State pension, and we said, my God, this is

marvellous. Now, the State pension can have a lot of terrible little [inaud]; you have to do this and you have to do this, you have to write about this, you know. Then you [inaud]. It protects; it is better not to be so secure, and to be free and do what you want, you know.

But, can we go back to your mother. I mean did she do any paid work at all?

Oh yes, well she had to do scrubbing floors for the better off families, taking in washing from the better families, you know. She always...she the pillar of the home, there's no question about it. You see my father had days of deep depression when he would do absolutely nothing, you know, and she would treat him as a child. And she would go out and come back with some money, doing all the time, she was always active. And do you know [inaud] thing, she never lost her beautiful skin. She had a lovely skin, you know, and her hands had never got swollen as usually people who have [inaud]. I always remember, I still have...I have her photograph somewhere here you know, which I discovered about a few years ago, the last photograph of her in Warsaw. My God she was a very attractive woman. She was a very [inaud], you know. But my love to her was in every respect [inaud] the richness of her feeling [inaud]. And so she had no vocabulary to express herself. She would [inaud] sometimes with a gesture.

What sort of gesture?

Putting her arm around you, to protect you, you know. I once got into a trouble, into a financial trouble. I borrowed money which I couldn't repay, you know, and usually people from whom you borrow money, you know, are not the nicest, it's a funny thing! (laughs) Well anyway, they would come to...they would search me out and [inaud], and when I told them look, you must wait till I have..., they didn't want to wait. So, I will never forget my mother asked them how much it was, something the equivalent, let's say two pounds fifty, but it was a great sum in the Forties[??], when you lived on less than this, you know. So she would go out, and told them, 'You come here by then, collect your money'. [inaud] caring thing. But there was similar caring from my father.

But what about discipline, I mean if you did something that she disapproved of what would happen?

There was no discipline.

None at all?

No, the [inaud] discipline didn't exist. No discipline [inaud]. They word discipline is only in a middle class family where everybody knows what they expect a child to be. In our case nobody knew what to expect, nobody expected [inaud], so there was no discipline. If I misbehaved when I was about four or five I would get a smack, but then people smacked [inaud] smacked everywhere, you know!

Yes. And did she do all the work in the house, or did your father help her?

No, my father didn't, my father was totally undomesticated; he just took it for granted that my mother was his...this is the job of the wife. And she did everything [inaud].

And apart from you had to look after your brother, your sister, who were called, I'm not sure...

Smiel and Zelda.

Smiel and Zelda, yes. And they were both younger than you?

Oh yes, I was the oldest. But they had it a little bit easier, because when they started I was already beginning to earn, so there was some support for them you see. And my sister could have been a very fine sculptress, but the Nazis saw to it that she...she disappeared [inaud]. My brother still managed to study chemistry, you know, but when I left in Warsaw in [inaud], when I left Warsaw, I don't know what happened to him. You see, our correspondence, first of all my mother couldn't write; my brother could, but my brother had quite a bit of a complicated life of his own.

What do you mean by that?

Particularly with girls.

Ah!

Oh he had a frightfully complicated life! He had about four or five girls. He was a very attractive boy, and always trouble with girls, you know. He had always or to hide out, or to lie, or to what, you know. So the letters which I got from him, they are very cryptic, but there were certain hints about the political situation on which it was very clear. We were all quite conscious politically up to [inaud] you see.

Can we come back to that later, because I would like to talk about that period in detail, but if we can sort of go on talking about you know, the earliest years.

Well this, haven't we been talking...?

Yes, yes just go on. I mean I wonder whether you could describe the place, the first place you really remember.

There was no first place, there was only...yes, we lived on the days - this I got to know later - when my father was well off, when I was only one year, we lived in a very fine area, a very fine district, but when everything went down we lived in the slum, in a stone[??] house, the only room. I remember it was [inaud] family room where my grandfather, my grandmother, my two uncles, my mother, myself, my brother and sister, all was living in one room. So it was a bigger room than this, but nevertheless it was one room.

So that's what, you're talking about 20 feet each way, or...?

Oh more, about, I should say about 24 by 26, [inaud], it's about 24.

Yes. So how did you manage to sleep in that then?

Well you see the point is this, managing to sleep was the easiest thing, because you slept...we slept everywhere. It wasn't necessary you had to have a bed, you know. And there were two beds, and the two beds were for my grandfather and my grandmother, but my father and my mother we slept [inaud]. And my uncles used to have [inaud]. And this was good, because other poor people, however overcrowded they are, have rooms with beds, everywhere there are beds. Well somehow we managed without them, you know. And if you would have come and missed the later tramcar, the latest tramcar was at 9.30 to 10, and you would miss it, you know, you stayed here.

End of F1411 side A

F1411 side B

....table, about three or four chairs, two beds, my father's little working table, my father's little working table and...and a kitchen. Not a stove[??] but a square kitchen with a tall, which was typically Continental, a kind of heating[??] place, you know. But this was in every room, no matter how poor, you see. We never suffered from cold in the winter.

Any pictures on the walls?

Oh heavens no. No, I tell you why, what was...I tell you, this is a very...[inaud] into the future. I had a self portrait of myself, my [inaud] of myself you know, and in this self portrait [inaud] I must find a reproduction of it[??], you know, and in this self portrait I have that exactly, the self portrait by Goya [inaud] his etchings. Now, this Goya appeared there because I couldn't hang Lenin! (laughs) You know, it was Lenin who would have had this space, but we couldn't hang Lenin there, so we hung Goya.

Yes, that's right, yes.

You know, the variety of symbolism. And mind you I wasn't at the time a Communist; on the contrary I was closer to the Bund you know, than to communism. But I had great sympathy for Soviet Russia of course, who hasn't, who didn't at the time?

Now we've talked of the people living in the room, we've talked about your brothers and sisters and your father. His name was David, that's right, and your mother's name was...

Sara[ph].

Sara[ph]. We've mentioned Veigel[ph], your grandmother. Your grandfather...

Uh-huh, he was...Hershl was his name, and he was a street porter. I don't know whether you know in the Continental sense what a street porter is.

Can you explain?

Yes. It is where people stood[??] on the corners of the street, and whenever there was heavy things to carry, they would offer themselves. So you could see them sometimes, I still see them in my eyes you know, bent like this with the heavy load on their backs. And this is what he did. He would get up about five o'clock in the morning - I got up at five o'clock in the

morning too, but he would get up at five o'clock in the morning and he would say his prayers. I have actually a very beautiful drawing of him which I did in the Thirties, and some ten years ago came [inaud] with some drawings from Warsaw, and there was my drawing! And I was so happy to have it, you know, [inaud] you know. It's actually a very lovely drawing. But he was a tremendous, huge man; [inaud] of course, he never...I don't think that he knew [inaud] prayers, you know. But he did put on his praying shawl, put [inaud] around, you know, but I don't think he remembered...he put [inaud]. You know, when I hear somebody saying, well Jews are [inaud], at least they know their prayer; they don't.

Did you observe the prayer rituals in the house at all?

No.

Not at all?

No. My grandfather would sometimes put on the praying shawl and would pray; sometimes when we had [inaud] carp for a Friday you know, my mother would put on four candlesticks and make the ceremony, you know, the movements[??], but she didn't know anything of the [inaud]. They would go to the synagogue on Yom Kippur, on the Day of Atonement, and on New Year, but these were the only times they would go, otherwise they...

Would you have a seder in the house?

We had some sort, but only on the times when there was money. The seder was more a good reason for a feast you know, but the times, there was a year when there was no money at all, there was no seder. You know, what people don't understand, they really think that Judaism and a Jew are the same thing, but they are not.

Mm, of course, yes.

You know? And we were all Jews, but Judaism in my life plays very little part, hardly any.

So you kept the dietary rules, or not?

Yes, yes. Yes, they would go out of their way to buy kosher food. Now this was rather from the prejudice, in that they really believed that kosher food is better than non-kosher food. They couldn't understand how Poles survive on pig! (laughs) You know. Then one day I had a Polish girlfriend, and I went back, I had supper with them, and her mother[??] said, 'Do you

eat pig?' I said no. We ate some beef! (laughing) A pig was always associated with poor[??], you know. But very rarely they had; some had you know, but very rarely.

Yes.

It's similar like here. My wife likes pig; I can't stand the smell of it when she cooks it you know, I can't stand it. Still today I won't eat pig. But I eat bacon.

Really? That's surprising.

Oh yes, yes. Yes, because bacon hasn't got the same smell as boiling or stewing pig. [inaud] to do with the smell which I [inaud].

But you get these feelings very young don't you I think, yes.

Oh yes, yes. Altogether, what remains most vividly in your memory are smells, tastes, and the [inaud].

What's the smell that you remember most?

Oh my God yes.

What would...can you describe the smell that you remember most?

Yes, oh yes. I remember best the smells of the summer, because many of the stalks[??] in the atmosphere in which they cook, [inaud] if the cook didn't work well, so there was always smoking [inaud]. And this smell I can never forget, it is always with me. I felt[??] this smell. And then there was the smell of the food, you know, in particular I liked the way my mother did the carp.

How did she do carp then?

Well she would buy a big carp, cut it up into slices, and then first of all boil onions, what is the other thing, which is white...

Leeks? No.

No no, not leeks. What is it called?

Grows under the ground?

No, it grows on top of the ground, but it is white and longish, just like carrots.

Not a...

Parsnip.

Parsnip. Parsnip?

Yes. So she would boil her[??] parsnip, carrots, onions, and this she would steam for a long time till they were almost mash, always adding a bit of water, sugar, salt, pepper. And when this has steamed for a long time, then she would put in the carp. And I still cook it in this way for my wife, when I cook, when I get the chance for cooking carp I cook it in this way, you know. It was really a delicious thing. But the aromas were just incredible, it's a lovely aroma of the parsnip and carrots, and it was [inaud] when you prepare it. And the sauce is so lovely, you know. So, but this is all from childhood, and it remains with me still today. Even today when my wife, there's a carp, I insist on making it, and she has learned it so well that now I have no need to insist she does it the same way[??], you know.

Very good.

Because she comes from a German family, there this kind of cooking wasn't done[?]. You know, if you did a carp you did it without the help of this sauce business you know, do it just like a fish, [inaud] you know. But no, we did it, for us it was the great ceremony of this steaming it in the sauce. It was a lovely smell, I just couldn't[??] resist it.

Going back to the room, we haven't talked about your uncle and aunt.

Well, I had two uncles and two aunts, and they were both...they were both working in various firms.

What were they called then?

[inaud], whom I met[??].

Meiloch was it?



Meiloch.

Meiloch, yes.

Yes. And they were working in storehouses, and they [inaud] six o'clock in the morning, and they got home nine to ten, you know.

And the aunts, were they working as well?

No, later on. The aunts, one was a tailoress[??], you know, and I can't remember what she did.

Was that Ryvka the other one? Was she the one who was a cleaner, you mention in...?

Yes, this was the one [inaud] you know. They were all lovely human beings, but of the two uncles, the one Shleuma was much more politically-minded, and educated himself, and became a shop steward in the union of shop workers, because he worked in a shop of the union, of the Bund you know. And he was really highly [inaud], like self-taught people can be you know, highly erudite.

And you learned from him?

Oh yes, oh yes. No, my greatest memory of him was when I was a child, and he told me the great story about Spartacus, and this was just when the Bolshevik Revolution began. And he said, and I will never forget this, he said to me, 'I told you that Spartacus will come, and here he is!' You see, Spartacus, the old Roman gladiator was for him a symbolic figure, and the Bolshevik Revolution was Spartacus. And I will never forget this, this was such a tender[??] image [inaud] you know, that this Spartacus is [inaud] than a man, and whenever there is an uprising for the progress of humanity, Spartacus is there. And I guess[??] Spartacus, later when I learned more about Spartacus he was an extraordinary figure [inaud]. Take on the Roman Empire, you know, with five hundred gladiators on his side.

Absolutely, yes.

Was something quite extraordinary. It really was something quite extraordinary. You know, at the time the punishment was crucifixion, so when the Roman Empire...eventually when some general[??] defeated the gladiators they made a whole row of crosses through[??] Rome,

from the place they defeated them to Rome, and on every one, a gladiator. You have this symbolism, the Christian symbolism of the crucifixion [inaud] was conserved[??] from the Roman method of crucifying. If you add to it[??] to a logical implications[??], you see it's a different story, but the historical fact is that the Romans introduced crucifixion as a form of ultimate punishment.

So, and he also talked to you about sort of socialist ideas.

Oh yes.

He was the first person?

Oh yes, yes. You know, but he told it in such a wonderful way, in such a wonderful way that a child could understand, could grasp it, could imagine, you know. It was greater than the story of the Paradise; it was nearer your skin than the story of the Paradise. You know, after all, Paradise, Hell, the greatest thing in all the religions is the metaphoric content, you know. The doctrines are devils, but the metaphoric content is very rich you know. Hell and Paradise, Devil and God; you know, these are contrasts which are with us. They all come from our own countries[??].

But you in some ways were brought up in a kind of hell weren't you, of this...?

Well, curiously enough I didn't see it; I looked on [inaud] not as...my childhood, I title the years of my childhood as the years of the sun.

I did, I did notice that. But you said that your hour was the hour of twilight.

Oh yes.

Why do you say that?

I do because it's more [inaud].

Ah, yes I understand.

[inaud] an hour of the self maturing[??], you know. But the childhood was not the same as maturing, it was just a spontaneous outburst. And it lives in my mind as a very beautiful childhood, in spite of the fact that I know that we had horrible days. I know that I had hungry

days, where for days I couldn't eat anything. And eventually when I got some food I got such stomach ache because I could no longer take in. [inaud] it is the years of the sun.

That's very interesting, yes. Would it be possible for you to sort of describe to me the street where the house was?

Oh yes, it's very easy, because it was such an uninteresting street. There was the [inaud] interesting building. You know, it was a typical slum street, with high tenements; not so high, they were about three stories was the highest building. By today's standards it's not high, but at the time it was...this was a uniform [inaud]. With a few houses of some wealthy owners who had keepers who would never let you in; you know, this was the only distinguishing mark. Later when I was about twelve or thirteen, and I had some friends in the richer houses, you know, deign to come down to take me in! (laughs)

So this was right in the centre of Warsaw?

It was in the centre, but the centre of Warsaw is just like New York, you know, just you have Fifth Avenue, a slum around the corner, you know. So in Warsaw it was the same. Slishka wasn't far from better districts, but it was nevertheless our[??] district, but it was nevertheless [inaud].

And, there are some people you mention in 'Related Twilights', like Dr Zaltzman. Why was Dr Zaltzman important for you?

Very very important. He was the most important personality in my childhood. First of all, at the age of three or four he taught me to read. Secondly, he was a utopian figure. He came from a wealthy middle class family, gave up the family to live in the slum and cure people. He didn't call himself a doctor, he called himself a healer. He was a [inaud] practice now. You know? This kind of a figure. What do doctors know?[??] Or if not[??], you could say my grandfather[??] who was ill, he would say, 'I will...' this and that. 'I tell you everything you need to keep on [inaud]. You need [inaud].' Where would we get the money for a [inaud]? You know, this is the kind...so, I gave you the best I could, I gave you...he says take this, take this [inaud] etcetera. But for the children he was a great influence in the sense, [inaud] a reader, liked children, and liked to teach them, you know, and I will never forget this [inaud] ways of teaching. And through him I acquired the first love for reading, which is still with me you know.

So that was a great gift, yes.

One is always grateful for this...for this kind of, almost Messianic people. Wonderful human beings, who could have had an easier life, like one was coming from a wealthy middle class, you know, being a doctor he could have had...no, he didn't, he chose a different life.

He was Jewish himself?

Oh yes, yes he was Jewish. But he was everywhere, everywhere. You always... I [inaud] I don't know where he slept.

Really?

Well, you know, in such an area there is hardly a day when somebody doesn't get [inaud]!

Absolutely.

You know? He was the only man to deal with it. And the [inaud]. So, there were such fantastic, there were really such fantastic figures, which really made a childhood the sun. If you remember that, we had such gratitude.

Yes. Another one was Xavery Rex, is that right?

Xavery Rex, yes, Xavery Rex. Now this was a different story, because he was a sign painter, you know he was a sign painter. I don't know whether you know Continental signs for tailors, for cobblers; for cobblers it's usually a boot, a huge boot and for tailors it is sometimes a woman with a [inaud] dress. You know, these signs are absolutely fantastic. You know that Chagall was very much influenced by these signs.

Really? I didn't know that.

Oh yes. Well Chagall had two sources: Russian icons and the Jewish signs. That he was a genius is beside the point, and that the others who [inaud] had no talent even. And men like Xavery Rex had no talent whatever, you know, but he painted all these huge posters for the local cinema, you know, and you could see him actually do it, painting the letter, a letter O with the hands sticking out with a pistol, you know. Just a silly thing! This was the greatest art I knew.

And you used to go and watch him?

Oh, my God, I used to pop in. And every now and again I was privileged, he would ask me in, say, 'Boy,' he would have so many pennies, 'go and buy powder ultramarine.' And I will never forget this ultramarine, it [inaud] with such fantastic magic, you know, and this was a great privilege to bring him the powder from which he would paint a sky or something like that, you know. And to be able to see it, because when I came back with the ultramarine he never pushed me out, he let me stay to watch him. Oh this was greater than all the [inaud] museums, this was a greater experience than all the [inaud] museums. I look on it with greater affection you see, because whenever we were later taken to the museums, 'shhhh, be quiet'; we were taken in front of this great picture by our great national painter, Yan Mateycoff[ph], who painted all the great and glorifying scenes of Polish [inaud], you know, [inaud]. And the teacher would tell you [inaud]. (laughing) So you couldn't love such things you know, quite honestly you just couldn't love it. Of course you were still...of course you were awe-struck, of course you viewed this[??] as the greatest, but when you were in Rex's place, you weren't struck in this way, you were struck by a miracle coming out, a [inaud] which meant to you more than the great victory[??] of Grunewald[??] or some other, you know. You must understand the sensitivities; the most wonderful thing about the sensitivity of great things in a child's life are really things which he will perceive and [inaud]. What do I remember of the museums? That I had to be quiet. This I remember first, you know, that I had to be quiet; that I had not to move. And that Grunewald[??] was a great epoch[??] of [inaud] the Germans. But here was something quite real[??], he didn't need an explanation you know. And he sometimes would chant, sing, or whistle, and I would join in. And when he rested, yes, he had a mandolin, he would sit down and play the mandolin, and he would sing some Yiddish or Polish folk songs. It was lovely.

And did you help him in the workshop?

No. Except [inaud] for errands! Buying ultramarine

And do you think that's where you first had the idea of being a painter, there?

No.

No.

No, not there. There I had the first idea that it is a different world. Now, it didn't occur to me even by the age of sixteen or seventeen, it didn't occur to me to be a painter; it came much...when I was about eighteen [inaud], when I got to know...actually when I got to know

students from the art school, and students from the university, students with whom[??], curiously enough, without having their education I could converse quite freely you know. And when they took me to exhibitions or to walk[??], you know, I could react. And one actual suggestion, 'Why don't you paint?' OK, so I tried, and they said, 'Oh this is fine. You will be having an exhibition!' There was a store-room, a store-house in Warsaw which gave the basement to painters to have exhibitions. There were two galleries in Warsaw and both had to be paid for entrance. For painters, young painters who couldn't afford it, went to this store-house and had their exhibitions there. And there I exhibited from the first - my first one-man show was with the man, Koterba, who was a frame maker and where the back room, which he permitted younger artists whom he liked, to exhibit. And here comes the most extraordinary thing: my first exhibition was there. What I didn't know is that you have to let people know that you have an exhibition! (laughs) That you have to print invitations, that...you know, you have to know. I didn't do anything of the kind, and there I was alone, and it was the loneliest day of my life. Here are the pictures. It was very sad, and I didn't know what to say to Mr Koterba. Why do people not come? 'Well, who have you asked?' I said, 'No, I kept it a secret!' (laughs) 'So how did you expect people to come? Did you print invitations?' Of course not, no. He said, 'Well, you see, I'll tell you what, I will print out a few invitations you can send out to people. In the meantime don't worry.' Because he liked my work very much: not so much my work as he liked me, and when I went out from this damnable first day, in the street there was my mother with a little bunch of flowers, afraid to come in not to disturb me if I had success.

Oh, that's very sad.

Yes yes.

But, now we've slightly sort of jumped on then. Can we go back to...the end of the years of the sun, what really brought the end of that? Was it the typhus would you say?

No no no, no no no. No nothing so dramatic brought the end, it was when I began working.

Ah, because in 'Related Twilights' you talk about the...

Oh no, the typhus was a general epidemic, but this wouldn't affect me, of ending my childhood.

I thought you divided the years of the sun and the years of the moon because of the...

The years of the moon was already the years of reflection, you know, and the years of the first love, you know; this was all...this takes us into the years when I had begun to have jobs and drift from job to job you know. But it was emotionally a very important...

Because I thought what you were trying to say was that that was the sort of terrible impact of the outside world, the typhus epidemic...

The epidemics of the, not only of the typhoid; you know in the [inaud], Americans sent over quite a lot of food, and Nestle milk you know, and this was for us a fantastic thing. So, it didn't bring a dramatic change in my personal life, but it brought a great change in the general social life. Just the poorest had for the first time everyday food.

Really? How did they provide it then?

From the Red Cross in[??] America.

End of F1411 side B

F1412 side A

The typhus business, the epidemics. Yes, well the epidemics consumed a lot of people; he, the doctor [inaud]...

Yes.

[inaud] children you know, and quite a lot of people perished[?]. You would see mothers taking out a child from the gutter, their child. These were horrific scenes. But at the same time there was a lot of support which came from America. Some of us got the first full meals a day through the soup kitchens and through the Nestle company, Nestle milk and, you know. Only very little bread. Well bread didn't travel like milk, so... But this is what I remember. But this didn't bring a great change to my personal life, you know; it changed a bit the social living all around, you see. My personal life began to change after, I was eleven[?] after I left school and I began [inaud].

But the other thing you mention in 'Related Twilights' was these soldiers, what they called the Hallertschiks.

The Hallertschiks. No yes, Hallertschiks were anti-Semitic, a dreadful bunch of people, really dreadful.

Can you tell me what they did?

Yes. They attacked single Jews. They attacked my grandfather; my grandfather came back one day and looked exactly like a plucked chicken, with pieces of skin and hair hanging from his face, you see, because they usually did it with their [inaud] covered like this. And they were the most awful men[?] [inaud]. But the curious thing is this, when all this happened there wasn't a single policeman. And whenever we began to organise defence groups, the police was always against us. But the Hallertschiks were before this, because I was [inaud] still a young boy to[?] remember their pogroms. These were all literally pogroms, attacking Jewish shopkeepers, and particularly individual Jews on the street, and individual Jews in Poland were recognisable because of their beards, which Poles very rarely...a Pole had a beard, if he had a beard this was a very swanky one, you know? Not the sort of thing which grows [inaud], you know. So, the Jews were recognisable, and[?] the Hallertschiks and other Semites[?] who were out against Jews did it, they attacked them.

And your uncle helped to organise the defence.



Yes, the self defence groups.

What did he do then?

Oh, organise Polish, the socialist youth, and Jewish socialist youth, arm them with sticks and whatever they could. And you know, it worked extremely well, it worked extremely well. So as socialists they didn't have much sympathy with shopkeepers, but they defended the shopkeepers. Because once the shopkeepers were evicted, they were victims.

Was that your first awareness of anti-Semitism?

Oh no, my first awareness of anti-Semitism goes back to the foundation of [inaud], when my grandfather came home plucked like a chicken and all of this. And it suddenly [inaud] cried and cried, why why why? Couldn't take it, they certainly couldn't understand it.

So that happened before the war was over, to your grandfather?

Oh yes.

Oh I see, yes.

So, this was my first awareness, but later of course [inaud] be unaware of the [inaud], it was an organised programme. You see there was the national, so-called national democratic[??] party, based upon anti-Semitism. And the [inaud], they were the first to invent the great [inaud], these Jews are bankers and Bolsheviks.

Get them both ways.

All Jews were bankers and Bolsheviks. And do you know, I didn't...when I read this, I hadn't yet met a Jewish banker. And curiously enough, there were very few Jewish bankers, because the Jews were permitted everywhere till the highest positions; at the highest positions they were stopped, you know, so Jewish bankers was an absolute fabrication. Just like the fabrication, which is now being provided[??] curiously enough in France, it's now being provided, that a Jewish mother[??] consists of blood of Christian blood, and that the brown bits on the [inaud] is Christian blood. But this today, in 1991. Have you seen the other day on television about anti-Semitism in France, about the growth of anti-Semitism?

No, I didn't, no.

Yes, it was...do you know, it goes back hundreds of years when you could tell such idiotic things to [inaud] people. But now, the [inaud] are still here, you can still say these things.

No, I heard a lot of it in the Soviet Union too.

Well yes, of course. The Soviet Union didn't conquer anti-Semitism; as a matter of fact Stalin did everything to foster it.

But, can you tell me something about your school? I mean I don't think you really enjoyed school did you.

Well no, there was nothing much to enjoy. It was an ordinary, what is called public school, you know, not your public schools.

State school.

A State school you know, an ordinary school. There was nothing...nothing much happened. It was neither extraordinary nor extraordinarily bad. I was average, quite average, and there were a few teachers whom I loved immensely, and this was the teacher of Polish, and she really installed in me a great love of language, and to continue the love of reading. As a matter of fact, I was the first editor at the age of eleven of the school magazine you know, and she really liked my writing, and she directed me. As a matter of fact at that time I wrote a little poem, and it starts like this (I improved the translation, in fact I didn't know that I would be a painter or a poet, I didn't know what I would be). You made your reports[??], I like images in boats[??], I like boats[??] and image...I like stories in images[??], I don't know that I would be a painter obviously. This was only the first time when I had intimation that I am going in a certain direction. But it was touch and go, but that it would be poetry or painting.

Yes. So you wrote a lot of poetry then?

Oh yes, very bad I wrote! Even this poem is a very bad one. But it was all concerned, subject, you know, without understanding what poetry is about. But my love of poetry was really great. A friend of mine, Felnla[ph], he was my age, and he gave his girlfriend a handwritten booklet of poetry, and this girl was absolutely appalled. Some of the finest poetry in the Polish language, of various Polish poets, you know... And do you know, and

when she discovered them and this, she was furious! And I said to her, listen dear, no, don't be furious; the very fact that he knew what to select, makes him a poet!

Very good.

This was my great defence [inaud] you know. And I still...I still believe this you know, that readers of poetry are poets; those who hate poetry are different, a different kind of people, but those who love it are...OK, not everybody has the gift of language. After all poetry is a gift of language, it's a gift of words, and not everybody has the talent, just like not everybody has the talent for pigments. If you have the talent for pigments you are a painter, that's all to it. It's ridiculous you know, it's ridiculous to put everything on the pedestal of masterpiece; if it isn't a masterpiece it's not... No it isn't like this, it's much more basic, it is much more basic. Sometimes when my little girl was ten she would come in here and I would see her standing at the easel, she always sort of put on my working apron you know, and she would stand at the easel, and she would put an orange, she would say, `Right!' She would put another white, [inaud]. If it wasn't right she would tear it up! And [inaud] really, you know, what we call talent is nothing else but a sense of rightness. Even today if the thing is not right it is scraped off, and if it is right you are astonished that it is right. Obviously not always know how it happens.

And that teacher, she was Rose Dickstein, yes.

Yes.

And I think there were some others that you disliked very much weren't there.

Oh well, there were a few hooligans, yes. There was a Mr Cybulski was a real hooligan. He knew only how to hit you. You could go along, oh! oh! oh!...he would hit everybody you know. A real hooligan. He should have been a prison supervisor or something like this, never be in a school. But you must remember that the times were such you see, there was a shortage of everything, so many, many people went into it. There was hunger, there was a shortage of people, teachers, so everybody who didn't want to starve went into teaching. And if you knew...nobody asked about qualifications. There were some qualified [inaud]. She[sic] was a devoted educator, a devoted educator, you know. When she[sic] read to us Polish poets, Cybulski [inaud] you know, at least a few of us who were involved in it, got involved in it, our heart stood still, for something so astonishingly beautiful. This can be done with words. So it always depends who, with whom, you see. Cybulski was a dreadful

chap. As a matter of fact, I still don't know what he was teaching; I know only that he was hitting us, but I...(laughing)

Was it...it wasn't a Jewish school, it was a mixed?

Yes, no no, it was a Jewish one.

Oh entirely for Jewish children.

Only for Jewish boys, yes. Because at the time there was already a division [inaud] pure education.

So did you get any religious education there?

No, no, but we could if we wanted. A rabbi would come once a week, but I had no... I was never inclined in this way. Do you know, it's an extraordinary thing, I was never puzzled by the existence of God, I just wasn't puzzled. I accepted...my view of the universe hasn't changed you know, I view the universe as a [inaud] space, and a speck of dust linking up to another speck of dust, to a third speck of dust, and [inaud]. Chance. I was amazed when Bronowski once told me, well probably this is how it happened![[?]]. You know? But this was my view of the universe, so I never viewed the universe as somebody sitting above and making everything. Whenever I heard it I just laughed, you know; I had no patience with it. And still today, you know the other day I have a close friend who was a minister, a Presbyterian minister, and he told me the other day something which I really...he is a very fine scholar and he is a great Shakespearian scholar, that this man could say such nonsense. He said, 'Well, God took over the shape of man, and as Christ, saved the world.' My God! First of all saying[[?]], what rubbish. Look at this world now, anywhere! Before or after Him. Where was any saving, you know? So, you do see, this is the kind of delusions on which most religions are based. The metaphoric content aside, because the metaphoric content is [inaud] you know, there's no question about it. And so this other, I think I said it in my 'Related Twilights', that I knew angels, and I can verify that I knew angels. Of course I knew angels. I knew devils too, you know! I remember I was once arrested in '36 or so, and I [inaud] of one of the most awful inspectors of a prison. Really an awful man you know, who would never talk to you, but yelled at you, and with this he got your submission. And I quite innocently asked him, 'If you will say it quietly I will know what you mean'. And he hit me like hell. You see, in this situation they can do whatever they want. The other way[[?]] was probably one of the most heartbreaking programmes on prisons, through with[[?]] with prisons

in [inaud], but it was the most heartbreaking programme, how the hitting still goes on; the treatment of prisoners is absolutely unbelievable.

Yes. And, you were at school from what age?

From the age of seven.

Until?

The age of about eleven and a half to twelve.

And then what happened to you after that?

Nothing, I just looked for work.

So what work did you find?

Any, any work. First, my first job I will never forget, was carrying boxes, cardboard boxes, from the factory where they produced them to the distributors, to the shops, you know. And I was...I was very small, so I was loaded with a wooden structure on the knees with the boxes on top of me, and I could hardly walk. And one day I slipped, and cried, and all the boxes got filthy, and I was sacked. This was the first job. The second job was a bit better because it was in a metal factory, you know, and this probably...this I began to like, but I couldn't stand the heavy carryings; I never had strong arms, so I just couldn't carry these things from place to place which I had to carry you know, and I was the clumsiest I think. So this, I stayed for about a year. So the longest I was a compositor printer.

Yes, yes. Can you tell me a bit about that then? You were apprenticed were you?

Yes yes yes. And I loved it you see, except...you see, I was very good at it, I was very very good at it, and I was quite well paid. Of course I was...but finishing the apprentice stage, after three years, you know the practical jobs are the most horrible jobs on this earth.

Can you describe that?

Yes, it's very simple. The practical joke was to put in types into my sandwich, with the idea that when I will bite[??] into it, I will know when I spit it out. Now the types, the printing types, they were all of lead, but besides this, they were filthy. Unfortunately for me I didn't

bit into the type, but swallowed it, and got lead poisoning, you know. So this was the end of this printing business. But still today you know, if I make a lithograph in a printing shop, for the first week it's all right, everything is fine; the second week I begin to feel nauseated. It has never cleaned up completely.

So you left the...?

Oh I had to.

What, you had to go to hospital?

Oh yes, oh yes. I was pumped out, I was cleaned out, but when I left the doctors advised me never to go back to printing, because I would be allergic, the sheer smell, and you have headaches, and tummy aches and what. So I looked for other jobs, I began to [inaud].

Can you describe that sort of printing workshop?

Oh yes, it was a very...I worked for three or four printing shops. They were all poor and kind[?]. But I was given always the best kind of work, because I was good at making good letter headings you know, inventing things. I was the first actually in Warsaw to invent pale colours on white, because up until then it was always black and white, or blue and white, or brown and white. But pale grey and white, and this took on. My boss was overwhelmed. And he actually advised me all the time, he gave me 'Gebrauchsgraphic', a German magazine [inaud] to study better, and improve. And I was quite good, and I wanted, by that time I wanted to learn to paint.

But you learned the sort of whole art of typography there.

Oh yes. I still know it today, I am a very good typographer. When I make a jacket for a book it's a good jacket.

And in these printing workshops, I mean how many people would work in there?

Oh, about...not more than about ten[?], between half a dozen and eight[?]. They were small places. And there were big places of course, the places where they printed magazines or printed newspapers, or printed books, but I never went as far as that.

And you joined the union?

Oh yes, I joined the union of printers, and youth, of Bund. And this was very...this was very good, very very good. First of all it was good because I fell in love with Yiddish, you know.

You hadn't spoke Yiddish in the home then?

Well, it was such an ugly Yiddish at home, you know, that I really preferred to always speak Polish. My friends, my Polish friends, or Jewish friends, spoke Polish; I always preferred Polish to Yiddish. But when I got to know Yiddish properly I became what one calls a Yiddishist[?]. I am still referred today, you know, that somebody writes about me, and particularly a Jewish person[?], they still refer to me as a Yiddishist[?]. But it's quite true, I love Yiddish, I begun to like Yiddish.

But how did you find out about it then?

No[?], through the contacts with the...

What was the...

Students from the Vilna[?] teaching seminar, and from the members of the youth of Bund.

There were sort of lectures provided?

Oh yes, yes, there were continuous lectures. But besides this, the [inaud], Bund spoke Yiddish on principle, and it was a beautiful Yiddish. And through them I got to know the Yiddish poets.

Were there poetry readings then?

Oh yes, yes. Altogether Warsaw was an extraordinary place, a way to have discussion groups. You could be busy, you know, for years, only attending these. And there were many wonderful people, wonderful people you know. Poets themselves who came and lectured all those things, you know. And then there was the Jewish literary Society which was well established, writers, you know, they went there. All this improved the love of the language.

But the Bund had a kind of centre of some kind, or did it have offices, or a club, or...?

Oh course, like every...it was a party[?] of a few million people.

But I mean, so this was the central...

Of a few hundred thousand people.

This was the sort of central, national one that you went to, or was it a local club?

No, there were local clubs and national, and this one was called a folk university.

Ah!

You see, and this folk university, I attended very...for a very short time, this folk university. But this was a Bundist organisation where you learned proper Yiddish.

So was that where you heard Zalmann Gurfingel?

Oh yes, yes. And as a matter of fact, the poet Zigmanger[ph], when he arrived to Warsaw in the Thirties you know, and became prosperous[??], and I painted him a portrait actually in a refugee camp here, you know. But I remember him when he arrived in this [inaud] college, he was the equivalent of a Verlaine in Yiddish, and by no means less[?]. But unfortunately Yiddish is not like...Yiddish poetry is based on the vernacular, and this is untranslatable.

And what did the...I mean, I still don't quite understand; there was a sort of local club as part of the Bund where you went to hear these lectures?

Many different...

Oh you went to many different places.

Yes there were.

I see.

There were many, there wasn't one.

Ah!



You know, there wasn't one. There was a literary society, there was a folk university, you know, and then there was the printing union which had their own section, sub-sections which you could join. Yiddish history you see, this is where I for the first time heard Dubno, who was the great, the famous historian, Jewish historian you know, and I for the first time had a lecture by him you know. And this again enlarged your perspectives of what it is to be a Jew. You see because it has nothing any more to do with Judaism. Judaism didn't enter it, you know. So you saw the cultural links of what make[??] the Jew today is.

Sort of new sense of identity then.

Oh completely. A modern Jew is a completely different thing. The modern...look, up until the nineteenth century, all Jewishness was hidden. Religious belief, Old Testament. But the Yiddish speaking Jew in the Yiddish theatre, Yiddish literature, Jewish art, a whole new phenomenon you see. This was a new stage in Jewish development, and no one had[??] anything to do with Judaism. It was a cultural ferment[?]. I expressed it once, [inaud], that Yiddish is a European phenomena, so Europe may know very little about it, and it's perfectly true. It is a European phenomena, because with Yiddish all European phenomenas of culture came into the Jewish life. There was no theatre for this, you know, there was no Yiddish sonnets or what. These[??] forms of poetry didn't exist before this; the novel didn't exist before this; a short story didn't exist before this. You know, the whole European phenomenas of culture came to be absorbed, to be a part of it, and we produced as great books the same as the European culture, or the European art[?]. After all you know...you see, let's take the example up until[??] the war, up until the late nineteenth century you had Jewish artists of European stature only about, you could link them [inaud] on the fingers of one hand. Pissarro, Josef Israels, Liebermann you know, Hebrunewald[ph] from Sweden, a very fine painter. But they were all, you know... And the generation of Chagall, the flood of us[??], of hundreds and hundreds, and there exists not a single European movement now which hasn't got Jewish members in it, not a single one. Whether this Constructivism, whether the Surrealism, whether this Expressionism, there exists not a single one, you know. So we spread ourselves out in this way. But there has to be a great social change for it to happen, but it happened, and it survived. Chagall couldn't have happened a hundred years earlier, just couldn't have happened.

And when did you become aware of Chagall?

Oh, quite early in life from reproductions, and besides this you know, Chagall was the model, that we can be ourselves and be something; not other peoples, not the Liebermann. All this meant assimilation you see, all this meant assimilation, but we remaining a Jew, and [inaud]

begun with the mystic of Chagall. I personally owe him a debt, because really...I didn't want to be anything else but what I am. I'm not an advocate of Jewish art, English art, French art or whatever, it doesn't concern me.

End of F1412 side A

F1412 side B

[inaud] that we have our own emotional terms to work with, and they may not be exactly like Chagall's; they may not be as Zukin's[ph], they may not be as Faskell's. They needn't be, because if [inaud], each other person [inaud] does something. It never occurs...you know, whenever I ask[??], there was a time, I don't know whether you remember, it was about ten years ago, twenty years ago, was a time when everybody was concerned, every Jewish intellectual was concerned with Jewish identity. When they interviewed me, I laughed, I didn't have the foggiest idea, but I am not worried about it. I am. I don't need a definition for it, you know. If you see certain peculiar elements which make me specifically Jewish, good and well, I don't mind. But if you don't, I also don't mind.

But you saw something in Chagall, you mentioned his mystique which you felt was specifically Jewish.

Oh no, no what was with him, that he discovered for us that our world is around us, you know, that we have [inaud], and that from this world we can do whatever we want. Just at school they made us aware, made all European artists aware that art is a mystery [inaud], you know? It's around in the streets of Paris. You know these are great discoveries, these are great important discoveries, and Chagall did this for the youth of my generation, you know, and for this I am grateful to him. I am not a great admirer of his at all you know, but I will always be grateful to him, because he did something, he made it easier for us. You see, small nations have progress which big nations haven't got; big nations have armies, they make empires, and you accept their cultures. When England was an empire everybody had to learn English. But who had the great literature [inaud]? Who knows of it? And yet they have produced one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century, [inaud]. I happen to know [inaud], that as in the Thirties/Seventies, because for the first time translated into Polish, and I was [inaud] who put together his pages. My God, what a wonderful novelist. What a wonderful novelist, you know. And Romel Roland[ph] actually discovered him you know; he was a vagabond, he was a vagabond you know, and fell ill [inaud], and found himself in a hospital, and he wrote from brown packing paper this size letter to Romel Roland[ph] and [inaud] that Romel Roland[ph] prize[?]. He didn't know[?]. And when Romel Roland[ph] read this letter, he recognised this is one of the great autobiographies. So he made a pilgrimage to the hospital immediately, you know, and thus his first autobiography, novel, appeared, [inaud] on the six novels. And then he made the great mistakes and began to politicise. And first of all he was invited, he became a columnist, was invited to Soviet Russia, was very disappointed in what he saw there, so he wrote the first anti-Soviet book, not [inaud]; it was the second, but this was the first on the anti-Soviet book[?] you know. And

[inaud] of Rumania began to hurt the Jews, and being a naive man he accepted this, they called him the great national writer, etcetera. So he went to Rumania, there they killed him off and gave him a national funeral!

Yes. So, you know, entering this printers workshop opened a new world for you really.

Oh yes. Not [inaud] the first maturity you know.

Yes. So, the person you were apprenticed to, he was called, what was it, Felix Yacubowitch.

Yacubowitch.

Yacubowitch. I mean was he personally important?

Very. Very very important, because he introduced me to my gifts in graphics, you know; and he was an extraordinary man. He himself, by convictions he was an anarchist, and he was the man who knew actually what [inaud], knew him. So he had a certain aura about him. But the main thing was how to organise a workshop and remain true to your anarchist principles. This was very simple. It was such a simplicity which nobody could imagine. He had that iron box, and in this iron box went in all the profits. He had another iron box in which went all the expenses. And every Friday was the great ceremony, separating [inaud] what remained. What remained was divided. Families with children were given the highest, married couples without children, lowest. The lowest were the young people. And this is how the division worked. And what remained was for him, and do you know very often nothing remained for him.

Amazing.

You know? So amazing personalities. Amazing personalities. Not taking [inaud]! (laughing) You would think he would have got into terrible trouble, [inaud] this, but he didn't know any of this you see, he didn't want to know any of this. He had the two boxes, this was his economic system. How I liked this man!

He introduced you to sort of foreign design, is that right?

Yes yes, to Gebrauchsgraphic, to the [inaud] in Europe in terms of the [inaud]. You see Gebrauchsgraphic was applied graphics, you see it wasn't[??] the great European [inaud] which had no equivalent in any other language. And they were the latest achievements of

great designers. Even Cassandra, who was a great French designer, appeared there more often than in France. [inaud], you knew more or less the line in graphics, how to follow[??], and I was quite good at it. I earned quite well, and if I would have gone on to stay in it I would have been probably, you know, as good as anybody else, but I wanted different directions.

You realised you wanted to do something else?

Oh yes, I began to realise that what I really wanted to do was to paint. And as I told you, to begin with I had the illusion that I will go through the winters in graphic design, have plenty of money, and spend summer in the Carpathian mountains and paint. And it just didn't work. So eventually I had to make a very dramatic choice.

Well just a minute, one point on what we were talking about. The Yiddish theatre, I mean who introduced you to the Yiddish theatre?

No no, you didn't need any introductions, there were about three theatres, and you went there. Being more or less quite articulate, you managed to make friends with some of the actors, some of the directors, you know, and so the Yiddish theatre began to play a great part in my life, greater even than...greater than Chagall, much greater than Chagall, you see. Because the Yiddish theatre was a great part of the Jewish folklore, a great part. There are two aspects of the Jewish theatre, one was with men like Weihert[ph] and von Schiller[??], because they wanted...they based themselves mostly on [inaud], and the great European tradition. And the other was more local, and they based themselves on the earlier origins when Jewish theatre was performed in pubs, in markets, you know. Just like [inaud] the whole European scene started in markets, and you know... So, the impact of the Greeks was a much later development, you know, and the same was with the Jewish theatre. Of the Jewish theatre, there were three main theatres, and if you were fascinated by it you went there. And if you had a bit of luck and you were quite articulate, people, actors and others would discuss things in your presence, and you could learn something about another aspect of Jewish culture. And I [inaud].

Another person that you have mentioned from that time is Stern, Oscar Stern. Stern maybe.  
[PRONOUNCED DIFFERENTLY]

Yes.

Was he one of the people that encouraged you as a designer?

Oh yes, yes yes. Yes, Oscar Stern. Yes, this was a businessman, you know, with the right connections, and through him I got quite a number of commissions for graphic designs. And through him, he introduced me to some publishers, and I began to make jackets for books. So you know, I don't know what it is in my life, I always seem to have had at a particular critical moment somebody who would...just stop me from drowning!

Yes, yes. So you were becoming an artist while you were a printer.

Oh yes. I became first a designer, a graphic designer.

What about your friends of your own age at that time?

Well they were all in the same boat as I, they all tried to do the best ways they could. Only the Poles had it a bit easier, because they could become teachers. The Jews, no, not much chance there.

But did you have close friends?

Oh yes, of course. Yes, one of my closest friends was Zigmund Bobowski, with whom I organised the first artistic group in Polish[??], or a left-wing group, called the Phrygian Bonnet. And he was a wonderful, wonderful man. He came from a land-owning family who gave, divided his part of the parents' [inaud], he divided his part and gave away his part to the peasants. When he arrived to Warsaw he was penniless, and he began to make his living as a teacher. He had a lovely wife, Marisha[ph], and we were very close. And we met by chance in a cafe, you know, two men with sketch-books, so began talking and became close friends and within a few weeks we organised the first left-wing group of Polish art.

Really?

Yes. [inaud] the Phrygian Bonnet. You know what the Phrygian Bonnet is?

Yes.

The sign of the French Revolution[??].

Yes.

And this was...it was an incredibly gifted group of painters, I mean they were all very gifted. And do you know, it's a funny thing, at the time Polish art was all French, Parisian-orientated. Bonnard, you know, all this, you know. And you had no chance in getting into the official exhibitions, and we didn't even want it, we didn't care, we organised our own exhibitions. And some of the Poles have later, some of the leading Poles of the time, like [inaud], have become very close friends of mine, later, here, in London, not in Poland. In Poland we were enemies!

Yes. So who were the members of your group in fact?

No, you wouldn't...they wouldn't mean a damn thing. It was myself, Zigmund Bobowski, Eugene Wermann[ph], [inaud], Miller[ph], and a few others, about seven or eight. All very good.

Felix Friedman, was he one, or not?

No.

No. He was quite a different...

Yes.

Well who was he, because he was quite important wasn't he?

Oh yes he was important in my life, but this had nothing to do with the...

Oh I see, yes.

This group was a specific group. Because it was the age of groups don't forget, [inaud] artists. The whole Twenties and early Thirties were all groups all the time; they were mushrooming out. We met about ten o'clock in a wine-drinking breakfast place; we drew up a manifesto, went to the art school, printed the manifesto. By two o'clock it was distributed to all artistic cafes and all artistic places. In the evening we were a new group!

Would you describe yourselves as social realists then?

No.

No, what...?

We weren't[??] even then a social realism. We were more linked to Edvard Munch, to more the Expressionist kind of realism. But one thing we insisted really, and in my case it was through my predilection, was the social [inaud]; I used to go a lot and draw in the proletariat suburbs, but others didn't. I used to draw a lot of peasants. But there were others who drew better peasants than I. You know, there were...our sense of realities were all impressed[??] by Courbet, Giriet[ph], and Daumier. And in terms of pure painting, Van Gogh and Cezanne.

Perhaps we could try and trace, you know, how your development happened, because I mean in 'Related Twilights' you mention Felix Friedman and I'm not sure what role he played.

No, he had nothing to do with the groups.

But with you personally, yes.

With me personally. As I told you, he had connections, and through him I got various jobs in the graphic field you see. And, more important, this, he had a wonderful collection of [inaud] paintings, and in his place I saw paintings by many Polish painters whom I didn't know personally, and this was an eye-opener, and I began to inquire through their works, what is the Ecole de Paris.

I see, yes.

You know? Because they were all French orientated. And one of them is now about 98 and still[??] in France, and he published a few years ago a literary artistic magazine in Paris, 'New Culture'[?]. And I suddenly got from him a letter, I hadn't heard from him for over 30 years. So you see, one is never so completely forgotten, and if you are [inaud], you did something[?]. If they come back, they know that if they come back[??] [inaud]. So this man Friedman, he played a great part in my personal life, but he has nothing to do with this fine group of artists.

Yes. Because I'm trying to work out the sequence, because you explained how you decided that you wanted to be a painter and then, I think for instance you tried to learn from that professor.

Professor Slubuski?



Yes.

No no no, this was much earlier. Professor Slubuski was one of those [inaud] incidental[??] when I was a young man, with beautiful curly hair, and he approached me once at an exhibition, and he was painting young Orpheus, [inaud] large academic [inaud], you know, and he wanted me to pose. And he said for this I would be able to attend his classes in the evenings for nothing. OK? So, I began posing for him, and I was put on a silver fig leaf[??], and I was put on laurels, and I was given an idiotic [inaud] for my hands. I had to stand like this, against a French 17th century tapestry. I have never seen anything so idiotic in my life, and here was this old man painting so very seriously, a huge painting of the young Orpheus. And one day happened something extraordinary. In the Polish press appeared a letter by Polish intellectuals to claim that the Jews by their sheer cleverness are endangering the Polish culture, and they should be restricted in the old[??] places of learning, universities, polytechnics, art schools etcetera. And one of the signatories was this Professor Slubuski. I was furious. And I was going to pose for him [inaud]. But I was...I was [inaud]. And then came the right moment for me, and I was intelligent enough to see this is the right moment. He asked me over to see this painting which he was working on. I looked up at the professor and said, 'You know Professor Slubuski, with this fig leaf nobody would ever recognise this Orpheus was a circumcised boy!' He was furious, threw the palette on the floor. 'Out! Out! Out!' It was recently quoted by Professor [inaud] in his own autobiography, this terrible [inaud]. Because I think it is extraordinary you know, that you find yourself in such situations. Here is a man I begin to respect, suddenly shows [inaud] that he hates me, that he would bar me from all places of learning. Why? What can you do but hit back?

Quite right.

[inaud], what can you do?

Yes.

But hit back. And the eyes of this [inaud], it's a very odd thing, but it was stronger than just tell him to go to hell!

Very good.

It hurt[??] him more.

But you were really trying to find your way at that point weren't you.

Oh yes, oh yes.

I mean you also went to the School of Art and Decoration.

Oh yes, yes yes. And there I was only for about a year and a half. Yes, I still had a belief that people who teach in art schools know something about art. They didn't[??] [inaud] and I left. But they just didn't have for me any great impact. The greatest impact that we had, that I was lucky enough[??], the elder Polish painters, good painters, took interest, and took interest in my work, and gave me unique lessons, unique lessons, which had nothing to do with painting or photography[?]. One, [inaud] Cybulski, I will never...I am so grateful to him. He asked me, 'Do you paint every day?' I said, 'Oh no.' 'Oh, this is very bad. You see, continuity involved[??] is everything. Now if you have a day when you don't paint, and you haven't got a bad conscience, then you are a lost!' Do you know, you won't hear this in art[?]. And this is amazing. It is still with me today.

Who said that to you?

Cybulski [inaud]. A Polish painter [inaud]. And do you know, quite honestly, if I have a day that I don't work, I have a bad conscience; I [inaud] something, I [INAUDIBLE.] something. I don't know why [inaud], and I don't know that everybody needs it, but this is beside the point, this is how I feel. I should work. You know, a painter is not exempt from work.

You mention these Polish painters. One you refer to in 'Related Twilights' just as JC.

Oh yes.

Who was he?

Cybulski.

Oh that's Cybulski, I see.

But I didn't want to, because some of his family are still alive you see, because he was a homosexual, and [inaud] I refer to him JC because I tell that story where he tells that he is free of women, you remember?

Mm.

You see, so I had to...I didn't want to mention him. Similarly, when I talk about Calhoun and McBride as two lovers, [inaud]. And yet it's a known, it's a known thing that Calhoun and McBride were two homosexual lovers. And they were a beautiful couple [inaud], they were a lovely couple. But you know, families are still keeping [inaud].

That's right.

This shouldn't be told, shouldn't be talked about. You know, I'll tell you a lovely story. I think I [inaud] in 'Related Twilights', I have this[??] story, because I think it's a beautiful story. We were staying[??] in a pub [inaud], and they were known there; I was less known but they were known in this pub. And this was during the war. And some dreadful [inaud], a bit [inaud] came over and said, 'Because of[??] fellows like you to be loose in the world.' And this kind of [inaud]. And McBride was very temperamental, he got ready to punch him, but Calhoun stops him and says to the chap, 'Listen here, I am as nature made me, and unfortunately it's [inaud].' I thought, this is such a fantastic thing. I am as nature made me. And this is all that can be said, you know?

Yes.

And [inaud] the immense relative dignity[?]. And the chap was just dismissed, he was a vulgar little nobody.

But can you tell me, I mean who was it that encouraged you for instance to go out and sketch in the suburbs?

Nobody.

Nobody?

This was myself. This was myself. You know, when you are a genuine painter, or a poet, or a musician or what, you know, you look in the direction which always evokes in you[??] the strongest emotion. And it's these things that often [inaud] the strongest emotion, and gave them[??] all the material for [inaud] everything, so I went there. And quite honestly I still today cannot see anything grand[??] in a worker in his Sunday best, or middle class people. But a worker in his working clothes can be quite sentimental[?]. A miner looks tremendous, but the same miner at a funeral, [inaud] there's an exhibition of some 40 drawings or so at the Tate[??], and there there is a drawing I completely forgot, of a funeral in this village, and they

are all dressed up in bowlers and [inaud]. And these are the same miners who inspired me for eleven years.

So already in Warsaw you were drawing miners.

No, not miners, but I was drawing workers.

Workers. What kind of workers?

Oh any kind; I wouldn't...I drew only their appearances, you know, as they were passing from the gasworks, or from some factory, coming out from work, you know. The kind of industry of the...or the professional never interested me. Even when I drew miners I wasn't interested in their kind of industry; I still don't know, I have been explained it for about twenty or thirty times by managers, how the ventilation works in a mine, I still don't know! You know, you listen to things out of politeness, but it's not your business, but I wanted to see how the [inaud] life, and how they relate to storm[??], you know. These kind of things, which are painterly[??] things, painterly[??] preoccupations, which have absolutely nothing to do with the reasoning about the profession of work.

And you also went into the countryside.

Oh very often, yes. Because I was drawn very much to peasant things.

Where do you think that interest came from?

I haven't the foggiest idea; I haven't the foggiest idea. Except in the countryside, you see a figure against the immense space, you know. So, once you have seen this, you go back and back and back, then you see two figures, you see three figures you know, and [inaud] be involved in the constant preoccupation [inaud].

I mean last week you mentioned to me, I think about some folklorists you worked with.

Oh no, this is a different story. There was a group of Yiddish folklorists, when I was fascinated with Yiddish. You see one of our jobs was to work out[??] a notebook, and to write in unusual words, and you will say [inaud], get in any dictionary, or aren't even in great common use, but [inaud] word, you know, or a new way of saying things. So you note it down, and we got together, every Thursday evening we got together [inaud] working[??] from

there, and whoever brought up the most unique or [inaud]. But we were quite seriously looking for the [inaud] in expression and in words. And this is with me still today.

[END OF SESSION]

End of F1412 side B

F1413 side A

Interview 2nd May 1991.

I don't have a clear enough picture of what you were painting and drawing in the beginning. I mean you mentioned...we've mentioned various bits and pieces, but is it possible to sort of put it together for me?

Not very well you see, because at the beginning you are usually searching in various directions. But mostly I was fascinated from the very start with the proletarian suburbs of Warsaw, so I was already then drawing working figures. Or better say figures returning from work, because I never work...I do very very few, even today very very few pictures of mine, of drawings, are of people actually at work; there are some, but very few, the majority is only of workers themselves representing, or in general not a specific industry.

And what technique were you using right at the beginning?

At the beginning I used quite a lot of charcoal drawings, and pencil drawings, but later I turned to pen and ink because this demanded a greater ability to control, and a greater, a kind of feel towards that image you can only get with time[??].

So when did you first start using pen and ink, would you say?

Actually, very...already in '39 in Brussels, but consistently I developed a technique of pen and wash in Glasgow in 1940, '41.

So these first drawings that you're not using pen and wash, it's charcoal and pencil.

Charcoal and pencil.

On white paper?

On white paper, or cartridge paper, whatever paper. Paper never mattered to me much you know. Whichever papers come, you know, I will use. But when I set out purposely to do something, or the easel[??] or something wider, I will choose cartridge, I prefer cartridge. And if the cartridge is inhibitingly white, I will tone it down with a wash of brown watercolour, very slight.

And did you use colour otherwise at all at that stage?

Very little. I actually like black and white. I did a lot. And when I read from a Chinese artist that he lives in his ink, I understood exactly what he meant, you know. You know, in Chinese art most predominantly there is black and white; sometimes added a bit of red, or one or two other colours, but mostly it's black and white. And I personally have a great love for black ink, which I often dilute into washes which makes it greyish. But I like the ink, I like it as a medium. I prefer it even to colour.

What kind of pens did you use?

You know quite ordinary pens. They are a bit...the widest you can get, but an ordinary pen.

So it's a wide...

A wide nib.

Sort of relief nib do you mean, or...?

I don't know that it's a relief, but it's a wide...I can show you one, but it's widish, on the bottom it's widish.

Yes. And you've used that right from the beginning?

Oh yes always, yes. I used also quills you know, because this has a great elasticity you know. And later I gave it up because I was a bit irritated with the calligraphic quality of it, which is good for writing, but I didn't like it particularly for drawing. I needed something harder, and the nib is of steel, like this, it's a very soft one. For a time I was seduced by it, I liked it for a while, but after a while I gave it up. Altogether you see, I use the simplest possible means.

And were you also doing oil paintings at that time?

Yes, oil paintings I did from the very beginning. On the oil paintings for example when I arrived to Scotland, I arrived penniless, and I plain and simply couldn't afford oils, so I did a lot of painting with brushes, or tempera home-made, which I made myself, you know, because I know all the techniques, ways, of making colours; I can make oils, I can make a tempera, I can make washes. I cannot make watercolours, because watercolours need a special way of infusing a tiny bit of size into a pigment, you know, and this has to be with a

certain instrument formed into a cake. Well I don't have these, I never had these. But all other mediums I can produce, all other pigments I can produce myself. Only it's time-consuming, you thereby[??] go out and buy a tube, you know, because it is cheaper. But technically, after all you see, when oil was invented around the 14th century, 13th century, by van Eyck[??], when it was invented, you know, there were always the practitioners who prepared, the students who prepared the medium for [inaud], you know. It was a time-consuming thing, [inaud]. Scientifically it's very [inaud]. As a matter of what, to begin with, painters in the 13th century belonged to the guild of the [inaud], precisely because they produced their colours themselves, you know.

And, these oil paintings, what were the subjects of your...?

No the subject would be the same. The subjects would never vary.

And I know your more recent practice has been that you do some rough drawing when you're out, but the main drawing is in the studio.

Yes, always; this was also at the beginning. On the spot, whatever I do is the rough, you know, and very often just with a pencil a few notes, which may be unreadable to others, but when I look at it, here in the studio, I know exactly what I want to do, I know exactly how to use the washes. And some painters complimented me on this, that whenever they look at a black and white drawing of mine they can see the colour, which is perfectly true actually, in black and white you can see colours. More [inaud] colours in different story[??].

How do you show colour in black and white? You don't show it, but you can see it. Can you explain...

[inaud] an evocative[??] power, just how can you evoke through words, a cloud? You do not make with words a cloud, but you can evoke a cloud, you see. The evocative element of mediums is more important than the realisation of a thing through the medium, you see. And one has always to realise how the evocative power of the image is important, more important than the subject. So to read the subject by itself is sheer ignorance, you know. Of course besides, there are always two images in every image; it's the image which you see, the factual image, and the image you take away with you you will never see again, but remains here, you have retained. Now from there is this [inaud], this retained image, this retained image. This has become[??] through the evocative connection.

But you don't know what the person takes away?



Of course not, but he may take away something totally different than my intention, you know. But these are two different stories, these are two different stories you may take away, yes of course. And it isn't literally scientific what the person takes away, you know. When you see a sunset, you may say, oh what a beautiful sunset, and you may even describe it and say, what a lovely...what lovely layers, from pink to red, and up to violet, and it becomes dark, and you may describe it in this way. But you may also say, 'Oh what a lovely [inaud].' [inaud] words for it.

But I don't think myself you are likely to remember it in the same way if you don't ever conceive it, either visually or in words. I think something that you just see and say, 'Oh what a lovely landscape', I don't think you retain anything.

Oh yes, you retain.

You think you do.

Oh you retain more than the landscape itself; you retain this what moved you most, the loveliness. And this you will try to evoke, this will be your guiding force.

That's you an artist, you're now saying what you do.

Yes.

No I'm talking, when I said...I'm talking about the person who just sees it who is not an artist, I think that's...

No no no, but you have listened[??], what I do, and what a viewer[??] takes away, are two different things.

Of course, that's right.

But I cannot...I am sure that if I would take 20 people in a room, having a look, a spontaneous look at one room, and go out, you will have the same story as if you[??] interviewed twenty witnesses to an accident, you know? You know the psychiatrist, if you interview twenty people at the same accident you will have twenty different tales.

And this doesn't worry you then?

No, of course not. Because I don't work for a particular...for anybody in mind.

So who do you work for when you draw?

For all and none!

What do you mean by that?

Well simple, whoever wants it, whoever is in it, it becomes his, fine. But I don't work with you in mind[??], I don't know you. You must understand that the capitalism has introduced anonymous market, you know, and painters no longer produce on commissions, with the exception of portraits, otherwise they produce... I don't know who will buy my pictures, I don't know to whom they will go.

Even right at the beginning?

Yes, one accepts this from the very start. You see, probably when there was the transition from the period when you worked for somebody, like in the Renaissance, lots of pictures were done for people, otherwise they didn't do, you know, they were commissioned to do things. But we, from about the 17th or 18th century onwards, who commissions? I have been commissioned only once in my life, during the Festival of Britain; only once I had a commission, since 1951 you know, but I have commissions rather like portraits. But even then, you see, I couldn't care less what you may think of the portrait, I do [inaud]. And if you communicate[??] it is fine, we will do that[??], but I must say in 40 odd years of doing portraits, I may have had perhaps two or three people who say, 'No, I can't take it,' and then I will say, 'In this case, don't pay, let's forget it'. Most of the time they go to people, you know, and most of the time they are accepted. But I have always made sure never to accept a portrait from somebody who hasn't got my work in his collection, you know, because my portraits are not objective, they are part of all the other works.

How do you do a portrait?

With the sitter usually, the fastest I did a portrait was 40 minutes, and the slowest is 68 sittings.

Why was it so difficult then, the one...?

No one can[??] know, one really doesn't know, you know. There's a lovely story about a Cezanne painting of his dealer Vollard, and after over a hundred sittings he says, 'M. Vollard, now it is very fine. I have the shelf exactly as I wanted it'. And this is a story, I don't know how much truth there is in it or not, but the emotional truth underlying it is this, that you never know how long a thing can take, you never know.

You paint portraits in oil?

Oh yes. Now for an...I will have now an exhibition at the Royal Academy, I will take...here is an invitation there.

Oh yes.

You see, this will be of watercolours, of children's heads[??].

Yes.

You see.

And you have been doing that since about 1950 then, portraits?

No, I've been doing portraits all over.

Right from the beginning?

Oh yes, oh yes. For example, when I arrived to this country, in Glasgow I did about 20 odd portraits [inaud].

Do you like drawing the human figure?

Only. Mostly.

I mean you draw landscapes as well, but...

No, but the landscape is never for me alive until I put in a figure too, you know. I've never painted a pure landscape. Oh yes...no, this may be the nearest to a pure land...not this, this I wanted with a figure, you know. Very rare. I do, I do, but very rare.

But I mean, most of your drawings are of figures which are clothed. I know you also do nudes but...

Oh yes. [inaud].

Tell me about the role of nudes then.

The nude is like a five-finger exercise for a pianist, you know. You try out many things, and you usually have a type of nude you want. For example, if here will come a very attractive fashion...a model who models in fashion, which are usually twiggies, very thin [inaud], I will tell her to dress and go home. But if will come a woman, you know, which has something earthy in her figure, a [inaud], you know, it's an incredible mass of human being, I can work with her for years.

Do you just draw women?

Yes, I've never drawn any men, no.

And, I think last time you were telling me afterwards that you never have professional models.

No, never.

How do you find models?

No, if I see a nice woman, or a...mostly friends actually, mostly friends, but sometimes I will stop somebody in a cafe or walk[??], and sometimes I will be told to go to hell, go to hell, and other times, oh yes. You know, these things...these things happen. But there's nothing...I find that at least ninety per cent of women who are proud of their femininity will pose. Others, maybe restricted by religions, how they were religiously brought up, others may be out of sheer shyness, they have never looked at themselves in the mirror, you know. So you have to accept everything. I never take things very personally, when a woman says to me no; I don't take it personally. Yet I have thousands of nudes here. At this very moment I discovered quite accidentally, there were some people for dinner and we talked, and I was sitting here, a woman, she was...she seemed to me quite...a kind of body I would like to draw, and I talked with her, talked with her, and she is 24, and she comes here and poses.

You told me about the woman you saw in the street.

Yes. The black woman who said, 'I would love it, but not me[??]'. (laughs) Yes, it's all right you know. One shouldn't take these things personally, because quite honestly, when a woman undresses she is an object. You know, she is just an object. She is no different from a bottle, she is no different from a still-life of a flower or whatever. The human responses come with the work[?]. And one critic rightly observed that my nudes are almost like self-portraits, and there is some truth in it.

Can you explain that?

Oh yes, because you put so much of yourself in, you know, that you completely forget that you have to produce something of a woman connected [inaud]. It is a human being, and there is so much of it, of you, so much of the expressive responses through it[?], that [inaud] matters less than the evocation of the image which appeals. You see there is always something different, there is always something different, between the model and what is done on the page, you know; the model breathes[?], you know, and the model has flesh which may perspire. You know, the model has everything. But on the page, there is something totally different. This is the intellectual summation, and the emotional summation, but it is a summary of a response to a model, not the model.

Who was your very first model?

My very first model was in Warsaw, a girl of about 14. I fell in love with her sister, but her sister gave me hell, you know, and this girl, the sister, the girl who posed for me was so amiable and so nice. But it so happens that I wasn't in love with her, I was in love with the woman who gave me hell!

And where would that be? Did you have your own studio in Warsaw?

No no no, in private rooms, usually in private rooms, and when I didn't have a room of my own I would ask somebody where I can draw. But usually it was in my own room.

So, how long were you...what age were you when you left the family home?

The family? About 16.

And then you got a room of your own.

Oh yes, yes. You see, I was lucky to get a room in the socialist co-operatives you see, and I didn't get the room but a friend of mine got the room and I could live with him, you know, his two rooms, kitchen, bathroom, so I had a room and I worked.

Now, then you described to me about the first exhibition. That was a joint one with your friends was it?

No no, the first exhibition was my own and [inaud].

Oh that was with the...

The frame-maker.

The frame-maker, ah, I've got the order wrong.

Yes yes, I got...this was my first exhibition. But the second exhibition was already when I belonged to a group, and we had, like all groups we had exhibitions.

And where did you hold that exhibition?

Always in stores which gave us a place, because we had no chance of getting into the official exhibitions, there was no chance. You see it was all...you know the fight of the Impressionists against the academicians in France was not only because of the ideas, it was plain and simply of space. The Impressionists weren't permitted, they weren't given space on the floor, they couldn't. So they had to find of their own, different place, and they produced later a Salon des Refusés, salon of the rejected ones. When Courbet had his first exhibition, the official Salon didn't want to give him a space, so he built a tent and had his first exhibition. And this was something lovely. Delacroix went to see Courbet's exhibition, and Courbet had, in this exhibition had a painting, 'Bonjour M. Courbet', where two peasants greeted Courbet. And Delacroix's comment in his journal says that he has seen Courbet's exhibition, '[inaud], Bonjour M. Courbet'!

And so your first exhibition with these friends, that was more successful.

It wasn't a problem of success, because you couldn't sell them [inaud] anyway.

Oh really?

Oh no, no. There was hardly a painter who could sell anything. You couldn't. Whenever comes here a painter from Poland, it still hasn't changed! You cannot sell, you know. Because Poland never had a middle class, just like the Welsh never had a middle class which was consciously involved in art, you see. Literature yes, music yes, but not painting. Just a very few with a great reputation made in Paris and came back, there may be a few of the well-to-do people who considered themselves very great in culture, you know, let's say would buy a painting or something, but no one [inaud]. But we didn't aspire to live on [inaud]; it wasn't on my mind even that I can live on it or not. Of course I wanted to live on it, but I was used to know that it wasn't, it is not the object. The object was communication through images, this was the object. And do you know, this is still the same. When I produced there a picture or what, I hadn't the foggiest idea when it will be sold, to whom it will be sold, if it will be sold. So this is never on one's mind, and I don't think there exists a single serious artist who thinks in this way, that this will be sold, or what, it doesn't occur. The prize[??] is everything, is after, you know. That is to say, the work of art[??] is a few yards from the easel and back, and once it leaves the studio it is an object, a saleable object, somebody else will buy, some won't[??]. And fortunately for me, since about 1951, since the Festival of Britain, I didn't have a single month when I didn't sell. Because I sold also a lot in Glasgow you know, and I sold quite a lot in other parts; it wasn't as regular.

Was Wales less good than Glasgow?

In Wales I didn't sell hardly anything. If somebody in Wales has a picture of mine, they bought it in London! I sold only one painting in Ystradgynlais, to a dentist who was a sculpture, and he bought a drawing of mine for about £15 you know. And a few years later, after his death, the drawing, it was a large charcoal drawing of a miner, and the drawing came up to London, the widow rang me up and she said, 'Oh Mr Herman, you know, I have taken the drawing of Jenkins[??] to Sotheby's and they say that I can get as much as £350'. Well I said, 'Listen dear, take a taxi, I will pay you for it, and if it is the drawing which I remember, I will buy it from you.' So she took a taxi, came over, and I bought it from her. But I sold it for £15. [inaud]

[inaud] your chance then.

No, it wasn't a miss of chance[??] [inaud].

No, that they missed a chance I said.

No. No they didn't, they...I paid them £350, that's justice[??]...

No no no, I mean the original people in Wales who should have realised...

Oh no, nobody...they never thought of buying, you know. It's plain and simple, they would go let's say on a honeymoon to some place, Tenby or somewhere else you know, and there they would buy a watercolour of the view of the sea, you know. This is the kind... You see it was a very curious phenomenon that in Wales the tradition of literature was great, and the tradition of singing was still greater. So if you came in to a small cottage, you always had a piano and you had books, but nothing on the walls. Perhaps flying ducks! You know the...

I do, yes.

This sort. One shouldn't have illusions. You know, even in France where I shouldn't take[??] illusion, there's the French peasantry [inaud] as the Parisian. Not a damn thing. If you toured France you wouldn't see [inaud] which you see, you know. What one forgets that exists for it, it's called patronage; it's a highfalutin term for the middle class who can acquire pictures. And whatever reason they acquire is their business, it has nothing to do with the artist who produced it.

End of F1413 side A



F1413 side B

And you talk about the sort of development of your sort of personal relationships with women and your love life early on. Would you like to say something about how that developed in Warsaw?

No, there was nothing...there was nothing in particular in it, it was just a normal youthful development which every youth goes through. My first great love was at a very early age, you know, very early, but it was a very tremendous love. An emotion I never regained. I loved several times afterwards, but none with the same intensity. When years later I met the same woman who was...when I knew her she was a girl of about sixteen, when I met her she was a married woman and had children, and I wondered what did I see in her! But nevertheless, in my imagination, in my memory, she still remains a very beautiful young girl. And I never had great...it sounds a bit like bragging, but I never had great sexual difficulties. Perhaps my instinct directed me to the kind of women who would respond.

This first one was the sister of the model?

Yes.

Yes. So what was so difficult about her?

No, the difficulty was an emotional difficulty between us; I mean she gave me hell.

Why did she give you hell?

Well, first of all she was possessive, you know, she demanded full attention. If I would be with her and have two books under the arm, 'Why did you come with books?' You know, this kind; it's a youthful thing. But she happens to be...and she went on my nerves all the time you know, literally. And then on top of this, she herself had no aspiration in her life whatever. So our conversation was a very limited one, you know. I remember mostly the quarrels we had, and I remember - there must have been something good too, but I remember this less, but I remember the quarrels we had [INAUDIBLE].

She was Jewish as well, or not?

No, no, she was a Polish girl. But do you know, the point Jewish, Polish or not, this never existed in my life, you know, this never existed in my life, and it didn't exist, with the

exception of the Hassidic Jews, with the Judaists[ph], it existed, but the Jews of my generation, particularly socialist upbringing, this doesn't...it just didn't exist. You know, for example, in American folklore it is always said when a youth grows up, he wants to be with a black woman. In Poland, it was the Gypsy, the great romance of the Gypsy. There were very few Gypsies around you know, and you had to go outside Warsaw to get...but you did!

To look for them?

Yes. And also the legend, it was a sheer legend, that Gypsies girls are available. They are not available, they were not different from other young ladies[??], but you hunted them, and sometimes you were lucky! It's a very interesting thing this element of the mystique of a minority, you know, just like Polish girls wanted to sleep with the Jewish boys. Oh there were many Polish boys available for them, just they wanted to sleep at least once with a Jewish boy, you know. These are very curious things which are reflected actually, in minority literatures are often reflected. I recently read a book by a black woman, and my God, it could have been written by a girl from Warsaw, the same fantasies. It's a bit like in all particular youthful relationship, fantasies play a great part. You imagine more than what can be supplied!

So how old were you when you had this first love relationship?

Sixteen. The great love, [inaud], a bit earlier, a bit earlier, I can't remember how long, between fourteen and sixteen years, this is my great love. And this lasted for about, well over a year, and afterwards it cooled off a bit, and the second great love was when I was about eighteen, or nineteen, but this was a very serious...

Who was that with then?

No, this was with a very very fine girl who was a student, and a lovely, lovely creature, and a lovable creature. And it was a real love, this was a real love you know, in the sense that both were involved in it: it wasn't an exploited love, you know. And there was a sexual attraction of course, but it wasn't mainly, it was a greater[??] totality, you know. I will never forget, we once stopped[??] in a little forest just outside Warsaw you know, and whereas with other girls I would probably want to make love with her, we were sitting and spent the whole afternoon talking, and it was so gratifying. And we had so much to communicate to each other, you know. So, there were sexual overtones probably in the conversation too, and there was always the cuddle and all the other things, but this wasn't the main objective. Whereas with earlier girls the main objective...you knew exactly what you wanted, and tried to get it, and if

you didn't see her again, OK you didn't see her again, but this is not exactly where loves [inaud] playing. You see, sex can be objective, love is never objective, it is always subjective. And there is always a lot of fantasy, of planning a life you know, and this is the greatest, there never was anything as great as this. They think they discovered, that millions of people have the greatest[??] in the same way, you know, but for you this was the greatest, and this is what mattered. If I didn't see her for a day, my God, it was just no day. We had to see each other, I took her in the morning to school, she went to a college, and I would walk with her to school, I went to work, you know. The strange phenomena of love is this, that it is the rarest thing; in spite of the fact that we talk a lot about it, it is the rarest thing. And once you experienced it, you know that all the other loves which follow are not exactly this. They are important, but they are not exactly this. So I am very wary of loving country, loving my people; I haven't the foggiest idea in this sense, I haven't the foggiest idea what it means, loving my people, you know. I just don't know what it is.

So that was really the most important love relationship.

It was a very important love, of sheer experience of the intensity of love is so strong [inaud]. All other loves were still loves, but not of the same intensity. I am still capable of loving, but the intensity of that first love, when I remember it goes through my bones. And you know, very often love poetry meant to me a lot, particularly at the time, but my personal emotions were always stronger than that I read, you know. And I think this has to do with this [inaud] since my early youth I have the suspicion of words. Of course it is the greatest gift man has, you know, but the misuse of it is so tragic. Most of the conflicts come from misuse of words. Disraeli[??] said, 'If I could understand a German I would talk differently with this man'. And yet he knew German and he talked with [inaud] German, but he was right in one thing, his thinking was not Germany[??].

Well going back to love, I mean how do you feel about Chagall's way of representing love?

It has one thing, it has a truth; the tenderness is true, absolutely true, you know. Losing one's head is true, absolutely true. Flying together over the town[??] is true, it's all quite true. But Chagall is the greatest artist of metaphors, you know, so if you take him in context of his metaphors, you have a fantastic [inaud]. The religious[??] modern artists [inaud] the use of his native folklore, [inaud] artist. Picasso is Spanish but not [inaud] not to the faintest degree as involved in the Spanish folklore as Chagall was. Maybe because Chagall was the naive boy from Vitebsk, and always remained the naive boy from Vitebsk, while Picasso out-grew his Spanishness at quite an early age, in spite of the fact that all the time he bragged about Spain, and drew some bullfighters or other, or other things. But you feel in it the great

virtuosity performer, but with Chagall you feel the complete commitment, there's nothing else, you see. Some people decried Chagall for many years, that his youth became smaller and the Eiffel Tower became bigger, because[??] when he went to France; these all are witty observations, but the truth is he remained through most of his life a great naive, and really a pure man, a pure man, in every sense of the word. Through at least, I am speaking of the man who comes down from the pictures, because the person, I met him only once, and I know nothing about him personally. And his biography is [inaud] in my life, and it's a real, a literary concoction, you know, nothing much comes through, and you know, nothing much... But his pictures tell everything.

Fine. Now just one small point, I notice one person from 'Related Twilights', of those Warsaw years, that we didn't mention, Joseph Sandler.

Oh, well no, Joseph Sandler was a man who interested himself in art. He was a writer, and an organiser of exhibitions, and he discovered me quite early and helped me a lot. But there is not much, it wasn't a close relationship. When I left Warsaw for Belgium he came to the train and said, 'Do you remember me?' So you can see what a relationship... Of course I remembered him you know, but the relationship wasn't...but he helped me quite a lot, because he was a very able writer, and he had a lot of connections with the middle class people, helped me sell works. He was a great help, and I remember him with great tenderness and with gratitude, but I know very little about him as a person; I haven't the foggiest idea whether he was married or not, whether he had a family or not.

Fine. Now, we haven't talked about the last sort of phase in Warsaw leading up to your leaving. Can you tell me something about that?

Oh yes. No there was...there is really nothing more to tell, except that after we organised this group, the Phrygian Bonnet, this was already in '36 you see, and this lasted for about two years, and my great connection with the friends Bobowski and a few other Polish artists. And we worked and we had to live, so I had to do some other work, and I made my living mostly from graphic design, from illustrating, from making jackets for books and making posters, and I was quite good at it, I earned quite a decent living, but it wasn't my [inaud]; what I really wanted to do was to paint all the time. But this was a dream which couldn't happen. Now, at that time I got to know the work through reproductions, of Edvard Munch, and my direction was clear. My direction was clear from the moment I saw the work, said yes, no surface[??], no pretty colours, everything has to be psychologically conditioned; everything has to have a double content, psychological and social. On this I worked[??]. No, on this one cannot say more for the simple reason that it felt, once you do this, now it's a problem of

working it out, and this takes years. And when I went to Belgium these things didn't change, but leading[??] to the connection with the Belgian Expressionist painters.

Now I would like to come to them in a moment, but...I mean the situation meanwhile was deteriorating in Warsaw wasn't it.

Well it was deteriorating socially and politically you see. If you walked in a Jewish area without a cap, a policeman could arrest you, because this was obvious that you must be a Bolshevik. All others wear caps, you don't wear a cap; if you are Jewish, then you must be a Bolshevik, you see. So, the political situation was very very [inaud], and most of my friends were already in concentration camps. I managed to survive not to fall into the concentration camps for the simple...there was no distinction between socialists, communists; the communists were illegal, the socialists were illegal, but there was no, from the police point of view there was no difference between socialists, liberals[??] and communists. If you were a Zionist, OK, fine.

Did you belong to a party yourself?

To the Bund, and the Jewish Socialist Party. But I wasn't very active and I wasn't...I cannot, you know, it sounds a bit pompous when you say you belong; I'm not a good believer. I sympathise with them, I went to their meetings; on the 1st of May I was demonstrating their [inaud] in their ranks[??], you know, but this was as far as it went. And don't forget that at the same time here, I wanted to [inaud] my reading[??] and my knowledge in everything. I was a ferocious reader; since the age of four I was a reader, but with[??] the years, my youthful years were mostly spent with books. And with friends who also read as [inaud] thought[??] I was crazy. So there were discussions, exchanges of views, till eventually I became to mistrust discussion; I prefer expression to provoking somebody's views. And also at that time I became a bad listener, you know. When you have so much on your own mind you are a bit impatient with listening to others, and [inaud] a bad listener. Of course I listened, but it wasn't the same as years before when I always expected to [inaud], you see. And therefore I always listened eagerly to everyone. But from the age of about seventeen, eighteen, I became a very poor listener, and I still am a very poor listener.

Really?

Yes, on the whole. Perhaps there is so much on my mind when I meet somebody who is eager, with whom I could talk, I am eager to put so much out, give everything. And sometimes I tire people, there's no question about it.

Anyway, eventually the police arrested you, is that right?

Oh I was arrested several times. No, this nothing you see. In the situation of Poland, to be arrested is not an extraordinary thing. There wasn't a liberal thinking youth, let alone a socialist youth, let alone a communist youth, an anarchist youth, who wasn't arrested, there wasn't. But I wasn't arrested for many...for years, I wasn't put in prison for years, but I knew the inside of the prison of course.

What were you arrested for?

By the time you got to know[??] you spend a view months, then you were let out. [inaud] the Birmingham Six, when I hear them when they say, they never told me why they arrested me! One forgets the tyranny of states, [inaud] that even in England you have here that a person can say, be sixteen years in prison, must have a [inaud]! You know, it's difficult to believe, but it's...I know it's a fact; I've never been told why, and I've never been told why I was let out.

And how were you treated?

In some prisons very well, you know, because they had a respect for the intellectual, and differentiated between the criminal and the... In others they put you lower than the criminal, and tried to incite criminals against you, being[??] beaten up, you know. Do you know, it's a very funny thing, criminals actually hate people with knowledge. There's an inner hatred of them. So for the police to incite them to beat you up, it's a very easy thing.

And you got beaten up?

Oh several times; I lost some teeth. Oh yes. You know, after so many years I can no longer [inaud], but I still dislike criminals quite honestly. As a class this romanticism which is round thieves with golden hearts, I haven't met one, and I have met quite a number of them, you know. I can't say I hate them, I cannot say this, but they are an element of society which I really do not like to be too near. Nevertheless, some years ago came a man, a thief, with a few paintings to the Gallery [inaud], and he was a very able painter, so we became quite friendly, and several times he came here, and I have wonderful letters from him. He had a really poetic soul, but he had one great fear. In one of the letters which I have, which I treasure, it's a valuable[??] letter, 'The only place where I am free is in prison'. He couldn't cope with bills, you know; he couldn't cope with anything which has to do with social

responsibility, he just couldn't cope with it. So he ignored[??], and eventually had to live, so he stole something, landed himself in prison, and the letter which we got, the last time he was sentenced for seven years you know. But you know, our prison system leaves a lot to be desired. They have a dreadful thing of sending you every few months to a different place, so all your friends, you lose touch. I would send letters, he would be somewhere else; it's quite possible they forward the letters, but got lost on the way, or by the time the letter would arrive he would be sent somewhere else. Have you seen the other night, there was a dreadful film about prisons. Have you seen that?

I've seen some dreadful films, and I don't know whether it's that one.

Well anyway, this was one of the films where they show you this sending away from place to place, and it was one of the films where the beating up by the prison staff of prisoners [inaud].

What was the longest you were in prison then in Poland?

I can't remember, I think about ten weeks or so.

Oh, a long time then.

No, not by comparison with ten years! (laughs)

Were you able to draw in prison?

No no no, no. The only things we could get is books, and you could get books sent in, you know. So...no, it wasn't...it wasn't terribly bad; it wasn't good either. It all depended who was the head. If it was a nasty chap, if it was an anti-Semite all Jews had hell, you know. We were given all the dirtiest works, if it was an anti-Semite, you know. But if it wasn't, if it was a more liberal-minded man, it was...you could even talk. But books you could have, and you could have a number of pages to write on, but numbered, and you had to give all the pages back. And if you sent out a letter, the letters were read and if you received a letter, the letter was read. Sometimes it was cut out, bits which they didn't think you should know they were cut out. But this is a normal...I think in this sense, Polish prisoners didn't differ from prisoners here or somewhere else you know, from what I know.

And, there was one point when you were trying to sort of sleep in a different place.

Yes yes yes. Because so many friends were arrested, and what we were frightened, it was not so much the imprisonment as being sent to the concentration camps, because the concentration camps were just like[??] the concentration camps in South Africa at the moment, or like the concentration camps in Germany under the Nazis. They were this: you went in, you were arrested and sent to a concentration camp. All right, you could be there the longest nine months, this is the longest. You had to be released, if after the nine months there was no trial and you were not sentenced, you know. So you should be released. So they released you after nine months. The moment you were outside the gate, they arrested you again. So, the nine months could be forever, and this is why there was a great terror of going to the concentration camps; you never knew whether you will come out or when you will come out. And I have no personal experience of how the concentration camps, how the life inside the camps, so in spite of the fact that many of my friends were [inaud], but I never got [inaud].

And so how did you manage about this sleeping in different places?

It was tough, because...well I had many, many friends which were...it was easy, but I had...but when they were compromised, then it was tough. And I will never forget this, I came once to a middle class family whose son I knew, and they had a few rooms, and when the son asked whether I can sleep there, they said, 'We haven't got a bed'!

Extraordinary. But most of your friends were more generous?

Yes. It somehow worked out. People in the war who I knew, were helpful, were trying to help, even when there was...'Well you shouldn't bring him here' you know, [inaud]. There were such risks[??] about, but on the whole somehow you managed to stay[??]. Most of the Polish families are not [inaud].

When did you decide to leave then?

I decided to leave [inaud] in '37, but for artistic reasons rather than political reasons. You see I fell in love with the Flemish art.

Oh, how did you hear about Flemish art?

Not[??] from books, from reproductions, and particularly the great Flemish painter Bruegel, he was absolutely...[inaud] in Belgium I was greatly surprised. I didn't think there was such a



country like Bruegel painted[?!]! But then I discovered other great things in Belgium which [inaud].

Well tell me about how you managed to go, the story of being able to go.

Oh no, this was very simple, I couldn't get a passport. You see the great...the great thing about a fascist government.....

End of F1413 side B

F1414 side A

Well the point was this, you see the Jews, the governmental press[??] all the time said Jews do not belong to Poland, they should leave, and when a Jew wanted to leave he couldn't get a passport. I couldn't get a passport. But having a corrupt administration, like all fascist governments, even the Nazi government had corrupt administrators[??]; for money you could get anything, you know. So my friends collected some money, and I bought a tourist passport for a fortnight, and with this I went to Belgium, you know.

So you had to bribe a lawyer did you then, or...?

Oh yes, yes yes. Well not me, I didn't have much money, but my friends had to bribe; they supplied the lawyer and they bribed, they supplied the money, and I got eventually the passport. You see I had always caring and lovable friends, and loving friends.

And by that point you were not only going to Belgium positively, but also would you say escaping from Poland?

No. I was literally going to Belgium. I really didn't think of the coming war, you know. And I really didn't leave Poland because of the fascism. Of course I hated fascism, you know, but these weren't the prime motivation; the prime motivation was really purely artistic. I wanted to be in the country of Pieter Bruegel. So I went there.

Can you describe to me the sort of scene of leaving?

Leaving Poland?

Yes.

It wasn't a very dramatic thing, because it took about, well over a year to get together all the money and all the things, but we had to keep a secret of the day that I wanted to leave, because you never knew who would report to the police, you know, something, and I would be stopped. So this was kept a secret. And at the station came this man Sandler, he came, who asked me so funnily, 'Do you remember me?' You know, there were quite a number of closer friends, and there was my mother and father, and this was all. And what I hoped is that I would settle in Belgium and bring over my family, but it wasn't a long time you know, that the war came, and I had to leave. But Belgium was like a breath of fresh air, I just couldn't believe it. Quite honestly I just couldn't believe it, that one can walk the streets so freely, and

that one can look... Do you know, I went...I don't know that I speak of it in 'Related Twilights' or not, I went over to policemen, just for fun, to see them smiling. [inaud] In Poland you saw a policeman there, you run here, you know; and suddenly, and quite honestly for the sheer joy of...it is possible that a policeman can be human. And Belgium literally looked like a heaven of freedom[??] to me.

How did you settle in in Belgium then?

Well, this was rather more difficult, because I had this [inaud] passport for two weeks you see. But Alfred Bastien was a painter who was the head of the art school in the Beaux Arts, and he was in Brussels, and I wanted to draw: not having money it was the easiest things to go to the art school, and use the models. And this was easy in Belgium for a time, but afterwards you had to be the pupil, so Bastien said, 'Oh, there's no problem, I'll invite you in' [inaud]. But this had[??] another wonderful thing, that as a student, the two-week holiday passport could be disregarded, now I could be a student. Except that I had to get from the Polish Consul a renewal. Now I said then to Bastien, look, it is impossible; they will keep my passport and not give me a renewal, and then I will be without a passport and your police will send me to the Polish frontier, and the Poles won't take me in, and there I will be stuck, which I'm sure happened with quite a lot of German Jews, you know. So, having this experience I explained to him, I said I don't want to go to the Polish Consul to give me the passport.

So what did you do?

A little chicanery, you know, the little...do you know, there hasn't yet been a proper description of the crimes of states. So, what I did is, I said to Bastien, look, the best way will be if a Belgian in my presence calls with me to the Consul. He said, 'Oh simple, I will go with you.' And this helped, you see, so I got the permission[??] for another few months. And in the meantime the war broke out.

Yes. And where did you live?

In Brussels, in Gent, in Hasselt; in quite a lot. In Namur. In quite a lot of places.

With who did you live?

I lived - I don't want to [inaud] go into this, so don't use it, I'm not [inaud], it was not. But I lived with some [inaud], and I lived with a Polish girl, a historian[??].

What, who came with you?

No no.

No, that you met in Belgium.

Yes yes. I knew her, I knew her very well, but she was in Belgium.

And were you able to earn any money in Belgium?

Quite easily. There was a critic, Robert de Bender, who liked my work.

Yes, go on.

Who liked by work, and he began selling my works for me, a few pictures, and then I had an exhibition, and he helped in making the exhibition work. And he introduced me to Permeke, to other Flemish artists, and I just began to make quite a decent living. You see, the difference between Belgium and France in this organisation, in the social pattern of art, was this, that in Belgium one or two collectors would buy all the works from one artist, and this is why Belgian artists were very comfortable off, but they never had enough work to be known abroad. So the struggle was always to get to one or two collectors who would buy all your works. And I just...I just got one, who was a representative of Peugeot cars, and he fell for my works. I can't say that I had a difficult time. And then there was a good friend, a painter, Leon van Droegenbroek, he was a wonderful, wonderful chap, and he helped me a lot to start, when I arrived.

You knew him already?

No, I met him on the day I arrived.

How did you do that?

In a cafe. I went into a cafe and there was this admirable looking Flemish chap, tall, big, and a lovely chap, and I couldn't take my eyes off him! And my French consisted then, of about, let's say a hundred words or so you know, but nevertheless we could understand, then I went with him to his studio. So, do you see, it's an extraordinary thing, how things take over. You cannot plan it. You see I couldn't say to myself, well, when I arrive in Brussels I will go to a cafe and meet an artist. Nonsense. It happened. He introduced me to the Café des

Intellectuals. Now this was a wonderful place where you could get, for something of the equivalent of a pound, a three course meal. Only for intellectuals; this was a cafe only, a restaurant only for intellectuals.

How did they know if you were an intellectual?

You are recommended. I was recommended by Leon van Droegenbroek; I wouldn't have known of its existence, you see. So one thing to another, you somehow manage...you somehow manage to survive.

What about places for exhibitions?

Oh no, I had only one exhibition.

Well where did you hold your exhibition?

In the gallery...this was a dealer, you know, who gave me... Oh yes, I had another exhibition in Les Grillets[ph], this was a cafe, and I had an exhibition there. But this exhibition helped me only in getting to know others, but I sold very little from it. But through this dealer I sold quite a bit. Oh I began to settle, and if not for the war I probably would never have come here, I would have stayed there.

Can you tell me something more about the artists that you knew and admired in Belgium?

Well, there are two well-known, this Constant Permeke, de Smedt, Fritz van der Berghe was already dead but I liked his work very much, you know. And it isn't so much whom you knew you see, as what you knew through their work. And this Robert de Bander brought Permeke to my exhibition, so this was the man to whom I became closest, and he sent me to others you know, he introduced me to others. You know how these things are, the things are just...some of whom are...Stern[??], Shirer[ph]; quite a number of names I no longer remember. Do you know, the tragic thing was this as well, after the war I went back to Belgium, in '48 I went to Belgium, only to find my friends. Not one survived, not one was there, not one. And it was really a very very sad day. And since then I have never had the courage to go back to Poland, because I knew the devastation was even greater, and the heartache would be greater, and I have never been. Even the other day I got an invitation for a Polish gallery in Warsaw, you know, that they would like to have an exhibition of my [inaud], and I would have no worries about this or about that. It's an emotional problem, I can't go.

But what sort of a man was Permeke?

Well, he was a cross between a very shrewd person and a naive child. Whatever he said was wonderfully profound, you know, wonderful, of sheer simplicity. Utter simplicity. No intellectual complications. There was in Belgium a painter, Delvaux, Paul Delvaux, who was a Surrealist painter, very intellectual, very metaphysical etcetera, and there was a large exhibition in Brussels of his. This will give you an idea what kind of a person Permeke was. And I was going in and Permeke was coming out, and he put his arm on my shoulder and said, 'Mon petit, je ne crois pas que toute le monde rêve si beaucoup, et [inaud] si compliqué'. Do you see, this is the kind of a man. He was short, very big, fat, big, and walked literally like a sailor; you know, the big sailors they always rock, and have short legs, and the big body. He rocked. And when he was for the first time brought to my exhibition in Brussels, I wondered who this old sailor was! And he was a wonderful human being you know.

Really?

Oh yes, he was a wonderful human being. He had a certain intimate directness which everybody, even people...if he disliked somebody, he wouldn't say anything nasty. I never heard him saying anything nasty against anybody. But he would just sit quietly, nod his big head, and rock[??].

One that you admired very much was Franz Mazereel.

Franz Mazereel. No, this was a different kind of admiration. I have written even a booklet about him.

Mm, I've seen that, yes.

Yes. Franz Mazereel. Well Franz Mazereel was more a political kind of love[?]. He was a wonderful wood engraver, probably one of the greatest wood engravers. But unfortunately his great period of wood engraving ended very early; later he became a social realist, he became really bloody awful, you know. But what I liked - he lived in Avignon, and what I liked about him was, he was big, he had a longish face like a horse, a very long, you know, a very long chin[?]. But a very quiet man, and literally, he was so engulfed in literature. And what he loved...have you ever seen his work?

Yes, I think it's wonderful, some of it anyway.

Oh it's incredible. No, he was the first in modern times to use the Middle Age tradition of making whole books without words[?]. He called them novels without words, you know. And they were very...seven volumes he produced, and the seven volumes are the greatest European art of this [inaud] wood engraving that exists. There exists nothing as great as this. And he had a wonderful imagination, a literary imagination, and he was a very close friend of [inaud], but literary circles more than artistic circles. And I met him only for a short time.

So he had left Belgium by that time?

Who, Mazereel?

Mazereel.

He hardly ever lived in Belgium.

Really?

Yes, he was born in Belgium and then lived in France most of his life, and then he lived, by the end of his life he lived in Avignon.

I thought there was a sort of whole Flemish group of wood engravers, but they all had gone to France had they?

No no, there wasn't...it just wasn't a group, there were...he was the only great one. But they all lived... There was no great market for them; Belgium has produced very few illustrated books.

So it was more, they were working for the French sort of Beaux Libre people tradition?

Oh yes, mostly, yes yes. And also Mazereel worked a lot for newspapers, for political newspapers. He was strongly politically involved all his life. He was the first great pacifist, and this is why he went to Switzerland to be with Roland[?], and together with Roland[?] he was the illustrator of his magazine, 'Le Fé[ph].

When you say his later work deteriorated...

Oh terrible!

I mean do you like those images of man and the huge modern city?

Oh this was from his great period. No no no, what he later did, I couldn't stand it; I had a few books of his later and I couldn't stand it, I had to get rid of them. They were more or less social realist, with great hymns[??] for Stalin[??] you know, or for... It's a funny thing, you know this, when you deteriorate artistically, you deteriorate intellectually too, you know. Just it's[??] one, you know, it's... There were stupid things which he did later. The first ones are so tremendous, such a great big...they are the best city[??] things[??]. And you must remember that Mazereel comes from a generation where the city represented a threat; the city itself recurs in the poem[??] against the city, you know, and there were many people mindless [inaud] against the city, there were many people, and Mazereel was one of them who saw only evil in the city. And all his novels are about great[??] loves in spite of the evil. They are full of tenderness, each of his wood engravings are so... You see there were two great wood engravers in the twentieth century, one was Felix Walleton and Franz Mazereel. Felix Walleton was older, and actually inspired Mazereel, but Mazereel's great idea was that he discovered in things of the Middle Ages which were religious books for illiterate peasants. There was no reading for them, so everything had to be done with drawings, and when he discovered this, he said, ah, he had something, and he began to make his novels without words. In spite of the fact that each novel[??], but this was only a publisher's trick[??], got the introductions from Thomas Mann and from Gorky and from others you know, these were the introductions to his books. But what was Mazereel's itself[??] was a novel without words, usually limited to 126 blocks.

Did you ever try wood cuts yourself?

Yes I did quite a number, yes I did quite a few, but not very...not [inaud] just I did a few lithographs you know, just from the sheer fun of it. And I still prefer always to draw. Drawing is my [inaud] more than anything which [inaud].

So this is also a medium of black and white.

Oh yes yes yes. But it's a different one, it's a much sharper one you know; you cannot use washes in wood.

No! And you have said something about the sort of artistic life in Brussels, but what about Gent?



Well I wouldn't know, I wouldn't...

You lived there you said.

No I didn't live there, I went there.

Oh I thought you said you lived there.

I went there, I went there.

Oh I misunderstood.

No, I went to Antwerp and I went to...I lived in Brussels.

Oh you lived in Brussels the whole time, I see.

Yes. But I went to Gent, I went to Hasselt, I went to Namur. I went to various cities, stayed for a week, or a fortnight or so, but that's not living there.

And you were drawing when you went to these...?

Oh all the time, yes, all the time.

What did you find visually to draw in Belgium?

Well, actually you don't find anything, unless you carry it with you, and then you see what you want to see. So you see the Flemish peasants everywhere, even when they were not peasants. You said, this figure is good for a peasant. But I didn't...I was never a topographical artist you know, I didn't paint or draw anything of Brussels or of the city, or of Gent, or of Hasselt, or [inaud], I didn't draw anything of this.

Now you were saying that the war was now coming. What happened when the war broke out?

When the war broke out, nothing happened, except that nobody could make a living and we were all supported by various organisations for the time till I ran...I had to run from Brussels when the Nazis invaded Brussels. Eventually I had to run, and then to France you see. But a few weeks before, when Belgium was already at war, it was impossible to earn a living of

course, but there were quite a lot of organisations where intellectuals could get food, sometimes a little bit of money but very rare. And then I went to live in...then I went from there, when the Nazis invaded Belgium it was very [inaud] one day, I thought of going to Spain but I went to France.

Was it difficult to get out? [BREAK IN RECORDING] Was it difficult to get out from Belgium?

Yes; there were no trains, so if you had a car it was something. Listen, three million people lived there, out of a population...this is half the population, is trying to leave. You can't imagine the roads to Lille. A friend of mine, an opera singer, she took me out as far as Lille, and she went back to Belgium, you see. She was one of those great naives. She thought that the Belgian opera will go on, you know, under the Nazis. No matter what, the Belgian opera will go on. You know, just as there were many Jews in Warsaw, [inaud] always[??] make a deal[??] with the Germans. It's extraordinary the illusions some people had. You see fortunately I never cared [inaud] for my[??] fantasy, I just like stark reality as it is. Nazism is Nazism. I am a Jew, I will be sent to Dachau or Auschwitz or wherever, or be killed on the spot, as simple as that. So I had never thought of these terms, that I will have something to manage to survive with. No, I wanted to go away. And when I came to France...oh yes, this was an extraordinary thing, when I arrived in Lille I met an American girl with a car who travelled Europe. No, she didn't travel, she made[??] Europe, she was making[??] Europe, as [inaud] long time to make Europe! (laughs) She said, 'Why, what's wrong?' So I explained to her. She had a little car. 'Oh, in this case I go to Spain!' No, she helped me a little bit with travelling, going from place to place, to Bordeaux. And in Bordeaux something quite extraordinary happened. I sat in a cafe, and the port was on fire, and they were sitting a group of about four or five Polish officers, being absolutely certain that nobody understands Polish. So they told themselves the great secrets, and one of the secrets was this, that in La Rochelle there will be a ship which will take Polish soldiers to Canada. When I heard this, I said my God, where can I get hold of this American girl? And where is she? No. She was going to Spain. Which one did she take[??]? And while I was saying to her, 'Hello!', there she was! And I told her my dilemma, said that I must go to La Rochelle; this is my only way to get out of France. You know that you could hear already the canons of the Germans - well the port was on fire. She said, 'Oh, no problem. Spain can wait.' And she was one of those happy-go-lucky girls, you know, and she took me to La Rochelle. And in La Rochelle the port was crowded with thousands of people, and there was only one ship, and in front of the ship French soldiers with machine guns. Nobody [inaud]. And there was one row of people who were meant to go out on this ship, and the rest no. When I left Belgium I took with me a leather coat and a beret. Oh a beret is understandable, a leather coat, and I thought that a

leather coat is better than an ordinary coat, for the simple reason that it can take more rain. And suddenly while I was standing there talking with her, saying goodbye and thank you, two Polish military policemen took me by the arm and asked me in a saucy voice, 'Where do you think you are going?' And I said, 'I want to get onto this ship, but I can't[??] think that I have any chance [inaud].' [inaud] the Polish military policemen, he said, 'We will see that you get onto this boat'. And they put me there in the row, all with leather coats and berets, and this was the uniform of the Polish airmen. And this is how I left. And it was here, we were about eight civilians with leather coats and berets, and the important[??] office was absolutely livid! (laughing) Because the ship was only for military people, and we were civilians brought in. So they send me, as a Pole they sent me to Glasgow. We arrived in Liverpool, so they sent me to Glasgow because they were the Polish [inaud] in Scotland, and the Polish Consul was in Glasgow then.

So you went up by train to Glasgow?

Oh yes.

And then what did you do when you arrived in Glasgow?

Well what could I do? I didn't know what to do. All I had is one pound, which I was given on the day[??] to go to Glasgow with. And I went first to the Gorbals public library. It was quite a sunny day, and I was thinking out what to do, you know. I knew already by then that the pound is not a great fortune, you know, so while thinking out what to do I surrounded myself in the books, one after the other, one after the other. And a journalist came over to me and addressed me in German. And I was very happy to talk with him, so we... And he turned out to be the foreign correspondent of the 'Evening Post' in Glasgow, a Jew, and I told him that I just arrived, I didn't know what to do. 'But tell me, are there any institutions where artists meet? Any clubs or what?' He said, 'No, not in Glasgow. But I'll tell you what, go and see Professor Benno Schotz.....'

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F1414 side B

Benno Schotz.

Yes.

And he taught me one rule: in German he said to me, 'Whatever you say, whenever you ask for something, say "please", it is very very important, to say please.' And this is the first word I learnt in English! Please. So he gave me the address, and actually he took me to Benno Schotz, and with Benno Schotz, Benno Schotz didn't[??] know German, he spoke French with Scottish English, which I didn't know. And as he came from Estonia, he remembered a few Yiddish words, and he became literally my guardian angel. He was [inaud], really a wonderful human being. His sister had two rooms [inaud] sister were in one room, and [inaud]. He[??] took me over so completely [inaud], and I didn't have any folks[??], nothing at all when I arrived here.

You arrived with none of your materials?

Nothing.

None of your pictures.

Oh nothing, nothing.

Everything left behind.

Nothing. My leather box[?]. Yes, and Heine's poetry, the booklet[?], the finest poetry, in my pocket [inaud].

Can you describe Benno to me?

Benno?

Yes.

He was a tall man, a very...in Scotland, he was Scotland's leading sculptor, and he was teaching at the Glasgow School of Art. But he was a very popular man, very much loved in Scotland, respected in Scotland. So he knew quite a lot of people, and he said to me, 'Well, I

tell you what, I'll take you to my sister and you will stay there tonight. Tomorrow we will go out and buy some materials, some [inaud] paints, and when you have some paintings I will manage to sell for you something.' [inaud] And this is how we started. And then at the same time he mentioned something quite extraordinary. 'You know, there is another Polish artist here, Jankel Adler.' I said, 'What?' 'Jankel Adler is here.' 'My God! Give me his address.' And he wrote down for me his address and I went to see him. Jankel Adler I knew since 1936. Do you know in the Thirties, in the late Twenties Jankel Adler was more popular than Chagall, more expensive anyway. He was a formidable painter, and a wonderful painter, wonderful human being. So when I heard that Adler was there, so Glasgow became my home.

Tell me more about Adler as a person.

As a person, I'll tell you, he was a little bit taller than I, he was highly erudite[??], and he belonged to the mystical, philosophic group around the Jewish philosophers [inaud] in Germany you see, and he was also a close friend of the German poetess, Elsa [inaud]. And he lived in [inaud]. He was really a formidable artist. In '36 he arrived from Poland. But he managed to come with 250 paintings out of Germany[??], and so the Jewish Association, the Association of Jewish Artists, of which I was the youngest member, organised for the great Adler [inaud]. The tradition was that the oldest painters are on one side [inaud] and the youngest painter on the other, and Adler went [inaud] and he said, [inaud] here? They said no. [inaud]? He said yes. Very quickly he [inaud] Adler. And that evening we spent the whole night walking through the streets of Warsaw, alongside our favourite - my favourite spot, the banks of the Vistula river, and became life-long friends till he died. He was a wonderful man, and very intelligent, and a beautiful writer in Yiddish. But he wrote for 'Horizon'; you know the magazine, 'Horizon'? He became friendly with Cyril Connolly and Peter Watson [inaud], and he wrote for [inaud], oh, probably the best essay [inaud]. I will never forget, he had such wonderful scripted parts[??] [inaud], that when he[??] sat in a room with dozens of people [inaud] silence. [inaud] I had a few letters from him in Yiddish where he signed himself [inaud]. He was a wonderful man [inaud]. You have never seen his work ever?

I have only seen one of his paintings, very recently; I saw it at the Barbican art gallery.

Oh yes.

Yes.

I have probably one of his most [inaud].

Really?

Oh yes. Because in Glasgow when I heard of the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, and the complete destruction of my whole family, I got a kind of schizophrenic breakdown.

How did you find out about that? How did you learn?

Through the Red Cross. It was somebody connected with the Red Cross.

Can you describe how it happened, that you got the news?

Well somebody whom I knew got the news from the Red Cross, and told me that the smaller ghettos and [??] Warsaw has been completely liquidated, and as my family lived there, and I knew what liquidation is. So got a kind of schizophrenic breakdown. And this is the only picture which I painted in '45, later, in memory of, in [inaud] of the uprising from the Warsaw ghetto.

What do you call that picture?

'In Homage' [??] [inaud]. And so...

But the news came two years earlier, was it 1943?

'43, yes, when I was in Glasgow, '43.

And you say you had a breakdown; how did that go on for?

Six weeks, seven weeks. Adler looked after me, and one day he came round to talk with me, [inaud], and he said, [inaud]. And I don't know whether this painting had anything to do, or a gesture [??] [inaud] able to weep, cry. This was the first time that I will cry, because I was still [??] completely withdrawn, because there was no release [??]. And this brought the release [??] [inaud] few days. [inaud].

Did you ever learn more about what happened to your family?

Oh yes, because I met later in Paris in '48, I met a historian, a Polish woman, who actually witnessed the liquidation of the small ghetto. So to begin with I...to begin with all were told, all Jews were told that they are being taken to a place where they will get work. So they were put into a van[??] which played very loud Wagnerian motifs, but later on whenever the Jews heard the Wagnerian motifs they knew [inaud]. There were exhaust pipes [inaud], and the loud music was [inaud] hear their cries [inaud].

And how do you live with that now? I mean what sort of...?

I live life with all [inaud]; one lives with it, it is simple. The nervous breakdown cured me from all this, and then I heard that six million people were killed [inaud], pathetic scenes to be concerned with myself. It's pathetic. [inaud]. If I would have been there I would have been one of the six million. And in this way you look at it, you become... OK, whenever you hear something dreadful you think, [inaud].

Would you say it has changed your view of humanity?

No. No, I was never a great optimist. I know human history. There exists not a single, in the whole history exists not a single [inaud] Probably of all the animals I think we are the worst, for the simple reason that we have a moral sense to distinguish between bad and good. A tiger is hungry, so he kills, this is no problem for him. But we have a choice; we have a mind, and we have a moral sense, we know. And yet there is not a single period in history where we apply [inaud]. So I have no...you know, I have no illusions. I can say objectively that of course, I could say the Nazi period and the Stalin period were probably the worst of the 20th century, because they weren't forced in these positions.

Did anybody, apart...I mean I know your family all perished, but were there any people from those earlier years who survived?

Not one. Not one. All my Polish colleagues all fought[??] in the Warsaw ghetto with the Jews, all were killed in the same way. You see it's a funny thing, I can sit with you and talk about it, but when I had the nervous breakdown I couldn't talk at all. You see it's only this outburst of tears [inaud] pictures [inaud] just opened me again. And listen, it's absolutely ridiculous when Jews complain that Jews are badly treated. How were the blacks treated? What was black slavery? What was it? It's horrible even to contemplate.

It is.

You know, so you see the whole pattern, you know. The Polish fascist police suddenly decided that they have to get rid of Gypsies. I don't know why, but they suddenly decided. And yet the Gypsies in Polish literature are one of the romantics, great romantic bards. In '36 they decided that whenever they saw Gypsy vans, they killed them all and burned their vans.

You saw that happen did you?

I have seen once, I have seen only one. But I can tell you [inaud] special for me to see. There are horrible, horrible things. But there is a lot through history, you haven't a single epoch which isn't rotten. You see I...a Catholic priest, a member of the Inquisition could no longer take it, so he retired, he became a monk, he retired, and he wrote a book, 'The History of Tortures'. It is translated in English, you can get it here, in the library. If after this...you wouldn't go out and kiss even a rat. Do you know, the Inquisition had invented a shaving machine, and this was, as the prisoner, to exert his confessions, the prisoner was laid[??] over there, chained, [inaud] from a table, chained down, and from the ceiling came down this machine like this, and shaved off your whole body [inaud]. Now, the point isn't just that there was such a machine, that somebody thought of such a machine, and that the Church accepted such a machine, to save your soul. These people when discussing it...oh but it goes back still earlier. Oh our history stinks! Quite honestly. So if you ask me what I have, is only the human potential [inaud]. And it's the only potential. We are only animals with a great potential, but our reality is rotten.

I mean how does this relate to what your art is saying? Are you trying to express the potential there in the...?

Oh only. All my work is to do with dignity, all my work. You see this is a rare thing, which is [inaud]. Most of my things are of such momentality[??], and of such dignity as [inaud], you see. Oh no no no.

More passive in fact.

Oh yes, yes. Not so much more passive as more still, more self-contained, more reflective. Because this is really the only capacity which we have, you know. And that this didn't liberate us, and that this was still alongside the most dreadful history. Yes, sorry, I am human, I apologise! I could do the same. You know, Goethe had a wonderful saying, really. Goethe had many...with Eckermann, you know Goethe's conversations with Eckermann. You remember, he said once to Eckermann, 'You know, I could have been a beggar, I could have been a hungry man, but it so happens that I am employed[??]'. And this is perfectly true



[inaud]. It is only chance that one is born with a bit of talent in order to do this, you know. But otherwise, when you read of Japanese prisoners who didn't have any food and had to eat each other up, and lived on each other, and the way of...I don't know, have you see them? [inaud]. You know how they did it, they took away one of them, [inaud] here and there, there he was killed, then brought back flesh, arms[??], this... And all was grilled[??], and it was called monkey food, because you couldn't bear to call it 'my friend'.

Yes, I feel I'm losing my appetite!

You see...no no no, in spite of this, in spite of this, I still, the sense of our potential is still something of the greatest things in nature. Listen, there is nothing terrific about nature really; the idealisation, the romantic idealisation of nature is absolutely over-rated[??]. There are tremendous lies all the time. What will the twenty thousand Bangladeshis who were just over-run by nature, drowned by it? Nature is a blind energy [inaud]; nobody knows where to, what for, and there is no reply to it. And suddenly out of this chance, produced one creature which has brains and can inquire and can... And this I think is a tremendous thing. But still, it doesn't give me much hope. I admire, because it is so tremendous; I cannot say that I admire [inaud].

This time, was it this time which led you to do that cycle of autobiographical drawings which you did around 1940?

Yes yes. No these were memories, and nostalgia, because I knew this was a whole...a whole category of people which disappeared.

When did you do those?

1940. Between 1940 and '43.

Before you knew the people had all died?

Before, yes; I started already then, but they continued into the time I knew.

And what sort of subjects were they?

Have you never seen them?

Yes, some of them, I just wanted you tell me.

Oh I see. No, they were ordinary subjects of memories of Warsaw life, of the street, of the people I knew, of the people I saw, you know.

So they were different from the drawings that you had been doing before, weren't they?

Oh yes. No, this was a closed period. Three years, finish. Nothing before and nothing afterwards.

I was just wondering whether...you see I know some of the subjects. I mean for instance you did some family scenes didn't you.

Yes.

Family meal and so on. What other sort of family subjects did you draw?

Family groups, and I did also Hasidic dancing, dancing Hasid. Because this was one of the most ecstatic things, you know, that exists, just like in all mystical organisations, there exists several different types. Some are quietists, another are ecstasies. And I was taken when a child to see the ecstasies [inaud]. The ordinary Jews, some of them [inaud], and they began singing and dancing, on the tables, on the floor, on the chairs. It was something quite extraordinary. So when I did the memories, this had to be included. You see one thing was certain, that I was, in all my memory things, these are all things which I actually experienced and witnessed. It has nothing to do with my criticism of it. I was already an atheist[??] then, but how can you not admire such fantastic phenomena? They are all much greater scenes than in an opera; it was the greatest company, the greater vitality. And a few[??] clumsy Jews having a dance, runaround, it's absolutely quite extraordinary you see. I was just taken aback when I saw it.

And at the Barbican there was a painting I liked very much of 'Discussion' too.

Oh yes, yes. The 'Discussion' was a...well this was in our homage really[??], because, I don't know whether you noticed, in the reproduction you can also see it you know, on the wall, it's hanging there, a little...on one of the walls, a self portrait by Goya, the only self portrait he ever drew, and this was in [inaud], and this is perfectly true. And the reason why Goya was hanging there, is because I couldn't hang Lenin.

Yes you told me that last time, yes. I must look out for that now.

So there are a lot of things. And you know, there's the [inaud] and there's the discussions. But the main, the most important thing about this painting, stylistically the most important thing about it, is that everything moves. Just like the conversation, everything is movement, you know. And I made several studies, and none were right because they were too still, and all I wanted to give was this [inaud] movement. The noise, you know. And the person who has it, here in London, and I wanted to buy it back from her, and she says, 'No, I have been offered already £20,000 for it, but I don't want to sell it'. I say, 'Well I wouldn't give you £20,000 because I can't afford £20,000, but wouldn't you sell it to me back, because I wouldn't want to sell it ever, I would keep it'. She says, 'My dear Mr Herman, I bought it, it is mine, and I love it!'

So, anyway, we've got to Glasgow, and...

Oh, we've got through everything [inaud].

No no, there are some other people in Glasgow you haven't told me about. There were some Scottish painters you met.

Oh no, there was the Unity Theatre, and there was younger Scottish painters, and there was a very fine sculptress, Helen Biggar. And there was Tommy McDermott, a very fine painter, who died only recently. They were all people either influenced by me or around me. Because we divided...Adler and myself had different groups of people who were influenced by Adler in a different way. They even now, whenever they publish a history of Scottish art, and when they come to the Forties they always mention us, how we brought European tendencies into something which was very provincial; all they could do is paint a few shepherds in the Highlands or something like that. And we brought in completely new ideas, and many of the younger painters assimilated the ideas.

Did you form a group, a formal group?

No we didn't. Yes, there was an art centre, an art centre where we gathered together, but it wasn't a group stylistically. We didn't think of it. Adler and myself we didn't think of a group, we thought of it as an environment.

Where was this centre that you mention?

In George Street it was. And there was a man, David Archer, who gave the money; he was the same man, and Peter Watson later who made the 'Horizon'. But he was in Glasgow this David Archer, and he supported us. He didn't support it, he gave the money for it, his was the money. I will never forget, it was a very funny evening in a pub, and Adler said, 'Well you know, if we would have here a tenth of the younger painters who would gather[??], the whole scene[??] will change. And David Archer said, 'Oh this is a splendid idea.' Next day he comes up to my studio, he said, 'Come, let's see the premises, I have premises here which I think would be...just lovely premises in George Street, you know, for this art centre.' And that day he bought it for next to nothing, because at the time you could get a property for about £50 or so, you know. Don't forget, for this house I paid only £1100.

Really?

Yes.

So where did you live in Glasgow then?

Oh I lived in a lovely studio in Grove Park Street. There was at the turn of the century, there was a photographer who owned a tenancy in a slum, Grove Park Street, and he built himself around the room[??] a studio, and when he died it stood empty, and this woman sculptress, Helen Biggar, she found it, and for 7s.6d. a week I got that [inaud]! Those were the days. You know, it's quite extraordinary. What I regret about the present-day affluence, that it's difficult to be poor. It is frightfully difficult to be poor. And then it was possible to be poor. Where will you get a place for 7s.6d.?

Rather difficult.

Rather difficult!

Can you tell me any more about Helen Biggar?

Well there is not much to tell about her, but I will tell you, she was an angelic personality, short, and at the age of about three she fell out of the window and her lower part of the body stopped growing, so she was virtually three years old on her legs and thighs, and with a fully-grown body with a hunchback, and the most beautiful woman, and the most beautiful hands. And she [inaud]. And she was a very good sculptress, and she helped us both, Adler and myself, she helped us in the sense, she always stood[??] around; you know, she was one of these girls, when she would go somewhere and see a second-hand shop with frames, she

would buy a few frames and bring them. This woman, you know, carry frames; the frames were bigger than she! Oh she was a delightful, a wonderful person. Oh I have met so many lovely human beings in Glasgow. And they still write about it you know, the ones who are alive.

They write to you?

No, not to me, but they write about it.

Yes, yes. Well you've been very fortunate, wherever you went, by who you met, haven't you.

I was very fortunate, quite honestly, and that people don't forget, this is the greatest fortune, you know. I am really moved to tears whenever I read something about Scotland.

[END OF SESSION]

End of F1414 side B

F1415 side A

Interview 16th May 1991.

Eighty days around the world.

To...?

No, to follow the route[??].

Yes.

Eighty days around the world [inaud].

Yes, oh yes. [BREAK IN RECORDING] First, there was somebody called J.D. Fergusson.

Yes.

Yes, can you tell me about him?

Well he was one of the greatest modern art painters in Scotland, but he lived most of his life in France. And his wife was Margaret Morris, who was the organiser of the Celtic Ballet Club, and the Celtic Ballet Club actually performed my ballet, 'The Ballet of the Pallet'. And when J.D. Fergusson came back, in the Thirties he came back, but I met him only in the Forties you know... No, he was a wonderfully erudite artist, very much a Francophile, like many English artists, many British artists were all Francophile from Roger Fry onwards, they were all Francophiles. And he worked [inaud], and he painted in the French manner, unmistakable French you know. But he was a very very fine painter, and a very individual painter, in spite that he has his roots[??] in France[??], but he himself was a personality on his own. So when we met we had something in common, just [inaud], and Adler, Fergusson and myself organised the art centre.

Ah, so he was the other person in the art centre, yes, I understand. And you haven't told me about this ballet you just mentioned.

Oh 'The Ballet of the Pallet', this came about like this. When I got to know the Celtic Ballet Club, they were wonderful, wonderful dancers, and Margaret Morris was a close friend of Isadora Duncan, and she was a fabulous choreographer, probably one of the best this country

had. But she was one of those possessed personalities; she had to have it her way, and this is why she could never advance in circles like Covent Garden or [inaud]. She was as good as any of them. So she preferred to stay in Glasgow and organise her own ballet club. And it was at that time when I got to know them, I sort of [inaud] a work, an image in movement; that is to say, it had to be a painting, but in movement. And the dancers had to be personalities of colour; not psychological personalities, but personalities in colour. And so I invented this dreamy kind of ballet of the pallet, of everything[??] what happens. Five colours, two brushes, one thick brush, a humorous[??] one, one thin brush, an inventive[??] one. And the five colours were of different moods, you know. The white was more like a [inaud], the blue was like a dreamy evening, you know, and so on. So when I talked with Margaret Morris about this ballet she got so excited she said, 'Josef, you did something'. And I liked this word [inaud] something you know, [inaud]. And she, literally she and Betty Simpson, her main dancer, took over the organisation of the ballet, but it was very true to my script. As a matter of fact I still have a copy of the script, I came across it the other day, you know, and it's a very interesting half surrealist dream, you know. And it ends up, how all the colours and the brushes eventually became personalities of an image; not of a story, but of an image. And it took altogether about three-quarters of an hour, and it caused a great sensation; it was performed at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow, and it caused a great sensation. Eventually they got a gold medal at the international ballet competition, but [inaud] in those year I had no longer anything to do with them. But in the programme they still acknowledge that it was my ballet. But in the meantime a lot of the dancers changed, young girls came in with whom I had nothing in common. So I didn't see the version which got the international medal, I didn't see this version.

And what about the music?

Now the music was by a young composer, a Scotsman with the name of Taylor, which puzzled me actually because Taylor is very much an English name, but he was a Scotsman, and a very very gifted musician, a very gifted musician. And he literally tried to follow the mood; all the time he looked at my drawings. And I was astonished, because he didn't want to read the script, you know, he only looked at the succession of drawings. This was very interesting, because obviously he was the type of musician who preferred pure music to story-telling music, you know, so he didn't translate this into a story, but added the music, not even as a background, but as a part of it, you know. And it was good, it was really very very good. He played it to me first [inaud] in a place where they sell pianos, and there was a room which you could hire for about a half hour for..., and he played it to me on the piano, and I was just flabbergasted you know. And he said, 'Yes, but you must imagine,' he said, 'there will be other instruments.' So I said, 'I hope not.' I hope not, I really preferred the great economy of

one instrument which goes alone. And he thought about it, thought about it, and eventually [inaud] the piano. But this was the only ballet I did.

Yes, yes. So it was a very fertile time in Glasgow.

Oh, Glasgow was altogether a magnificent time, you know; I think I talked about it, it was really in many ways... You see, don't forget that Glasgow at the time was a cosmopolitan city; in the city you could hear about half a dozen European languages, and this changed the whole atmosphere, you know. The streets[??] were really rich. And besides this were the various clubs, the Czech club, the Danish club, you know, [INAUDIBLE club, you know. So we went from one to the other. Particular artists went to the Germans[??], you know, and there were some very very fine German poets[??] around. Altogether there were very fine German [inaud]. It was a vital city at the time, you know. So, I didn't consider this as a [inaud] provinces place, it wasn't. But it helped me find my own...well I was at the time [inaud], well this not...I am not exactly truthful about it. What happened was this, that at the time when I lived in Glasgow it was the terrible time of the massacres of the Jews in Warsaw, and this...

[inaud].

And most of my drawings were of nostalgic, of the nostalgia of these[??] times.

Yes, we talked about that at length last time.

Yes.

Well what about the rest of Scotland? Did you get to know the rest of Scotland?

Oh of course. My first wife was a Scottish, a McLeod, from the isle of Skye [inaud] fishermen's cottage, fishermen, and quite a lot of Scottish landscape. I did quite a lot of work there.

Did you feel at home in those Scottish islands?

Oh very much so, very very much so. You know it's an extraordinary thing, that cities give a special separate complexion; London is different from Paris, Paris is different from New York, but when you go outside, France could be in Scotland, Scotland could be in Wales, you know? They are the same, straightforward people. [inaud] you talk about ordinary things. A



sheep lost its way, this is a catastrophe and everybody goes out looking after the sheep, and you get also involved. And later there is a lot of talk in the local pub about that, you know, who did the best job, etcetera, you know. And this is life[??], and this is the same what I found in France, and the same in Wales, and the same was in Scotland. So I didn't...there was no...it's not difficult. You see, if you have not closed your mind with bookish[??] specifics[ph] of racial characteristics, then you see a different humanity, then you see something properly different. A greater unified humanity, and not a separation. But if you close your mind with a lot of racial balderdash, you know, then of course you will find a world, the Scotsman are funny, they talk in this way, that [inaud] are mean. I haven't met a single [inaud] who is mean! I wasn't ever mean, and I [inaud] I couldn't find it. Not the same you see. For example in Poland we had a place [inaud]. Now this place went into the folklore of the place of the greatest influence[??], you know. One of the examples of their idiocy, that a sharpish crook came and sold them the moon. But how can we get that? Oh no no no, you put out the barrel with water[??], and the moon was there[??]! And you put the lid on it and said, the moon is yours, it is there! And whenever they lifted it they saw the moon.

Very good.

You see. No, folklore is very rich in this [inaud], but it has its prejudices connected with certain places, you know, a specific colour of a place. When I went to Helme[??] I couldn't see anything like this, but it is an old tradition, you know how popular it is[??]. And no one asked what the roots of them, it may have come from Rumania, it may have come from Hungary you know, it may have come from anywhere, only translated by someone from this locality.

And when you were travelling, who would you stay with?

In Scotland?

Yes.

In the outer isles?

Yes.

Oh in an inn, in any inn. But very often I met somebody and they would say, 'Oh, don't spend any money here, come, stay with me'.

And when did you first start visiting the islands then?

Oh, when we married first, it was the isle of Skye, I remember, my wife, we married in '42, so I went with my wife to the isle of Skye, and from there we went to the isle of Harris and Stornoway and this, you know; I travelled the whole damn lot[?]. I have written about it actually. [inaud] In fact I had an exhibition in Glasgow of the Scottish fishermen etcetera, and so then I wrote in the introduction of my travels in Scotland.

Mm, I saw the catalogues, yes. Your wife's name was Catriona?

Was.

Yes, well [inaud]. Can you tell me something about her?

Well, I had an exhibition in Edinburgh, and in came a beautiful, blonde young woman, and she looked round the pictures, and goes down, and says to me [inaud] a Scottish gallery. And [inaud] comes out and says, you know, [inaud]. And she bought[?] five paintings. This beautiful young lady was Miss McLeod; from where has she got the money? Well, you know, she is all right[?], she's all right. OK. A few weeks after the exhibition closed I get a letter from Edinburgh, that she would like, this Catriona McLeod would like to become a pupil of mine, would I give her some lessons. And I wrote back that I am frightfully sorry but I cannot take on pupils, but I see no reason why you shouldn't carry on on your own. And she wrote me back rather a very...a very very [inaud] letter. She said - I will never forget [inaud]. `You should know how to think in order to [inaud].' I said, my God! This is good, this is intelligent, this is individual, this is a way of thinking. She didn't[?] say, you should learn to paint from better painters, and this is what usually [inaud]. One should learn to paint in order to [inaud], could you help? So in this way she came over once a week for about a few months, and eventually we fell in love, and from then one went on. But it was at that time that her father cut her off financially, because he belonged to the Major Douglas movement, you know what this was? It was a Scottish fascist movement. Ezra Pound was one of the godfathers of this Major Douglas movement, and he [inaud] plenty of money, so he supported them. And for him to hear that she is in love and mixing with a Jew, you know, [inaud], you know. So, it was too much so he cut her off. And the poor girl took on a job in a nursery. But by that time we lived over the[?]?...of course together, and [inaud] from where the money comes, we lived. And in '42 we got married.

And you were married to her for how long?

About eleven years. But, our divorce was a great tragedy actually, because, I think I mentioned it already to you, she gave birth to a dead child, and as a result of this she had a severe breakdown, and the severe breakdown manifested itself in this, that she lived in her remote life of symbols. So whatever you said it had a different meaning to her, and on the advice of the doctor, we had to divorce, to separate first and eventually divorce. So, it wasn't a divorce out of any character complications, but it was a divorce because of a tragic situation.

It must have been a very difficult time for you.

Oh, it was a dreadful time, because I loved this woman very much. I mean, she was by that time so completely dissociated from any capacity of feeling that it would be difficult to say whenever she rang to me in desperation, or come to me in desperation, that this was still love you know, it was difficult, you know. With a sick person you cannot definitely define what the motives are. So I do not want to flatter myself that she came all the time because of a life-long love; but definitely as long as she was normal there was love between us.

So how long after you married was the child, the dead child born, roughly?

Oh, about three or four years.

And then you lived a long time after...

Yes, after [inaud] it got from bad to worse, until she lost her physical power in her legs, she could no longer walk. And this was in '51 when I had a very great bonanza financially, after the Festival of Britain, when many of my pictures sold and I had enough money, so we travelled to Switzerland and Vienna, everywhere, to see specialists you see. Now curiously enough, it was a small doctor in Jersey who said, 'Mr Herman, there is nothing wrong with your wife'. [inaud] through the words, 'You cannot stand on your own feet [inaud].' Then I know that [inaud]. She couldn't stand on her own feet. And physically she just couldn't stand on them. But curiously enough when she became aware through...she went under psychoanalysis, and she became aware she [inaud] as anything.

That was later on?

Oh yes, but there was never...a year or so later. She got a very good psychoanalyst, a very good psychoanalyst, and we discovered what it is [inaud]. But the first was the man in Jersey, a small doctor in Jersey, who plainly and simply said, 'There is nothing wrong with your

wife.' [inaud] she would be ill. Well, it's a good piece of news. It was like hitting me with a hammer on the head, you know. And particularly, that I couldn't imagine how she would cope by herself, you know. So there were many, many many complications. Fortunately the money side was not as severe at that moment; it could have been if it would have happened a few years earlier, it would have been, but here was no money problems, it was only how to get her back to normal. But she never got back to normal.

Had you stayed in touch with her after you split up?

Well after we divorced in 1954, and by that time I lived already with my present wife, because we knew already, I knew already that this is a finished chapter, for her as well as for me. She was incapable to live with anybody, you know. So I had to rearrange my life, being in touch with her still, looking after her as much as I could, but I couldn't [inaud] look after her; the less she saw of me the better. It's a horrible awareness.

Terrible.

It's a terrible awareness you know, that you are in the way.

I think you told me that eventually she did inherit her money.

Oh yes, but this was much later, much much later; this was after the divorce you know, and when her father heard about our divorce he was so ecstatic that he made out some half a million pounds or something like this, which she squandered so quickly, you can't imagine!

What did she spend it on then?

Oh, she bought herself a Rolls Royce, she bought herself a chauffeur, she bought herself a boat. Oh, this is when[??] one is mad, you know, you find so many excuses to spend the money, you know. But in fairness to her, I must say that she always rang me and asked me, do you need any money. But I didn't need any, so there was no point...so money didn't come into it.

So that was fortunate.

Well it was fortunate for me, that it happened in this way, because otherwise I would have had to look after her, and this could have been very very difficult. In spite of the fact that I earned quite well, but not enough to keep up two lives, particularly in the distance. Two lives

living together, so one eats one day, one doesn't; but two lives in the distance, one on the island of Skye and one in Wales, you know, it's not as...

But she did go with you to Wales, didn't she?

Oh yes she did. All through the years.

All through the time, yes.

Oh yes, all through the years. And it was in Wales actually that it was this tragedy with the death of the, the dead child, with the birth of the dead child. No she was a very good, lovely human being, and on top of this she was very beautiful, so there were all aspects for us, for me to be attached to her, and she obviously found a love of this...she painted; she wasn't a very good painter, and she would never have been a painter you know, but she painted, it's all right, and there's no harm in painting badly. Why not, you know? I never told her, I never once told her how to improve a picture, because for me it is absolute idiocy to tell someone to improve a picture. What is improving a picture, one picture more, one picture less? What really matters is the whole development of your personality, and if you are an artist you are a particular kind of person, and if you aren't, it's absolutely silly to make [inaud]. Silly, you know. And she was a very very intelligent, very bright and very intelligent woman, you know, so there was no...I mean she knew it. So she went on painting there, her little pictures, her little way; she made some quite decent drawings. But she never intended [inaud] exhibition, not even this. She knew her place and was humble enough about it, and like a very sensitive, intelligent woman, she didn't need me to tell her that it isn't good, or at least not good to the degree you know, that it would satisfy her, her sense of rightness and her sense, her artistic sense of intuition. This she had; it was a joy to go around with her in museums, or exhibitions you know, it was a joy. She was very responsible, she doesn't [inaud].

And so, why did you decide eventually to leave Glasgow?

Oh no, this wasn't a conscious decision. I had an exhibition, I was given an exhibition at the Lefevre.

Where did you say?

[inaud] in Lefevre. This was in 1943. So I went to London [inaud] exhibition, and suddenly found that I didn't see much point in going back, because my attitude began to change. You

see Glasgow belonged to a specific time, and this period of the dreaminess, of my nostalgia for Warsaw, has ended, and nothing took its place. So London was a critical situation, waiting for something to happen, and you didn't know how, or what. And many foreign painters in London felt the same, that they were going through a certain crisis, a psychological crisis, let us say a creative crisis, a crisis in their work. We each of us forced himself to do something, but it just didn't work. And one day in 1944 we decided to go for a holiday somewhere, and a friend came back from Wales, and he spoke enthusiastically about the Welsh mining villages. And do you know, it was just like getting a piece of good news. So all right, let's go down for a few weeks' holidays. We went down for three weeks but stayed on eleven years!

That's amazing.

Well, that was a great discovery you know, it was really a...literally a...you know, like St Paul in Damascus you know, there it was, this is the greatest thing.

What did you see there then?

Well, I arrived one afternoon, a very very glorious sunny afternoon, and miners just came back in their buses from work you know, and they spread out like confetti from the buses, and then gradually slowed down, each going in his direction. And a group of them were crossing the Ystrad bridge. And there was an incredible huge disc of a sun, and their stark silhouettes[??] [inaud].....

End of F1415 side A

F1415 side B

.....proper human beings, became my main preoccupation for the next eleven years. I knew nothing of...yes, we do a lot of different subjects, but the spirit is one. Many subjects, one spirit. And this takes time[??].

And there were other things about the landscape there which were particularly interesting to you.

There was nothing in an objective sense, but in a very subjective sense, in a very subjective, were the few mountains with whom[??] I became very friendly, you know? Like the Craig y Fartig became a very personal mountain. There wasn't a day that I didn't look at this mountain. Now, there's something very heroic, very noble, and sometimes very distant and very faint, but it was my, Craig y Fartig was my mountain. You could take all the other mountains, but this was my mountain, you know. And, this mountain had an immense impact on me, and helped me clarify the monumental forms of the human beings. You see, you never think in pragmatisms. Scientists will think in pragmatisms, to discover this is what makes this grass grow, or what makes this grass fail. But painters think in the general aspect; what makes humanity tick in a general way. So whether there was a strike or not a strike, it didn't worry me, I couldn't be less interested, it wasn't in the line of my interest. How the ventilations in the mines work wasn't my sphere of interest, you know. My sphere of interest was the colossal triangle of tip, governed the whole village, and it is this tip which stood out of the mountains. It was greater than the mountains. A physical measurement, probably it wasn't, but in spiritual effect[??], it was. And this is what my world consisted of. And gradually discovered[??], sometimes you lose your way, get absorbed [inaud], and then you recover. So the eleven years were years of synthesizing a stylistic and a human accord[??].

And you even liked the rain it seems.

Oh I couldn't care less. Even here I couldn't care less. You know, weather is not my most important thing. But when it brought down my health, then I had to do something about it, but otherwise I couldn't care less.

So you wrote about the rain in a rather poetic way.

Yes, quite right. Oh yes, [inaud]. But this is not...you know, when the English way of saying, 'Isn't it a terrible day today', 'Isn't it a lovely day today', you know this never occurs to me in my starting a conversation with somebody; I never start with the weather, you know,

it doesn't...I hardly ever notice it. Unless it gets too hot and I will perspire and say, oh my God, I must take off this jacket[?]. You know, such [inaud] things. But generally weather...the weather of my spirit, not as a word[?], of the outside weather, it doesn't [inaud]. And I still, quite honestly I still can't understand many people who talk about the beautiful light of Provence; well I was in Provence and I didn't see any different light than in Wales.

Really?

Ah, you know, there is a lot of nonsense[?] and a lot of legend which one talks[?] out. You see, Impressionism, the attitude towards Impressionism was born in the north, in Paris, the whole theories of Impressionism were born in Paris, and when [inaud] connected, they [inaud] this attitude to objects. After this, Monet would travel to this part of Provence, and to this part of South of France, and Renoir would live in this house in the South of France. [inaud] something, and later they look, as often happens in later[?] life too, you know: later you look to verify your discovery. But the discovery was a purely intellectual[?].

But I'm a bit surprised by your saying that the light is the same everywhere, because in that diary you kept...

Yes.

In South Wales, there are some very beautiful phrases about different kinds of light, and...

Oh yes, there are nuances, there are different types of it, maybe yes, but generally speaking, generally speaking the same sunset can appear in Provence as in Wales, with the same intensity and the same [inaud].

But for instance you wrote about the rain as being thick like yellow syrup; well surely that's to do with the pollution and so...

Well, yes. Yes, this is one of the specifics. But I can assure you, in Lille you will also find it. In [inaud] in Belgium you will also find it.

Maybe in Poland too.

And maybe in Poland too. So you see, it isn't a specific; it isn't a kind of thing, how to [inaud] a legend. The legends grow out from different roots. Listen, there was a very fine painter in Wales, Walters; a small painter, but a very fine one. Augustus John was the great



painter, so Walters sought Augustus John's opinion of his work, and Augustus John told him, 'You will never be a painter in Wales, you must live in France'. And do you know...how did I know of this, is David Bell[ph], who was the keeper of the [inaud] art gallery, wrote a book, 'Art in Wales', and in it he pays me the great compliment that I contradicted this idea that one[??] cannot be a painter in Wales. Of course you can be a painter anywhere. But legends develop, you know; everybody, every Englishman: Paris. There was a life in Paris, there was direction in Paris. Turner never went to Paris; Constable exhibited in Paris his great pictures, which literally had such an effect on Delacroix that he had painted these pictures, the Dante's Barque, completely changing the texture according to the textures of Constable.

Which paintings did you say?

Dante's Barque.

Ah, yes I know.

Yes, it is in the V & A. But this painting he overpainted according to his own journal, after he had seen Constable's horse. So one often forgets that there was a time when English painters didn't have to go somewhere else, but there was a time [inaud] painter if he didn't go to Rome. If a French painter didn't get a Prix de Rome he didn't exist. In my days if you didn't go to Paris, and precisely because I am so obstinate, because everybody of my generation went to Paris, I didn't want to go to Paris. Just like today, if you would tell me, this is a colony of painters, I say OK, I will go there!

So you looked for the fundamentals in Wales.

Yes.

But they were the same fundamentals.

Yes, yes, they are the same. They are everywhere the same. Except that you have climatic, great climatic differences. For example I wouldn't say that you could find the white in Alaska in Wales.

Well what was the winter like in Wales?

Rain! Sometimes it would snow, sometimes, and then [inaud] were very very beautiful, in particular the ponies, the white ponies came down from the mountains and got interested and

involved with them, and against the white snow, you know, and women feeding them with carrots or with boiled potato, or whatever, you know. So there was a certain fantastic, extraordinary, poetic movement, you know. But most of the time it was raining!

You did drawings with the ponies then?

Oh yes.

Yes. I think you changed your technique while you were in Wales somewhat didn't you, you used pastels for instance.

Oh yes, no this was a different [inaud]. With the pastels, it was already that I wanted to get away from the liquidity of paint, and perhaps some of the harder in [inaud]. And so I tried out for three years pastels, you know. And my God[??], there is just now actually in the Tate Gallery, they show a pastel of mine, because I saw it the other day [inaud]. And this is of that period 1945, you know, [inaud]. And I am glad to say they gave it a special place, completely isolated from all the others, and it looks really lovely. But once technically, once I exhaust a certain medium I never go back to it.

So it was only that period when you were doing pastels.

Yes. It was about three or four years of pastels, and I really exhausted all the facilities, I think, all the facilities of pastels. And I still believe that mine are the very best pastels [inaud]. All others, there are many painters who use pastels every now and again, but no one made of it part of a general attitude, that this medium represented best. You see many painters use pastels as a help for[??] an oil painting, but for me it was in itself complete.

Can you describe to me the sort of house and the studio you had in Wales?

In Wales? Oh well, very simple. First of all we lived in the Pen-y-Bont inn, and they were good enough to give me the ballroom to make it a studio. So we lived there for about a year and a half or so. And then came on the market a dilapidated [inaud] factory, and I [inaud] my wife, Catriona, went over to look at it. And it was she who said to me, 'You know Josef, this has everything.' The front part, which was a garage for buses[??] could be made into a good studio. The other part we can make into a living accommodation. And from the first floor I can have my studio. And I suddenly began to see it, and we bought it. And we took on builders and changed it, changed the whole thing into a studio and living accommodation. It was a beautiful studio. It's still there, because a friend of ours lives there.

Oh. A painter?

No no no, she was the wife of a writer, Peggy Williams. She died a few years ago, but she was still living, and they moved in together. But after we left.

Because when you were there you were the only artist in the community.

Oh yes, I was [inaud].

So how did you fit in with this Welsh community?

No, it's all right. To begin with I was a stranger [inaud]. Later when press photographers came down [inaud]. But I was accepted fairly quickly, after about a fortnight; a part of the community [inaud]. People would come up to my studio and say, 'Oh Joe bach, [inaud] just for a chat.' And living above a pub, they would come up with a pint and sit and [inaud]. There was no...there was no stranger [inaud] you know. Perhaps on the first week there was a curious man, you know, who, so different from anybody else, even in dress. But after a while, after a fortnight or whatever, I was called Joe bach, and I was one of theirs, and fine.

And sort of how far could you sort of join in local events?

Well I didn't; I'm not a good joiner anywhere. I'm not, really. So this is nothing to do with my connection with Wales, I just didn't join in. If they asked me to make a speech or to open something for them, I would do this. But on the whole I am not a good joiner, I really...temperamentally I am not; I am not a good committee man, you know. So there was no...there was no point. But there were no such demands on me. And you see, there were certain curiosities of course. It's like, if I get up at 5 o'clock and the miners going to work saw my light on, I was already working as early as early as they. So all these were quite pleasant things for them to discover.

Were they very religious there?

No. Chapel pub, chapel pub, chapel pub. But this cause them quarrels between chapel and chapel, and another chapel, you know! But these are small things. The pub plays as great a part as the chapel.

And you would go to the pub?

No, nowhere.

They came to you.

Yes! I wouldn't go to...I'm not very...even here I am not a great pub crawler[?]. I will go every now and again to a pub, but... Curiously enough I will go every now and again for food rather for drink.

Did you make friends there?

Oh yes. Well, this is inevitable.

Can you tell me about any of the friends you made there?

Yes, there was a miner, Sid Owen[?], you know, was a lovely chap, a lovely chap, and we became very close. And through him I got to know other miners, and then there was Dai Dan Evans, who was a member of the Central Committee of the Miners' Federation in Cardiff you know, and with him we became very good friends. But he was an incredibly, incredibly [inaud] man. And then there was Brimley Griffiths, who had probably the best library in this country, of history of social development, only this. And then there was my great friend, Mena[ph] Griffiths...Mena[ph] Bryce[ph]...oh hell! Well anyway, her husband was professor of philosophy at the Swansea University, but she lives, she comes from Ystradgynlais, and so we were all quite close friends. Do you know there wasn't a minute, quite honestly there wasn't a minute of feeling out of it[?]; everything was open to you. If you wanted, you had it, if you didn't want it, you didn't have it, [inaud]. And when I gave my...when I made my broadcast at Ystradgynlais as a Welsh mining village, you know, the whole village whenever they saw me, 'Ay bach, you did us proud.' 'Ay bach, you did us proud.'

So it was really only for health reasons that you left.

Oh yes.

But you had kept in touch with London life all that time?

Oh inevitably, because you can't...you can't live from [inaud].

So did you sell anything there?

No. No, it was all sold through here, and I had the gallery [inaud] they sold my work, and here they had exhibitions, [inaud] used, and [inaud] popularity[??] grew, everything was from here, from London, not from Wales.

And so, of course you lived in London for about a year between Glasgow and Wales didn't you.

Yes, less than a year.

Yes. Did you get your house, London house at that time, or not?

No no no, I had a studio here, which I rented not long before I left for Glasgow. This studio was [inaud] the painter, Martin Bulow while I was away, so when I came back I stayed with him.

Now where was that then?

Alma Studios in Stratford Road, Allen Street, Kensington; Allen Street, Stratford Road.

Yes.

So I lived in there, I lived there.

So you always had a kind of base in London.

Oh yes, yes. Mind you, it's a [inaud], but do you know, a studio for art[??] for £1.10s. a week then. £1.10s. a week was the rent. So whether you live in it or not you keep it, it's ridiculous; it's not exactly a sum which will break you.

No. And, as far as exhibitions in London are concerned, you had one as early as '41 in...oh, and that was in Glasgow.

This one was Glasgow.

Then '43 was Lefevre Gallery, that was the first one in London.

My first one.

As you mentioned, wasn't it.

Yes, and afterwards I had every three years an exhibition at Roland, Browse and Delbanco.

Well that was where you met Gustav Delbanco, at that exhibition.

At this exhibition at the Lefevre.

Yes. And was...Gustav Delbanco was not so important for you as Heinz Roland.

No, he wasn't very important at all; he only was important in the sense that he approached me. He is a man who is very very serious, over serious, unfortunately[?]. He got a few drawings[?] from the exhibition and [inaud]. OK. Then one day I passed Cork Street and I see Roland, Browse and Delbanco, this was in '45. It can't be the same man Delbanco can it? So I went in, so Delbanco greeted me with [inaud]. [inaud] say no, I had only one exhibition with them and this was all. [inaud], and this is how it started. And from the very first exhibition, it was all pastels, and I thought that nothing would sell, but the whole exhibition sold actually[?], and had incredible reviews. So we then worked together for 36 years. You see, I am by nature very lazy, really. If I can do nothing, I will do nothing, except that I am driven very often by my creative energies and I do work. But the other things, the social life, the establishing yourself[?] etcetera, if you won't do it for me I won't do it. So when Roland began to say, 'Well OK, can we have every two years an exhibition of drawings, and every three[?] years an exhibition of paintings?' I said, 'Let's not make of this a law, but when I have enough drawings, you can see them and arrange an exhibition.' And this is how it went on for 36 years, without any agreement, without nothing.

Now you didn't have an agreement with [inaud]?

No.

I thought you had a sort of exclusive contract.

No. Never, no.

But you didn't exhibit with anyone else in that period.

Oh no, because there was no point. First of all I produced very few paintings, so it's ridiculous to think of other galleries you know. I mean whenever they approached I just said to them, well look, quite honestly I haven't got any. [inaud], you know, when the dealers come to me, 'Look, I haven't got any paintings. I have only about six or seven paintings; this doesn't make an exhibition.' So with Roland it worked very well with Roland, Browse and Delbanco, they didn't hassle me, [inaud] quite peacefully. It was fine. The income was small because, but this was because of my inability to produce a lot.

And they would pay you on the basis of the paintings sold.

Yes yes, sale or return. They wouldn't pay for things which they didn't sell. You see if I...they offered me an agreement for so much and so much a year. Now then they would have the monopoly of everything I produced: this I didn't want. And besides, I just plain and simply don't like agreements, you know; I don't like to be bound to anyone. In spite of this, it can work out better you know, because I never...in 36 years I never even thought of another gallery; when other galleries approached me I said no, I work with Roland, Browse and Delbanco [inaud].

What kind of a man is Roland?

Well here is a difficult thing you see, because in the last ten or fifteen years he has become impossible. He has got this great Napoleonic complex, you know, that 'the world owes me a place in history', and this makes him pompous and I don't think [inaud]. He has written a dreadful autobiography, a really dreadful one.

I've seen it.

You've seen it? Oh. It's a really dreadful autobiography. And yet, he was a very valuable man, earlier, before he became Napoleon! Then[??] he agrees that he is just a modest dealer, that he really cannot compete with a place like Marlborough, or [inaud] Lefevre, or a greater[??] [inaud]; he didn't [inaud]. When he was a modest [inaud], but one thing was good, they always dealt with works of high quality, and their[??] possible[??] prices, you know. They couldn't buy a Picasso for £100,000 at the time; they couldn't so they didn't. But they had a Picasso for £20,000, let's say a drawing or something, and the drawing was good. This I must say, that all three partners, Roland, Browse and Delbanco, all had a good sense of quality, so it was a good gallery; it wasn't a great gallery, and not a high-powered gallery but a good gallery. And it suited my temperament, because you know, I wasn't particularly interested in world-wide, getting on. For me the importance more, [inaud], not the first, not

the last, not [inaud], finish[?]. I just go on with my work, and this is what I like the best. And I am in red[?] of course, and I have to think of the means to get out of it, but it's never my first consideration. And if possible, if I can stop thinking, for 36 years I had no need to think about it, it's a wonderful thing.

Absolutely.

It's a wonderful thing, not to have to think about it. Roland did all the thinking, you know. It is perfectly true that at the time my sales went well.

And he was supportive to you as an artist?

Well he liked my work, he bought whatever I didn't sell; he has more than 150 or 160 drawings, he has about 14 paintings. Yes he was.

Would he ever make artistic suggestions to you?

Never. Never. As a matter of fact, even as recent as a couple, a few years ago, when he would come here, and he began to philosophise on art, I would just shut him up. I don't like it, quite honestly I don't like it. It is something so specific that all theorising distracts me[?]. And you can never be general about...and art historians, and the connoisseurs cannot be anything but general, they have nothing specific to go by, you know. When I compare what I read with my personal experiences, maybe it's right [inaud] but I can't [inaud] my experience. But when I read writings by painters, I can find my experience, you know. So whenever I see a book by a painter, I buy it. And art historians I no longer buy[?]. Connoisseurs I no longer buy[?], books from connoisseurs I no longer buy[?], you know. All these things, they are not for me. It's quite possible that art historians have their headaches to work out with other art historians what is part of a general culture, you know. [inaud] was for me one of the greatest [inaud] of the most significant of all the art historians, for the simple reason that he was the first to connect art of a period with a general tendency in culture. And those who minimise this.....

End of F1415 side B



F1416 side A

You see most quarrels between artist historians are philosophic quarrels you see. For example there is a very fine art historian who is a [inaud] you see.

Who is that?

I have his book, I'll tell you in a minute, I've forgotten his name. He's written a lovely book on [inaud]. Rebbard[ph], John Rebbard[ph]. He's a wonderful art historian, fine, you know. But [inaud], also art historian, would bite his head off, you know. What all specialisation has done to mankind is that we all...they cannot imagine that another specialist can be a specialist in his own right without agreeing with my specialist art[?]. So you have libraries, whole libraries written on, that this specialist is wrong from this point of view and this specialist is wrong... A waste of time.

But I mean you obviously were much more interested in these problems in that period before you went to Wales weren't you; you were trying to think out the sort of [inaud] of art and so on there.

Oh yes, yes yes. As a matter of fact I did too much thinking, of course.

You did too much thinking?

Oh yes, much too much.

Was that a difficult time for you then?

Yes of course it is, it's always a difficult time[?]. You see, I am surprised that I [inaud] myself in a mental home. You see it's a great strain, a great strain. It is always much more pleasurable to produce than to explain, you know? What you produce has already the explanation. So the explanation produces a distance, and this I begin to resent[?].

In that time, one of the people who was important to you I think was Ludwig Meidner, is that right?

Oh yes, Ludwig Meidner, he was a painter.

Can you tell me something about him and his ideas?

Oh yes yes. No, he was a very very fine painter, and a very great draughtsman. I have a good [inaud] drawn by him. He is probably one of the greatest draughtsman of the German Expressionists, you know. You know, he was also a wonderful mystical writer, a very beautiful writer. And he was a very funny character, a very [inaud] character. And of course you know, people with a mission are always dreadful[??] people, and he had a mission, you know. And the mission was to convince the world you know, that evil is necessary, all right? Now, in our days we have so much evil that I can make[??] him a whole package of [inaud], and let him keep it, I don't need it, [inaud] evil is good. But when you put yourself, he didn't mean any harm[??], he was such an obstruction[??] which, of course there are sides in all of us, we are all capable of these things, you know. So he worked out[??] of it, and [inaud]. He was a very very intelligent, and very...but when he drew he was so wonderful, he forgot all his [inaud] of his intellectual writings[?]. And he was a very intelligent man, and a pleasure to listen to him. You see there was no possible conversation, you know; you listened, [inaud]. And in many ways, I have a bit of his own sickness, that I am a poor listener and he is also a poor listener.

Were there other painters that were close friends in London?

Oh yes, there was David Bomberg, there was Martin Bloch, and there was Kokoschka. Oh yes there were quite a few [inaud]. And there was of course Jankel Adler.

Who had come to London?

Oh yes, oh yes.

So where would you meet then?

In cafes; in Wardour Street there was a Viennese cafe, we could meet there, at my studio, in the other ones, you know.

What did you admire about David Bomberg's work?

Oh well, he was a [inaud] artist, there's no question about that, [inaud]. You see, he was the only English artist, but the only one, of his generation, who knew and understood that pigment is more important than colour. You can have a sense of colour when you put on a grey tie with a yellow shirt, you display a sense of colour, but this doesn't make you a painter. A painter has only one [inaud], pigment, how to handle pigment. And he made of pigment a

language, the only one in England. All the others too believed[??] in colour, but he made of pigment a language. And all his pupils, Auerbach, Kossoff, good painters, first class painters with a great sense of pigment, you see. So, he was [inaud] by listening to him, and you didn't tend to agree or disagree, you know, it wasn't his[??] problem, but he had something to say, and it was worthwhile.

And as a person, what was he like?

You see, he was very kind, very generous, but he put all his tastes in such a way that he could literally make you think[??], you know. And this was only his manner of speaking, or [inaud]. And what he said was true, and was profound, and was fine. I think I spoke already of this [inaud], that I was standing with a dealer in Cork Street and opposite, near the Burlington Arcade was a whisky shop, and David Bomberg would come over and say, 'Josef, have you ever heard anybody selling whisky calling himself a director of a whisky gallery?' Now this is such a...do you know, this is fundamentally...there is a great truth in it, it's the language that art dealing is highly inflated, you know? And he was the only one who had the nerve to put it in this way, so naturally dealers hated him. They liked to see themselves as great missionaries. When it comes to money, they are not as great missionaries you know, but they like to think themselves as great missionaries, starting great periods in art, with Vollard[??], you know... That's nonsense. They are business people who are in it for the business, but it so happens that sometimes they have a good sense of their [inaud]. Just like a...my father was a very bad cobbler, so he never had the sense of a good shoe; if you would show him a good shoe he wouldn't know what it is. And there are many businessmen who have an excellent sense for the things they deal with. It is a gift[??] and commands respect, but in their case very often it goes with great fortunes. Good for them, you see. But Bomberg could see through all this sham, you know, and hit it directly, with such a directness that others would hate him for it, but I liked it, I liked it very much.

And you admired his black and white drawings, did you?

Oh, not only that, but also his paintings, he was a great painter. I still believe today he is the greatest painter in England of his generation. Now it's [inaud] acknowledged, but when he was alive nobody wanted to hear of him. The room at the Tate which was given to him (now they [inaud] I don't know why, but they have no longer the room of Bomberg), but the room which was one of the finest rooms of English art. And the curious thing is this, he was as English as English are; he was born in Birmingham, English bred, but a fantastic sense of the expressiveness in the English character as opposed to the withdrawn of the English character. The middle class have made a great cult of the withdrawn of the English character, but the

truth is the English character is also very expressive. Go out, speak with cockneys and you will see.

What about Kokoschka, I mean what did he mean to you?

Oh no, nothing. No, nothing, he just...

You just met him.

Yes.

Well who was significant for you as an artist at that time?

No, the...none in particular quite honestly, but there were good friends. Adler, Bomberg, Meidner, Martin Bloch, they were good friends.

Martin Bloch, what about him?

Oh he is a very fine painter, a very kind, Germanic edition of Matisse. He was a student of Matisse, had a great sense of [inaud], you know, and a great sense. He was a very very fine painter, very fine. Unfortunately a bit underrated at the moment, but I'm sure his time will come.

I mean in 'Related Twilights' you do mention other artists, such as...you mention Moore's shelter drawings as being important for you.

Yes they were important at the time, they were very important at the time, because there was so little of this type of art around that when he came out with this sense of reality, it was almost like finding a brother you know, we had the same language. I didn't go to shelters, but I went to a mine, which was just the same, you know. And you wouldn't believe it, but the first book on Moore published by Herbert Read, written by Herbert Read and published by Zwemmer sold three copies! Yes. I got that from Zwemmer himself. This was the popularity of Henry Moore. One forgets he wasn't very popular, he was...he had a very small following. Everything happened much later, only about twenty odd years ago. In the Thirties...

Weren't you also drawn to him because of him being a sculptor?

Oh yes, yes yes yes. First of all because he was an artist, this is what drew me, he was genuine, he was true, and he was absolutely first class, so fine. In the few conversations I had with him, we sat on a few committees together, fine, you know, there was a common spirit. And also because he had the mentality of a worker, not of an artist, the mentality of a worker. Maybe because his family were miners. But he had the mentality of a worker you know; he really referred...I very rarely heard him say [inaud], you know. But he loved his work, and he knew what he was doing, and he was extremely, extremely intelligent.

And what about your relationship with other sculptors, like for instance Epstein, what about him?

Well, this is a very different category. Again, he is a genius, so he is [inaud], and discussion[??], he was a genius you know. And he had it in his fingertips, [inaud] was not here, but in his fingertips. Whatever he did was in his modelling, in the way he modelled things, he was absolutely incredible. And he had the wisdom of an ancient prophet you know; he spoke with such a tremendous simplicity. He had a difficult time, a very difficult time, and even by the end of his life there was no [inaud]. But he had a great sense of collecting, had a wonderful collection, probably the best collection in the world of tribal art. So, it's a privilege to know such people, whether there grows out an intimacy[??] or not, [inaud]. The very fact that you knew each other, and you...your personality grows with them; by knowing them your personality grew.

And what about Lipchitz?

Jacques Lipchitz? No, I met him vaguely, I met him only a few times, because he lived outside New York you know, and whenever I was there I met him once or twice. One [inaud] there are so many others [inaud] you know.

And Hepworth?

Barbara Hepworth? Yes, I...well, I met her in extraordinary circumstances. I was doing lithographs for the Curwen Press, and she was doing lithographs for the Curwen Press, and so [inaud]. And she was a very very intelligent but withdrawn woman. And she suffered a lot, you know; her life with Ben Nicholson broke up, and he wasn't very kind to her, and she didn't like to speak about, to talk about herself you know. So whenever we talked, we talked about more objective things, line[??], mass[??]. And at the time she was doing some drawings of figures, doctors performing operations, [inaud] and these kind of things. So we talked [inaud] about me, the role of subject, and I was astonished when she said, `Why you

don't [inaud]?' Oh, fine, it was no news to me, but it's all right. One is always glad to hear it from another artist you respect.

Didn't she...I think you told me she tried to persuade you to become a sculptor yourself.

No no no, not persuade. She liked my drawings, and she said, 'They are so sculptural. Why don't you do any sculpture?' So I said I like sculpture on a flat page! And this was all. And this may have something to do with my laziness, I didn't like to make anything [inaud] too much effort.

And, from another side...

But that's [inaud] also tried to.

Did he?

Yes, not to convince me; none of them tried to convince me, but each one suggested, 'Why don't you do some sculpture?' Which I can well understand, because my drawings are so sculptural, really, more sculptural than many drawings by sculptors. And probably I am the least pictorial draughtsman. Form[??], monuments, mass[??], [inaud], these are all sculptural elements, and they are all in my drawings. [inaud].

There is another kind of influence which you mention in 'Related Twilights' which is from the Romantic painters, like Piper and Sutherland.

No no no...

No influences there?

No no no. They were at the time; the Neo-Romantic movement started during the war, and had more to do with England's isolation. And it was a good thing, because not being able to get all the news from France they turned to their own history, and Blake, and Palmer became very important artists. So the Neo-Romantic movement really came out from this isolation.

I see. To what extent did you manage to keep any contact with that kind of Yiddish culture that you...?

I didn't, I didn't keep...

Not at all?

No no, only I had a few hundred books[??], which I gave recently away to the...to Professor [inaud] Kratz[ph] of the Yiddish Department [inaud].

Well what about Itzik Manger?

Ah no, this is different. Itzik Manger was a Yiddish poet, and we were very close, close friends. But he is a poet of the quality of the[??] Verlaine, and included a Verlaine translated into Yiddish folklore. A wonderful poet, a wonderful poet, you know. And when we met in London, because we first knew each other in Warsaw, and when we met in London, you know, it was really like meeting a brother, except that he was a very difficult brother. I mean he was a very very difficult man. In Warsaw I [inaud], he quarrelled with his girlfriend [inaud], he quarrelled with her, and she threw him out. So he one day arrived, and I had two rooms, so I said all right, you can stay here in the other room. And this was the greatest mistake I ever made in my life! Because this man had so much energy, and he needed all the time [inaud]. He didn't eat any food; I have never met anybody who ate so little, and with such a complete indifference to the food he ate. But he needed to talk, and during the conversation something would crop up in his mind and he would [inaud], and would produce a magnificent ballad, or a sonnet. He was a master of all the poems, of poetry, and all in Yiddish. He was a great, a unique person, a unique quality. Again, such people one can forgive many things, in spite of the fact that in Warsaw when I asked him in to stay in my place, after about three weeks I could no longer stand it, and [inaud], you know. It was very exhausting, impossibly exhausting. But he had a great talent, a formidable talent.

What I am wondering is though, that you said that you found through the sort of Yiddish culture a different sense of being Jewish when you were in Warsaw.

Yes.

Well was there any sense of being Jewish when you were in London?

Yes, with memories, with memories. London contributed nothing to my awareness of the culture of the Jew, nothing.

Although quite a few of the artists you knew were Jewish, weren't they.

Yes yes, there were a few writers, a very few good writers, and a very few painters, and one or two good actors. Zelnike[ph] was a very very fine actor you know, but...no, you couldn't...I couldn't call it a source[?]. We met, OK, we ate some schmaltz herring, or something like this, but this was as far as it goes. Except that we all loved it when we could talk Yiddish.

So you carried on doing that sometimes?

With them, yes, it is true, but very rarely, very rarely you know. Don't forget they were all [inaud], and they were living so far away. You know there was this man, [inaud], was a formidable person, a formidable person, and he published a little magazine, the name which [inaud], but he lived in Whitechapel. He came to us, walking from Whitechapel, because he had a fear of authority, and the bus conductor is authority! You know. And he wouldn't quarrel with them[?]; he doesn't want to know authority. So you had different characters and different...but lovely people; but I couldn't say that they kept up my Yiddish, they couldn't, we were too far apart. But when we met we spoke.

Do you talk Yiddish at all now?

No, I haven't spoken Yiddish for at least ten years. Oh yes, I spoke...sorry, I spoke Yiddish with David Kratz[ph], Professor David Kratz[ph], but this was the last time I spoke Yiddish. I don't miss it actually, you know, it's not the problem of Yiddish, I could use any particular language you know; I just don't miss it. For me language is something useful. I cannot say, as many writers say, I love language, you know. Well I don't love language per se. I don't love Polish, I don't love Yiddish, I don't love English, I don't love German, I don't love Spanish, I don't love Italian. I can use all the languages, but there's no...I don't know what this love of language is. I hear it very often you know, you hear it so often from some writers who have felt[?] it, well, you know, English is the greatest language. OK, I don't think the Russians will [inaud] Russian, and I don't think the Germans feel that about[?] German, and I don't think the French [inaud]. Oh, these are little exaggerations. But it's perfectly true that certain languages are richer than others, and I wouldn't consider Yiddish one of the rich languages. I wouldn't consider Yiddish as rich as English, oh far from it; English is a formidable language. When you look into an English dictionary, you know it's a pleasure to see how many nuances of the same word; whereas you read and look into a Yiddish dictionary, you may have two or three, yes? So there exists such a thing as a richness, but this doesn't make me love it. Love is a different kind of emotion.

So you're saying in a way that you don't feel at home in any language.



Oh no. No no no no.

But what about...can I ask you again about identity. I mean do you feel yourself Jewish still in an important sense, or not?

No, not in an important sense, but I feel myself Jewish, from the very fact that I was born Jewish, and that I have no reason to think of myself as anything else, or to wanting to be anything else. I have known just as many hateful Jews as I have known hateful Englishmen, as I have known hateful Germans. Listen, the human body is very much alike, believe me! Believe me, very much alike. And the worst tendencies more so even than the good ones.

And I suppose in England it's much less problematic isn't it than it was in your childhood, I mean Jewish identity.

No it wasn't even then a problem, only...you see, when you are forced in a situation, you see... If I would live in a southern town in America I would consider myself black; I would definitely not want to be part of the whites[??].

Well why is that?

No, for the very simple, the black are the persecuted for no reason, you see. So this brings me back to this, the problem of Jewish identity was thrown on me. Anti-Semitism was there, so whether you liked it or not, you said, 'Yes, I am a Jew'. You know? If you have no need to say I am a Jew, it is a lovely situation. But if it is thrown at you, and you shrink from it, it is terrible for you [inaud].

So you identify in a wider sense with the persecuted.

End of F1416 side A

F1416 side B

You see, [inaud] a kind of a picture...

That was the 'Warsaw Rising'.

Yes, that's the only time[?]. Mostly it's [inaud]. This brings me to the very fine... You see I may have said it already. You see there are two types of Romanticism, wild and aggressive kind Romanticism, and the quiet reflective kind. Delacroix, and Friedrich...

Caspar Friedrich?

Caspar Friedrich. You see these are two kinds of Romanticism; the one is eclectic[?], and the other is robust. And it's not a problem of quality, because both are equally great, but my own responses towards them are Friedrich rather than Delacroix. You see, I prefer Klee for his quiet, I prefer Morandi for his quiet. I like quietists. I like Gwen John better than Augustus John, because Gwen is also a very very quietist. You know surprisingly, there are very very few. The English middle class who wanted to so much to [inaud], were very very few quietist artists in English art, very very few, you know. And this idea, these cultural inflections, and they are in inflections, are inflicted on people, cultural definitions or what, you know, they really are inflicted on us, and I really cannot see, if you look at the English football match, there is the English choir[?!]

Can I ask you about something quite different, that, when and why did you start collecting African sculpture?

Oh there was no reason. I began collecting it because I saw a close affinity between the things which I am looking for, and what they have achieved. I didn't find such an affinity with Greek art; I didn't...I found a little bit with Egyptian, but very little. But they were more available. And I would have liked to have some great Egyptian things, you know; I would like to have some great archaic Greek things, [inaud], but an archaic Greek piece would cost you a quarter of a million, five hundred thousand. No. So you have to [inaud]. But if you can find the same thing in another culture which is still accessible to you, fine. I did not take these things because I admire tribal existence; as a matter of fact tribal existence is horrible; it's absolutely dreadful to be under the terror of a witch doctor. But this didn't prevent them producing great works.

Yes. And when did you start?

'45 I bought the first piece, but I actually began collecting in the Fifties, when I had economic [inaud] spare few pounds to buy things.

And where did you buy them?

Oh, well this was easy. There were only about three or four shops, you know. And what I later personally discovered is that the miniatures contained the same quality of [inaud] as the great works, so I began to concentrate on miniatures. When other collectors, and other artists, concentrated on the big pieces, I concentrated on miniatures.

What qualities do you really look for in a...?

Oh, the monumental aspect, you know, the strong form, the decisiveness in outline, the decisiveness in mass[?]. Things which concern me in my own world. And as Epstein once rightly put it, 'we artists collect ourselves!' Oh, this man was really[?] fantastic, an incredible simplicity of expression, almost like [inaud] of poetry, like [inaud] he used to express himself. And it's true, we do collect ourselves. When painters write, they never write like writers, not one of them. If you think that if Van Gogh would have sent today one of his formidable pieces of writing to an editor, and that the editor would have accepted it, you are wrong. He wouldn't understand it. He would consider it bad writing, you know, from the simple thing that he doesn't write with the competence of a professional. Listen, you look through our magazines, and you will see that they are plagued with one thing, professional competence. They are all competent people[?]. But there[?] comes along, and then with the passion[?] of a Van Gogh, we haven't even time to think of [inaud] competent. So when it comes to an editor [inaud]. Do you know, what surprises me is that I hardly have ever had anything rejected; when I was asked to contribute writing, and I did take trouble to write, I hardly have ever - but there are very few of the things I have published you see, nothing to write home about, you know - but I have never had anything rejected.

Well you have quite a style in writing I think.

I don't know, maybe, whatever it is, but I will tell you, it's a fact you know. I am really very often surprised, because I am also not very competent.

What was the first thing that you published in England then?

The Welsh mining village [inaud] '48, and my vocabulary consisted of...it was just astonishing how this... I wrote it in six weeks it took me to write it, you know. And I enjoyed every moment of it. I worked with about three or four dictionaries at home[??], because my own vocabulary was so limited. And yet I managed, today when other people quote me from this essay, my God, how did this come about?

You've got some brilliant phrases in it I think.

But also I think some...the opening line of the description, this mining village differs from others [inaud], you know, and the broken dreams, [inaud].

Well it's surprising that you describe the colour so much, that surprised me. Now, there were two times I think when you did do some public paintings weren't there.

[inaud].

I thought you did...one at the Festival of Britain.

Yes.

Is that right? Can you tell me about that anyway?

Well nothing. There was plain and simply, I got a letter out of the blue, inviting me to paint a mural for the Minerals of the Island pavilion, and quite honestly I hadn't the foggiest idea how to go about it. And they had a department of, what's his name? You know, he was the president of the Royal Academy, Sir...

Hugh Casson?

Hugh Casson. And I got a letter from him. It was quite extraordinary, he asked me to... I went up and I was quite interested, because curiously enough I am not an easel painter, I am really a mural painter. My paintings, every one of my paintings belongs to the wall, you know. I paint them on canvas or on board only because I am not commissioned to do murals. You know quite honestly I believe I had the [inaud], and I really believed that after this great success [??] of this mural, now I will get [inaud].

You would have liked to have done more murals?

Always have done[?]. I would have given up easel painting tomorrow. I love the wall.

Can you describe the mural that you painted?

Oh yes, it was very simple. There was a row of crouching miners, you know, it was 29 feet long by 14 feet high, and... The technical side of it was absolutely astonishing, because 29 feet was the length and the studio was 32 feet, so I had three feet longer, and the local carpenter made all the panels to just fit the studio, end of [inaud]. And I invited five students from the Swansea School of Art to do all the technical things, like mixing the gesso and applying twelve coats of gesso. You know, all the technical things they did. And I was[?] absolutely exhilarated. We all worked so beautifully, and I thought, my God what a lucky buggers the painters of the Middle Ages, the muralists, and the painters of the Renaissance, what lucky buggers they were! Such a beautiful thing to do, you know. And the students learned so much from it, by sheer application. As a matter of fact none of them wanted to go back to school; they said in these few months, they [inaud], they learned everything what there is... And I am sure it is true, because you cannot learn the painting from fragments[?], you have to do it all the time. [inaud]. A student wouldn't know that in order to make a good gesso background, you had no need for it[?] in an art school, you need twelve coats of thin gesso. Now how to apply it, what kind of brushes? Do you use big buckets? You know. And then they saw how gradually the texture becomes massive, from something which was in the [inaud] work. They were excited. When this white was done, now it was a problem of washing it over with a brown, an even brown. And I told them, you will do it, but I will demonstrate to you how. And I began to do it[?], they did it, and they loved[?] it again. Then I put on the drawing, and they began to transform the first drawings into cutting out[?] the background and the foreground. And by that time I [inaud], then I had to continue myself. But they didn't want to leave; they had come and they wanted to see the whole mural, [inaud]. Well, it was about fourteen months[?] [inaud], and [inaud] Really a good work, I'm still proud of it. And you see, just now I have produced another [inaud], this is the 'Homage to the Women of Greenham Common', which will be shown in the Academy. It's another. But this scale of work, well, [inaud] everyone. [inaud] Such things are connected to commissions, you know, [inaud] commission. Of course, but I imagine them of course, [inaud] exactly this [inaud], and it was fine.

And you got the Contemporary Art Society prize sort of after the Festival. Was that...what was that for?

Oh for a lovely painting, a beautiful painting which now belongs to the Peckham Art Gallery, they have got it. It's a lovely lyrical painting of a family scene[?] in front of a [inaud]

woman and child in front of a door. But it's a very lyrical, a very tender painting. And they invited me to participate in this, and this painting I began before the invitation, but when I completed it I sent it to them, and their subject was seasons, and I called this 'Autumn'. And it has a feeling of autumn.

And, I thought there was another public work you did for the Arts Council, 'Lear Destroyed', that was 1963.

[inaud].

That's the[??] picture.

You saw it, the painting in the studio, in the room there, 'Lear Destroyed'.

Yes.

Yes, this was a painting, just an easel painting.

Oh I see. But that was commissioned by them?

Yes, it was commissioned by Professor Melvyn Merchant, who just blackmailed[??] the Arts Council! No, you see he is a very good friend of mine, and he got the commission of organising the centenary[??] of Shakespeare now. As a matter of fact he is the author of a magnificent book, a monumental book, 'Shakespeare and the Artist'. Wonderful book. And he got this job, so he came down from Suffolk[??] and asked me, 'Josef, I have the rights[??] of the Arts Council for two commissions, and you must forgive me but I used your name and your [inaud], so I know, whether you like it or not, you have to do something!'

How did you get to know him then?

Oh no, we knew each other on the National Committee of the Arts Council for Wales, and by sheer chance we [inaud]. He has just published his autobiography, and he started with her, [inaud], so he was a close friend of Barbara Hepworth, of Ezra Pound, John Piper. He is a formidable, good man. He is a clergyman but I must say a formidable human being. I must show you this autobiography, because during our meetings of the National Committee of the Arts Council, you know, I doodled away; I never took part in any discussions, I just sat there, and eventually I told him, they're wasting time [inaud]. I contribute nothing, I hardly ever listen to what goes on. So they kept on my name, but this was all, and I stopped going. But

during the meetings I grew [inaud]. And every now and then, when he opened it or...[LOUD MIC NOISE FOR FEW SECONDS] And he kept these [inaud]. And now I am very glad that he kept them, because he produced them in his autobiography, and some of them are quite interesting doodles.

If you were thinking about your art since say the 1950s, I mean how would you say it had changed in those years?

It hasn't changed much. It hasn't changed. It changes a little every now and again, a different mood and relation to colour, but on the whole it's still the same. There are always two types of artists, artists who never change and artists who all the time change, you know. A temperament like Picasso is a temperament [inaud] it goes on changing every 24 hours, and he has to, you know. But the temperament like Braque, he hasn't changed [inaud]. In sixty years he didn't change hardly anything. So it isn't a problem of criticism, it is just the acceptance of the variety of temperaments involved in art, this is all. You have to accept this, as simple as that. If not you land yourself in such dreadful messes. You know, Valrot[ph] wrote once an article on 'La Francais, de Fouquet[??] a Derain'. And do you know whom he had throw out?

No.

Roualt, because Roualt didn't fit in to his pattern of French reason. Running from Fouquet[??] Derain. You know? So what do you do with an artist like Roualt? You just throw him out. Quite honestly when I read the article I laughed, I honestly, I just roared with laughter. And he's a very fine painter, a very fine painter, but my God, Roualt is a much greater one.

Why do you think that?

What?

Why do you think that?

Oh just the sheer quality of genius. One is a talent, a very talented man, the other is just a genius you know. You cannot produce [inaud]. You see, this has nothing against Derain, this has nothing against Derain; it says a lot for Roualt himself, you know. There are such simple delicate differentiations in the quality of talent. Some goes higher and some will stay at the lower level, and there it is. And both are equally important, and no need to discourage, to

dismiss any of them, but to be aware of where each stands. You know the reason why so few Roualts are ever [inaud]? It is frightfully difficult to think who can [inaud]. Derain is technically more advanced than Roualt, but someone who is [inaud]. So fakers have a lovely time! You know, it's hardly possible to find a genuine Derain, because there are so many fakes. But Roualt is so time-consuming, and demands so much of the individual discipline. I met once a Hungarian painter in Ibiza. Oh he was on television, but I can't remember his name. A fantastic charm, a wonderful man, and he invited me to his place, and we had a lovely time, and he was absolutely genuine, an honest man. He said, 'Look, I am a third rate painter, I hate the things I do. But there are so many artists I like, so I don't mind faking them. I like [inaud] that people want to pay money. Do you know, all my Modiglianis are in the museums all over the world!' And I am sure he is right, because he fakes so well you can't imagine. He fakes signatures; in my presence he made a Matisse signature. I couldn't recognise the difference. I took a book, a photograph of the Matisse signature, compared three, four signatures, because you know there are always slight variations. Compared them with his, his could be the fifth variation, you know! And...you see [inaud], the industry produces corruptions; there is nothing wrong with what this man is doing, except from an industrial point of view, you know. That it is a corruption thing, to produce on the market. Somebody will be swindled, you know. Otherwise there is just no harm in doing what he does.

That's right, yes. But could we talk a little bit about your travels?

My what?

Your sort of...times abroad, because, I'm wondering whether any of these were significant especially. I mean you've been to many different countries haven't you.

Oh yes. Well, significant were the times in Burgundy.

Yes, can you tell me something about Burgundy?

Yes. It was very significant because it helped consolidating the form which I started in Ystradgynlais. Significant was the time in Spain.

Well what did you find in Burgundy that helped you?

Well just the connection between the figure and the mountains, things which were not unlike this [inaud] in Wales.



But this time with peasants.

The wine-growers. You see, there is always, I think I mentioned it before, there is always the many paintings [inaud], but in certain places you find a certain additional element which you wouldn't have thought of in other circumstances, so Burgundy added the additional element. And Spain added another additional element, and this was the element of light, of the bright light. You see usually my light was very subdued, twilight light, and in Spain I did the great, drastic contrasts, you know. So this was a new aspect, a new element which [inaud]. But also took years to realise, so they weren't as [inaud] as all that.

Where did you go in Spain?

Oh, Andalusia, and from there all over.

Did you like it in Spain?

Well we stayed only eleven months.

A long time.

Yes, I liked it. But mind you, it was a very bad period, it was the Franco period, and the Guardia Civil was everywhere, and the horrible things you see. If you talked in a cafe against Franco, and some of the Guardia Civil dressed in civilian clothes take notice or take notes, you would be thrown out as a homosexual, and if you were a woman you were thrown out as a prostitute. And there are no defences. I talked with a Belgian friend of mine who is a father of three children, and I knew him very well. One evening he got very drunk and he gave Franco a bit of hell, and he was thrown out as a homosexual. So I went to the Consul, the Belgian Consul, I said, 'How can you permit such a thing? This man is a father of three children, he's as much a homo...'. He said, 'We know, we know that. But you see legally we had no leg to stand on, because whatever we would say, every homosexual would say.' So it's a no win situation, you can't do a thing about it. And if it happens to be a woman, she's a prostitute, [inaud] prostitution. And what will she say now, you know? And they say yes, and there it is now, and then you are thrown out, you are never let in again. And I have seen such many things. We got ourselves almost in trouble. You see there was a flood in Torremolinos, a terrible flood, and all the poor people lost all their things they had in this flat. So [inaud] took it upon ourselves to go around the colony of the foreigners to get together some money, to divide this between the families who lost. And one day there arrived an

inspector from Malaga, and spoke beautiful English, highly educated man, very quietly, well-mannered, spoken, and he said to me[??], 'We may have to deport you'. 'Why? What did I do?' 'Very simple. You see we have our dignity to consider. We don't want charity of foreigners.' And we said, 'But you did bugger all. Here are people who lost everything, and nobody cares!' 'You don't know how it...do you know, how do you know that you didn't insult those poor people?' You know, this kind of thing.

So you were quite glad to leave in the end?

No no no, no no. Listen, I was used to fascism in Poland. You don't leave a country because of this.....

End of F1416 side B

F1417 side A

So, we were talking about your travels, and Spain. Is there anywhere else which is really important?

France also, France is very important, and I travelled quite a bit in the Bordeaux area, again the [inaud] and particularly La Rochepot, I did a lot of painting and drawing there.

La Roche...?

La Rochepot, it is a mountain village in the south of France, high in the mountains.

You stayed a long time there?

Quite a few weeks, but I used to return, go and come back; became very good friends with all the villagers.

So when did you discover that place?

I can't remember.

Roughly.

I think over there, go there, and there you will find a postcard. [BREAK IN RECORDING]

Sixties you think, yes. Because Spain was 1958 I think you went there. So it was later than Spain.

Yes.

You've been to Mexico haven't you?

Oh well, yes, this was a great experience, because...

Why was that a great experience?

Well, I went there with the sole idea of looking at the muralists, Diego Rivera, Siqueiros. But I discovered a life which was for me very very important, very significant. And I did curiously enough very little work on the spot, but when I came home I had three exhibitions of works from there, and I produced a few hundred drawings, and some of my very very best drawings there.

Can you say more about what you found there?

Well, you see you don't find all the time something else; you find the same spirit in a new subject. So you find a squatting woman, which is different from a squatting miner, you know? You find a family group against a desert with mountains. And you can't find this anywhere else, this combination of desert and mountains. The family group you could find somewhere else, but the combination of the three... This is why I speak all the time about the same spirit, different images.

Where did you go in Mexico then?

All over the place. We were in Mexico City of course, but Mexico City was mainly to be in the various museums. You know it is one of the most hellish places on this earth. It's lunacy[??], you can't cross the road.

Really?

It's absolutely impossible. The traffic is so continuous, you see. And what is worse, if there is an accident, let's say, we have seen this: a bus turned over a car, so the driver of the bus ran away and left the passengers! But of course you know, in Mexico City every incident on the road is punishable by prison, so nobody wants to know about it, you see?

But outside Mexico City, where did you go then?

Oh, Patzcuaro, quite a few other places up in the mountains, and after my wife left, my wife [inaud] left after ten weeks, I stayed on and I got to know an American social anthropologist who made a study of Mexican areas where there is no money, everything is [inaud] for barter, you know? No money. And I couldn't believe it, that there is a place like this, that exists such a place. So I travelled with him and his, what's it called, his car... Well anyway, I travelled with him, and indeed, we came to villages where they have never heard the sound of money, they have never seen money. If you showed them a, let's say 50...a note of 50 pesetas[sic], they will look at it, 'Oh, oh oh, oh oh!' And give it to you back. But if you

give...if they live in a place where it is difficult to get wood, and you showed them wood, they would give you fish, you see. And from there, there I met a shepherd, and I painted probably one of my most popular pictures of him. He was a wonderful guitarist. You must read in the 'Related Twilights' my thing on Mexico, because it was all based on his stories.

Ah, yes.

He told me the most extraordinary stories, you know. He was a living bit of folklore. And I verified it with this social anthropologist. He said yes, some he corrected, but he said well, you know, 'In other places I heard the same story but with different...somewhere with different people', you know, etcetera. And he was [inaud]; it was a great experience to get to know a completely new world, and the new world began far away from Mexico City. Because Mexico City is still [inaud]. Some of the same problems[?]; you know, still the cafes and restaurants, and traffic, and museums; you know, all this what we expect from a big city. But when you came to these places you were in a world probably of pre-historic, you know. So you see, completely different things. For example, the early morning begins with hearing chapatas, [MAKES KNOCKING SOUND] You know. This is the first sound you hear. And then you see, you go out and you see all the women making chapatas, and all the men sitting in a row against the wall in the sun. And when the chapatas are made, 'Rico! Emilio!' Suddenly shouts from all the sides. And they go in, drink coffee, eat the chapatas, and go back to the sun! You see, these kind of things you can't see anywhere else. No this was a fine...this was a great experience. On the human side, it was a great...but artistically it was very significant for me, I did a lot of good work. And then I discovered something else. You see, I met Siqueiros' sister. Siqueiros was a Communist you know, and a rather, a very strong Stalinist. He organised the first attack on Trotsky, you know. He was a dreadful character. I have a good book by him actually, '[inaud] Revolution'. He was a wonderful artist, and a very very wonderful writer, but a horrible reactionary in a Stalinistic sense. Killing men for [inaud]. Now, he was in prison for organising a tram-car workers' strike, and by chance I met his sister, and she was a lovely woman, and she said, 'Oh you are lucky you see, because he will be out tomorrow, because tomorrow he works on a mural, so they let him out from prison to do the mural! And then he goes back in the evening to prison'. He got a five year sentence. Well these are things which I couldn't imagine in any other country.

That was in Mexico City?

Yes. Can you imagine in England a painter being let out to complete a mural and come back to prison?

Roughly when was this?

When I was in...?

No, but roughly what year was this?

Quite honestly I can't remember. But you can look it up in 'Related Twilights'.

Yes. I'm not sure that there was a date on it.

There must be.

Ah, well there you are! Good, I'll look it out. You've mentioned several times about your present wife. Maybe it would be good to...

Nini?

Yes, to say a little bit about her, and how you met her, and so on.

Well, I met her very simply, she came to the studio. Have a look at this photograph there, on the table, go on. [BREAK IN RECORDING]

Yes.

Comes into the studio with a friend of mine, you know. And she has written in her autobiography, 'My Kleinian Home', she has written probably the best thing of our first meeting, you know, how she was absolutely stunned by my complete absorption in work, and when I told them to be quiet and sit there for a few minutes, and after this, we began talking, had coffee. This was in my studio in [inaud] Road. We had coffee and this, and then I asked her over another time, and then I asked her to pose for me, because she is absolutely a magnificent thing, magnificent figure, magnificent sheer stature of her, and incredible intelligence. She was a doctor, so she had a certain [inaud]. And we became friendly, and within a year we fell in love, and about two or three years later[??] we got married[?]. But we had to wait for my divorce you see, and so... No, she is a very talented writer, a very gifted writer. She has published four books in the last...no, three books in the last four years, sorry.

What's her second name?

Nini Ethinger, but she writes under the name of Nini Herman.

Ah.

And her best book which is known, almost a minor classic, is 'My Kleinian Home'; it's an autobiography based on three psychoanalytic treatments, Jung...Freudian, Klein, Jungian and Kleinian, and the Freudian and Jungian were not successful, and the Kleinian was successful, and this is why she calls it 'My Kleinian Home'.

This is about herself?

Yes, it's an autobiography based on three analyses. It's now become a classic book, because it is rare. Psychoanalysts very rarely write about themselves; it is part of the ethics that you know, psychoanalysts have no nervous breakdowns! You know? Psychoanalysts can't write about such things, it never happens to them. And she was the first who just said yes, [inaud] a breakdown, you know. And it became a classic. She, and there's another woman, a French writer, Maria Cardinale[ph] who has written a similar autobiography, also based on the fact that she broke down to the level of madness, and how a certain type of analysis will[?]?...her type of analysis, that for seven years she went to an analyst who didn't say a single word; all she did herself. And the final day (this is probably one of the great classic descriptions), in the final day she arrived and said, 'I don't think I will come here any more'. He said, 'Well, of course, we have done the job.' And this is the only time he spoke. You see, what is the object of this, is that analysis is very much your work, not the analyst's work, your work. And the legend is, that this is a good analyst, this is not a good analyst, this is the best analyst, this analyst helped me in everything. It's quite possible, but this analyst who didn't say a word also helped.

And, what is her background then?

Well, a very unfortunate background. She comes from an almost, a Junkerish German aristocratic family, which you know is very horrible to their children, like most aristocratic families. Her mother is still alive, she is now about 90, she lives in Oxford. Her mother is a good folklorist, but now she is too old to do anything. But she did, only last year she did a paper where she interpreted an image on a Danish bow on a Danish ship, connected with Danish folklore. She was the one who discovered it, the connection. She's a formidable woman, but a very bad mother, a dreadful mother. Perhaps not so much dreadful as a not caring, she couldn't be bothered with children, you know? Then during the war they came

over here, and here was a tragic thing, because the mother couldn't boil water, so the poor girl of twelve had to do housework. That began to produce many tensions. But before this she...then she was [inaud] school, and this straightened her out a bit, the school helped her immensely. And then her first marriage was to a doctor, she was only 17, and this marriage broke up, and we have been married for over 36 years.

36 years ago you married?

36 years.

It's a long time isn't it.

Yes. No, but she is basically a very very fine, caring person, a very fine caring person, but she had gone through, she has been exploited first of all by a tyrannic mother, and then by her husband, well, who was more concerned with himself than their relationship, so this had to break up. In the meantime she had two children by him, you know, and she was incapable of looking after them. So later she began to suffer from the fact of having neglected the children, and this was one of the causes of her prolonged breakdown.

What happened to those children?

Oh listen, they are now women of 40 and 41, they are not children. One lives in Taos, New Mexico, and one is here, has a lovely restaurant. An unexpected thing. Listen, a girl whom I would never have expected to be able to boil an egg, opens a restaurant and is one of the most successful restaurants in London, where she does most of the supervising of the cooking. It is Polish/Jewish food.

What's it called, this restaurant?

Buschka[ph].

Buschka?[ph] I must try it!

It's a good restaurant.

Where is it?



Oh, I [inaud] tell you [inaud]. I never remember the addresses. But this, you know, it's absolutely a first-class restaurant.

But they didn't ever live with you?

What?

They didn't live with you?

No no.

No. They stayed with the father then?

No, they stayed...yes, they stayed with the father, but then separated from the father, and they came more or less of some age. Both had degrees in teaching, university degrees. The one who lives in Taos is a staggering beauty, and she is a great survivor, but a very intelligent girl. The one here in London, who lives here, the older one, she is a much quieter type, but to my great surprise produced such a successful restaurant. So there was quite...

And that side of the family is also originally Jewish?

What? Oh yes yes yes.

But I think, didn't you tell me they were baptised?

No, the mother became Catholic.

Ah.

And later separated, became Protestant, and now she considers herself Jewish again! She doesn't [inaud].

And, when you met, was Nini actually practising as a psychoanalyst, or was that later?

No, as a doctor.

As a doctor, oh I see.

As a doctor of medicine.

What sort of...?

General practitioner.

General practice, I see, yes.

She had her surgery, you know, and she chose - this is out of conviction - she chose the very poorest part of North Kensington, so she was not out for money at all. I think she made about £8.10s. a week. Mind you, you could live on £5, so £8.10s. was not as bad as all that, but definitely she could have done, if she had wanted to go into Harley Street and practise as a doctor, you know, she could have gone... But she was...I don't know, she had the instinctive care for the poor, so she chose North Kensington, and believe me North Kensington was poor, you know. And you know, this was the hot-bed of Mosleyites.

Was it?

Yes. Well, when there was such poverty, and nobody could do anything about it, naturally Mosley had the answer, hate the foreigners, hate the blacks. As a matter of fact, when she put out a poster in her surgery telling the blacks that for every white hooligan, I can assure you there is a white caring man, do you know what the Mosleyites did? Throw in a dead rat to her, [inaud] anything, you know, and said, 'You will be next'. So the police, the police guarded her house for a few months.

This was before you got together?

No, I was already on the scene, but vaguely, the beginnings, the beginnings. As a matter of fact I got to know about this much later.

It sounds a brave woman.

Oh, she is...oh, she is a fantastic fighter. She is a fantastic fighter. But a very gifted writer.

And you've had two children with her?

No, we...we have two children, a son who is 34...

That's David.

David. And the daughter who is 24.

And her name?

Becky.

And what has happened to them?

Nothing.

What do they do?

No, David was a producer on Granada, he was the producer of the programme called 'Voices', and when this was cut out he got a job with the BBC, and at the moment he is neither here nor there, because he [inaud] in a project, a history of madness, you know, for which they needed over £2 million to produce. So that the [inaud], they showed him this, but] gave him a very good handshake[??], quite, really a very good, you know... But at the moment he is writing articles for the 'Times Educational Supplement'. He is a historian by training, he is a good researcher[?]. But he is looking around for a better job. You see his tragedy was this, that he got himself a double first at Trinity, in Cambridge, so before he finished Cambridge they offered him a lectureship, but at the same time he got a [inaud] scholarship for Columbia, so he went to Columbia, and they promised to keep the lectureship. But after three years when he came back there was a cut-back everywhere, you know; lectureships were lost one after the other. You know probably of this.

I do, yes, too well, yes.

You know? So he had nothing, you know. OK, sorry, we apologise, you know! So he came back to nothing. So he applied for a job at the Granada, and got this job for 'Voices', he became a producer for 'Voices', and had a few wonderful programmes. I don't know whether you ever watched 'Voices', because it was very late, a late night programme. No, it was high-powered, you know, and he brought over Chomsky, he brought over Mary MacCarthy, Josef Brotsky[ph], so you can imagine what...you know, they came on it. This programme had the lowest rating! (laughing) So, then what was his name, who took over? Grant[ph]? No. Father and[?] son, but the son took over [inaud] television. So he first cut all the programmes which had low ratings, out!

And what about Rebekah then?

No, Rebekah is beautiful, she is wonderful. She was a very late developer; she couldn't read nor write till the age of ten, and we thought that we had a problem on our hands. But by sheer chance we discovered that we had no problem whatever. Do you know that there are many people [inaud] who represent cultures[??], their doing means more than abstract things? They cannot think abstractly. And many of the Jamaicans, many of the blacks have this great problem. And this is why the IQ test is totally unfair, absolutely unfair; they will never pass an IQ test, because they have no abstract way of thinking. They cannot even use mathematics properly.

And it was like this with her then?

Oh yes, very much so. So fortunately Nini discovered that there is a lovely school for beauticians, and she asked Becky, would you like this, because we really didn't know what to do. So I[??] applied, and she went, and my God, what a different person came out of this school, after three years, you know? Her articulation, which was non-existent before, is now wonderful. She is a lovely chatterbox. She still has difficulties with reading serious books, but she can read Jilly Cooper's paperbacks, you know, this is no problem, but other books, with difficulty. Anyway that she can read at all is a bit of a miracle, but she reads. Now, this job has made a total difference, this school, and now she has a job for Chanel, and she earns £190 a week, which is not too bad. And my God, her personality has grown. She was always a very beautiful girl, but her personality, her self-assurance. Her taste in boys was so dreadful, absolutely incredibly dreadful; now she has thrown them all out, out out! 'They're no good, they're no good! I'm not impressed by having a fast car.' So she bought herself a Fiat!

What do you think is, for you as a father, what do you want...what kind of a father do you want to be?

I don't want to be any father at all, I am not a father, I am a friend of theirs, finish. I don't know what it is to be a father. Hell! I hate even the name. I can't see myself as a father. But we are good friends.

But what do you enjoy doing most with your wife and children then?

We do very little together, very little. Except that we every now and again have a dinner together, or at David's place or they come here, you know. Or sometimes, well David is very easy to discuss, talk about things, so at the moment he is going through a very critical period because, you know, [inaud] projections, applications, this is [inaud], you know, and so he is a bit drawn[??], you know. But still, he has got such a good handshake[??] that it will keep him for another two or three years.

But when they were younger, I mean what sort of things did you enjoy doing with them, when they were children?

Do you know, nothing. We did hardly ever anything together. David invented his own games as a child; we lived in Suffolk, and he played most of the time, and when he was a bit bored he would come down to the studio.

End of F1417 side A

F1417 side B

A middle class woman when she was [inaud], she went out to buy a house[?]. Today, [inaud] a beautician. And Becky became such a good [inaud], talking about their problems, you know, that now women are queueing for her.

Really?

Yes. 'Oh we will wait for Becky.'

Maybe she should be an analyst like her mother.

I wouldn't be surprised if she could. If only she could read, if only she could get up [inaud].

And you said you were in Suffolk, that was Little Cornard, is that right?

Yes.

Yes. I mean that was a happy time, living there?

Very.

What did you like about it then?

Well, complete isolation, wonderful work, no financial difficulties whatever. What more do you want? Lovely environment, you know. We got a rectory[?] which had wonderful barns; I had converted one barn into a studio. The studio was near a pond and a little waterfall. It was a lovely...beautiful trees, some of the oldest trees in Suffolk were on my grounds. I was perfectly contented, but Nini wasn't, she was too isolated; she was going through a period when she wanted to be with people, and the only friends they had there was the writer Jack Lindsay, who became a close friend of ours. And otherwise we only had people who came down from London, and I had quite a lot of clients who came down from London to spend the weekend. So Nini began to feel that she was [inaud] congratulated her on her cooking, and this she hated most! She [inaud] ever to be pleasant to them, and to produce a table. But she, first of all she disliked it most of all[?]. Listen, most of the clients are not proper[?] friends. I hardly know them, you know. They come down, the well-to-do middle class family, a middle-class husband and wife, you know, they came down to buy a picture, two pictures, a

few drawings, and this is all. But Nini insisted that they should stay the weekend; I wouldn't, but she insisted, so she cooked and this all the time, and then she was all the time congratulated, what a good cook, and this depressed her even more! So eventually there were several things. As David needed to further his education, and he was enrolled in St. Paul's, and Nini gave up medicine to start a psychoanalytic practice, so these two combinations, we had to move back to London.

So how long were you in Suffolk then?

Eleven years.

Oh, 1961 to '72 then that would be, yes. Interesting. I mean, in the last...

As far as I am concerned I could have lived there forever.

You could?

Oh yes.

Yes.

You see, only you don't like to live in a place which makes others unhappy, you can't do it. And besides, David had to move to London for his school, so it was...you know, I take it in [inaud].

Jack Lindsay I have read some of his work, but what sort of a person?

[inaud] You know, you could be surprised. He was really a saintly [inaud], but an unfortunate Stalinist. Stalin could do no wrong. And he got a Stalin literary prize, and [inaud] the worst books on this earth, and he [inaud] a Stalin[??] prize, [inaud]. Such a concocted piece. Do you know, he has written 138 books?

I didn't know there were so many.

Now, he has written the best book on Turner, which is really a great book, really a great, a definitive book on Turner; he has written a wonderful book on Cézanne, which is actually dedicated to me; he has written a wonderful book on Courbet, you know; he has written a wonderful book on Goya, and a wonderful book on David, Jacques-Louis David. And they

are good books, but his [inaud], his writing is so bad[??], you can't imagine! Maybe because he writes so fast. I don't know, but I just know that he [inaud], he just writes [inaud], except, with the exception of the book on Turner, which is [inaud], and he wrote it in ten months, and with such a [inaud] style, and such a beautiful book. You know, he sent me the manuscript, and I couldn't believe my eyes, and I wrote him back an enthusiastic letter, 'My dear Jack, this is the best thing you ever wrote'. Do you know what letter I got back from him? 'I have written 138 books, how do you know one[??] is the best?'

Very good! Yes.

Oh no, we were very good friends, he was a dear dear friend you know, really a dear friend.

So after Suffolk you came back here...

[inaud].

You already had the house here?

Oh the house was here, yes.

When did you get this house then?

In '55.

Oh yes. And did you...the studio was here, or...?

The studio was here. The first ground floor always was here, we sub-let only the top.

Yes. Was there a painter here before you then?

Yes, a civil servant before the First World War then he retired, took up sculpture, and sacrificed his little garden and made the studio. [inaud] garden, but it's a beautiful little studio.

Perfect for you.

It's absolutely beautiful. Oh, I could do with four times the size, but this is a different story, but it's a beautiful studio, it's a beautiful atmosphere. When I come down here at half-past



four in the morning [inaud] completely different world. [inaud], stretch yourself out in it, you know, and you [inaud]. You see again, Nini found this place. I was still living in [inaud] Road and one day she arrives with the 'Evening Standard', and says, 'Josef, at six o'clock there will be an auction for a studio house'. I said all right. And I couldn't even[??] afford it. She said, 'No, you don't know; it is a slummy area, they go cheap.' And she had always a good nose for property. All right, so we arrived at six o'clock, and there was hardly any bidding, except one woman who was doing scarves, dyeing scarves, and she wanted this place. If not for her I would have got this place for about six, seven hundred pounds. She bid up to a thousand pounds, and for eleven hundred I got it.

That is a...that was a lucky day! And tell me now, I mean in the last say ten years or so, who would be your most important friend?

Oh I have quite a few really, [inaud] the writer, [inaud] frightfully embarrassing [inaud].

Mm, OK, fine, yes. I just wondered whether your circle had changed.

No, the circle... Look, lasting friendships don't change, but acquaintances come and go. Naturally the turnover of acquaintances here is quite phenomenal, but the friends only...definitely you are damned lucky if you get, in a lifetime you have five or six friends. I think it's enough[??].

And you've been very lucky in that way.

Oh yes, yes. I have a few friends [inaud]; we are friends. What is called...what one [inaud] lightly describe, because it is no one else, but we...because it is no one else, but we [inaud].

So you keep on with your friends, you keep on with your work. And if you were to sum it up, I mean what would you say was the best and the worst thing about your life?

Well, the best thing is having achieved a mode of life where I can do my work, this is the best thing. The worst things were really the things behind, you know. Well, one can't grow up between two world wars and consider this a happy existence, you know. One cannot help[??] to change places, not knowing where or what, or how it could happen. And sometimes it happens quite good and sometimes it happens very bad. For example, my experience of France during the war, 1940, when I fled from Belgium through France, [inaud] a French peasant asking [inaud] for a glass of water? [inaud]. And one, he asked me, 'Quelle nationalité être vous?' Polonais. 'Oh, [inaud] Polonais, [inaud] a vous le [INAUDILBE]

guerre'. Not exactly the most pleasant experience! No, there are...but listen, the truth is, we are all ready, open...whether ready or not, but we are all open to it. You know, we are all open to it. There exists not a single people on this earth who hasn't a dreadful history behind it, you know? So, one can't take personal disadvantages too seriously. I don't.

No.

I don't. What happened, happened; it could have happened...it happened to me, it could have happened to others. [LOUD MIC NOISE] and if it doesn't happen to me, I'm still aware that it happens to others, you know. Listen, there are skinheads here who roam around and beat up the Indians, the browns or the blacks [inaud]. [inaud] you know; this happened in this way to Jews, and it happened in this way to Irish, it happens in this way to others.

No, you've seen the tragic side of life certainly.

I have seen it, but I...well this is the part of being human; you know, you...what am I, so privileged as to avoid these things? Who am I? If you ask yourself such a basic question, how...why[??] I should like to be more privileged than two hundred other people? You're so damned lucky if you don't get divorced, you know. I got some [inaud] divorced too. Listen, in Poland was a chief of the secret police, Privorski was his name, whom everybody feared. And I was warned, that if I will be interrogated by him, I should not trust his smile, and I shouldn't trust his kind words, his kind voice, so I was prepared. I was arrested and I was in front of him, and indeed, the kindest father-figure you could imagine. And he would say to you, you know, that I must confess I do believe in communism. No, I don't believe in communism; I don't believe that communism [inaud] help mankind. But then this is my personal belief, but I do understand that there are other people who have the illusions, and they believe in communism [inaud]. You see, many of my colleagues believe in[??] interrogation by force, I don't, I don't, you know. He would give you such a lovely smile you know. All he wanted is for you to say that you are a communist. But this was his way, and when he couldn't get it, he would suddenly say, 'You will excuse me for one moment, you would excuse me, I will be back soon'. And he would go out, and you wouldn't expect anything, and suddenly three thugs [inaud]. Oh brother! You have the swollen, face bleeding. Do you know, you get all different things. And they would disappear. He would come in, he would look at you. 'My God! I can't leave my own prisoners for a minute. This is what they did to you? If you want to complain, I will be on your side.' By this time I didn't trust him a single word; I knew the game, he will go out and I will get another beating, you know. So, once you meet with this as part of the method, how it works - because there were other more direct methods, who yell at you, hit you, you know. But you know, he was kind,

he wouldn't do anything. And with some people I am sure, through his cunning words[??], he got out from them things which they wouldn't dare even admit to themselves [inaud] said it. The second stage in all this was that he had a piece of blank paper, and after all this he said, 'Well, you know I can't bother you with all the details which I will write down, could you sign it here'. You know, the nonchalant tricks of this bit of inhumanity. I know that he has to [inaud] with the interrogation, I know this. But to [inaud]!

Well thank you very much, thank you.

So he had everything, more even than everything.

End of F1417 side B

End of Interview