

**NATIONAL**

# Life stories

**LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH  
COMMUNITY**

**PHILIP ENGELBERG**

Interviewed by Ilse Sinclair

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



## **IMPORTANT**

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## F310 Side A

Could you start by telling me your full name and the date and place of your birth?

I was born in Chemnitz, Germany, today known as Karl Marx Stadt, on 13th of September 1923.

What is your full name?

My name is Philip Engelberg. Incidentally I changed the - Philip from Felix. Because when I came over in 1939 and I introduced myself as Felix Engelberg, usually there was smiles on people's face and I was usually greeted with "Felix the cat". So obviously when you live in Rome you do as the Roman. So I changed it to Philip. It stuck ever since.

Can you start right at the beginning and tell me a little bit, at leisure, about your childhood. And the first sort of things you remember about your home and your parents?

Yes. Really the first thing I sort of could - or can remember is the - would be the first year at school. Because that always used to be - a big event in Germany. Not like here in England. You would - it was more of a celebration. Your first day at school your mother would take you, and your father at times of course. And what one would call you were given zucker tuete And that was usually a very big occasion. You had chocolates and so on. And I don't think there was ever any child - whatever - in whatever - material position they were, whereby you wouldn't take a photo of - of your first day at school. And as I said what they called zucker tuete which was a - a - what shall I say - a - big bag made out of cardboard -

Just like a cone wasn't it?

Yes, like a cone, that's right. Yes, a cone. And that usually was filled with sweets and chocolates and - a nice big tie on top. And that - those - I should think that was my real first vivid recollection of my childhood. Of course that I would say was in 1930 or '31, I'm not quite sure. Of course that was still before the upheaval and - and - what have you of Hitler. So I should think the first two years were happy years in school.

Could you tell me a bit about your parents. Your father, mother, brothers and sisters and grandparents?

Yes. I've got two brothers. Of course my father had his business in Chemnitz and in Berlin. We didn't see all that much of him because as he was always commuting between Chemnitz and Berlin. And I should think sort of looking back that my mother was the - domineering feature in the family. She - she was the one that - brought us up as one would say. And my father when he saw us had the novelty of - of being with us and playing with us. My mother at the same time was always a nervous person. Again looking back over the years because obviously as a grown up

and adult person she would - she would be nervous of things to come. We're going back to say 1932. 1931, 1932 and of course 1933. It really started. It was always my mother's intention of - of leaving Germany. And it was my father of course being in business - he usually tried to pacify my mother. And I remember relatives of mine immigrating to Palestine. Which was then obviously called Palestine. And trying to persuade my parents as far back as 1934, '35, to - in those days you could obviously still sell up and come to Israel. And my father was very reluctant, he wouldn't - he said "I've got a business here, nothing will happen, it'll be sort of a passing phase and everything will be all right". Of course we know it wasn't.

What was your father's business?

Ladies stockings and underwear. Wholesale. Being in Chemnitz which was the centre of - of - of the manufacturing side. And he was in partnership actually with a brother of his who was running the wholesale business in Berlin. So my father was on the, what one would call die quelle.

So he was a manufacturer as well as a salesman?

No -

He didn't have a factory?

No, just the buying. The buying. He would -

At the source?

At the source, that's right. At Zwickau, Chemnitz, etcetera. All round, which was all the centre of that particular commodity.

Could you give me a picture of both of your grandparents?

Well, only - I remember my grandmothers. My grandfathers - I think died in the First World War. So I can only remember both of my grandmothers.

Can you give us their names?

One was Ettl Rudolf. And that was my mother's mother. And my father's mother was - Bina Engelberg.

Did you lead a very Jewish sort of life?

Well, a traditional Jewish. Sometimes my father would go on Shabat to synagogue. Yes, we kept the - my mother kept a kosher household. We would keep the main festivals, etcetera. But - nothing extreme.

Did you have mainly Jewish friends, you and your parents?

Yes. Mainly Jewish friends. Which was obviously - at school I went to an ordinary elementary school in the first years. And there I did mix with - with all sorts of boys. Religion didn't come into it at that stage.

And your parent's friends, were they Jews and non-Jews?

No, mainly Jews. Good neighbours. Non-Jewish good neighbours, yes. But socialising I would say with Jewish people.

And you said you had two brothers?

Two brothers.

Are they older?

Well, one is younger, one is older. I am in the middle.

How did you get on with them?

Yes, extremely well. As a matter of fact they're both in this country as well.

What stands out when you look back. Did you live in a house or in a flat?

I lived in a flat, as one does on the continent, you know, it's not like in England where you've got your sort of little house. Mostly one would call dwellings, that type of - It's a matter of fact when I revisited Chemnitz, I visited the places of my youth. And I've got pictures to that effect.

Were you born at home, do you remember your mother telling you. Or were you born in a hospital or clinic?

I think I was born at home. Yes. In those days I think - to have people born in hospital wasn't - unless there was something wrong with you, normally I think women had their babies at home.

What else stands out. If you sort of shut your eyes and put your mind back to the age of say between under 6 or just over 6, or 8. What stands out in your memory?

Here again I've got to refer back to my schooldays. Because the first years were the sort of most impressionable - dates. Such - I think what sort of started off the difference - or made me aware of being Jewish and my fellow men being different, if one can use that expression. Was through your religious classes. We as Jewish children, I don't know why, but we were not allowed or we were excused taking part in - in religious - lessons. And we would have to be outside the class. And at the age of 7 or 8 the impression a Christian boy would have of this - this schoolmate was that there was - this is really the sort of beginning of the - of the - difference between a Jew and a non-Jew. And I think obviously looking back that was the sort of beginning - or it gave me the basis of - of - almost I would say hate. And -

everything that goes with it. And of course the teaching of - of - of religious material was - it always fell back to Jesus was crucified by Jews.

So you boys went out of the classroom. Did you have your Jewish instruction in that time at the school?

No. No, we didn't. No.

You had it out of school?

We had it out of school, after school or Sunday mornings. We would go to what one called in those days, and is still called today, Cheder.

Did you enjoy that, learning about Judaism?

Oh yes, yes, we were - made aware of that. And of course as children we then, at the age of 8 and 9, we started joining the Jewish organisations such as Habonim. And sort of took part in - or started to begin to take part in all Jewish activities.

You became a Zionist?

I did, oh yes.

And your parents were Zionists?

I suppose in a way they were Zionists. Because maybe for different reasons. Belonging to Habonim was then a - the idea of Zionism was given to us. I'm not going to say brainwashed, because I didn't consider that being brainwashed. I - I felt that even as a boy of 9 or 10 that really there was no long term future for Jewish youth in Germany. Especially by that time obviously we had reached the - the - '33 or '34. And also I always - I've never realised obviously in those days, due to my age, the seriousness of what could happen. I felt that - if - or when I was getting older that my place wouldn't be in Germany. I would like to go, not had to go, but would have liked to have gone to Israel.

Am I right in understanding you that you would have liked there and then to go to Israel. Or when you were a bit older?

Yes.

You didn't see your future in Germany?

In Germany, no. No. That was already at an early age.

How did you get on with your mother and with your father individually. Could you tell me a bit about that?

Excellent. We were - we were a very close knit family. And because of - of what was happening in - in Germany or in this particular town we lived in, Chemnitz.

Somehow it brought you more together. It was almost like during the blitz in this country when you were exposed to all sorts of danger, that even strangers - you felt some affinity. And I suppose looking back as a child I felt a stronger affinity because I looked for protection from my parents.

Am I right in understanding that they were a bit divided. Your mother wanted to leave the country. She was more of a realist?

Yes.

And your father had his business and security and he didn't think Hitler was going to last anyway?

No. And then he felt I suppose - the years he sort of put into the - into his business. Which was quite a successful business. That obviously it blinded him.

Did you used to visit your grandmothers?

Oh yes. Every Shabat we would go and see them, or even - my father's mother only lived more or less round the corner, so as children after school we would go and see them - or see her. Maybe my mother's mother was - if one can say that, maybe a warmer person. She was sort of more the real grandmother type. I think with my father's mother it was a question of ringing the bell, coming up, being at your best behaviour. And - tasting her cake. Which at times wasn't always - the right taste. But you dare say you didn't like it. So you had to swallow it.

Can you give me an idea of the history of your family. Your grandparents, where they originated from?

My father's father came from Austria. And my mother came from a place called, I think in German it was Landberg. Or in Polish I think Lvov. My father was a soldier during - a German soldier during the First World War. He fought in - somewhere in the Balkans. And then after the war - he again I suppose due to - that part of Austria sort of became part of Poland, was a lot of swapping and changing of borders. He came to Germany.

And have you ever traced any further back than that?

No. No. I believe we've had cousins as such in - somewhere in Poland, but - that I got to know at a later stage.

At that time when you were a child did you ever learn to speak Polish?

No, no, we never took any interest in - in the Polish language. But here again - I don't think my parents were very fond of being classed as Poles, because as everybody knows the problems started in Poland. And they really were the teachers of - of anti-semitism.

Your nationality was German?

Well, the funny thing is - I don't know if you are aware. If you - I was born in Germany. But you take the nationality of your parents. If you are born like in this country you are British, irrespective of your parents nationality. In Germany it was different. And that was the puzzling thing when I came over here eventually, that when you had to fill in a form you put the place of birth and you put Germany. And nationality Polish. And - people just couldn't understand it. If you were born in Germany you were German. I said "yes, well - take it as you like, but according to German law that was that".

Your father couldn't have become a German even in the early days when he started his business. He didn't want to?

No. No. He was quite happy.

Is there anything else that sort of stands out in your mind from before Hitler. Before 1933?

Not a tremendous amount. As I say, the - what sort of jerked my - my memory, is obviously the - upheaval as it started in 1933. No, not much.

Because what I'm trying to get at is the sort of family outings you might have had and the sort of family life and a picture of that. And then perhaps the difference of what happened later on?

Well, yes, maybe those little things Sunday afternoon - relations would meet and would go out, what one calls "Ins Grune". And used to be a habit of - yes, that I do remember. Used to go to a place called Kirschwald. Where you could - you bought your own cake and sandwiches and they used to have big notices on the trees and it said - SPOKEN IN GERMAN?

It was like a public picnic place?

Yes, that's right, yes. It was quite -

Was it great fun?

It was. Yes, that I do remember.

Did you have a car?

No. My father wouldn't drive.

So how did you get there?

By public transport. Bus, walk. Different type of life, you know. Today you go round the corner here, you jump in the car.

Can you give us an idea of what happened to you personally in 1933 when Hitler came. Did it creep up on you. Are you aware now of the shock to the system?

In 1933 I would say I did not realise the seriousness. Although listening to the wireless and - and walking along the street I used to count the flags hanging out of the windows. The Communists and the Nazi flags. And we used to - as children we used to walk along the street and count. And when we saw more flags of the Communists obviously we were happy because - obviously we didn't understand politics, but we knew that if the Communists were to come into power as far as the Jews were concerned that would have been alright. But counting Nazi flags was a - a different - kettle of fish. And it used to - worry us as - as children.

You were just 10 when Hitler came to power?

Yes.

And you were still in your primary school?

Yes.

Did you encounter any anti-semitism at all?

Not a lot. The only thing, as I said before, I can recall is when the - religious lesson was over and the teacher would call me in the classroom. People - the boys would sort of give me sheepish looks. But never say much about it. And I used to feel pretty uncomfortable.

How many Jewish children were there in your class?

Just two.

Very much in the minority?

Yes, oh yes. Yes, we were just two Jewish children. But I couldn't really sort of recall any fights or any - anything serious that would - go on in the classroom at that stage in 1933.

So what happened when you had to change schools?

Well - my parents decided in 1934, '35 to move away from Chemnitz as it was a small town and you were sort of - Jews were known as it were. And having the business in Berlin anyway still, in 1934, '35, we decided to - or rather my parents decided to get lost in a capital. Which would give us a better chance of - what I realised now today of survival.

So you moved to Berlin?

We moved to Berlin in 1935. And talk about changing school. I then went to a Jewish school in Berlin. In Tiergarten. And the school was called the Adas Yisroel.

Which was actually a religious school. That was the only one of the few schools in Berlin that were prepared to take you in.

Was that easy for you, the change. First of all town and school as well?

Well, it was sort of a question of necessity. By that time obviously I was 12 - 13 or - It was just before my Barmitzvah. And I sort of became more aware of what was going on. And - all those things were sort of secondary. It was a question of accepting sudden changes and circumstances.

Was this a grammar school?

No, I'm not quite sure what they classed that school as. It was according to German law - I think some sort of restrictions were already put onto Jewish establishments. We learnt English. We've had English. Modern Hebrew. And - and - Talmud. And the standard was pretty high. But I honestly can't say what the school was - classed as. You could go up to 16 to this particular school and then carry on after examinations.

To another school?

To another school. To another Jewish school.

So you did the equivalent of O levels, which is kind of "einjaeriges" in German?

Yes, that's right.

Were you quite happy as a boy?

Yes. Then being amongst Jewish children again, it was obviously some sort of false security, but I was amongst my own people.

Were you a happy boy generally?

Yes, I was happy, but here again circumstances made me obviously - think older and act older I suppose.

You grew up before your time really?

Exactly.

End of F310 Side A

F310 Side B

So now you are in Berlin and it is about 1935?

1935, yes. Yes, just before my Barmitzvah. I got Barmitzvhed in 1936.

Tell me a bit about your Barmitzvah?

Of course - it was obviously a happy occasion. And - but obviously one felt all the time - by that time, 1935, 1936, that it was a mixture of - of anxiety, of happiness. You tried to - carry on life normal. But you tried not to think too far ahead. And of course the thought of becoming Barmitzvah sort of overshadowed the anxiety that sort of existed at the time. Yes, I would say I remember it well. My parents making the little party and in the synagogue, being called up and feeling obviously very nervous. And - but it was certainly a - an occasion I remember well.

And of course one brother had had his barmitzvah before you?

Yes.

Also in Berlin?

No, that was in Chemnitz. And of course my younger brother then - he was only 10 at the time.

He was 3 years younger. And your older brother was 3 years older?

Yes.

And were you aware of having lost any friends. Or did you make friends very quickly in Berlin and your parents too?

Oh yes, we made friends very quick. But my parents knew - they had relations and we had aunts and uncles in Berlin. I made friends very quick. Belonged to Habonim again and various sports organisations.

What about your grandmothers, did they move with you?

Yes, they did move to Berlin as well. My father's mother immigrated to Israel then. In 1936. I think it was just before my Barmitzvah because my father's sister had then gone to Israel and she took her mother over. And my mother's mother lived also then, as one would say, round the corner.

And so how would you look back on your adolescence in Berlin as a Jewish boy under Hitler. What stands out in your mind?

A lot of things stand out in my mind. I - if I may go - if I may carry on to 1938, before the - before the Kristalnacht. My parents at the time were - on business in

Czechoslovakia. And there were some rumours going round that people were being - rounded up, etcetera, etcetera. I wasn't aware of it, I didn't know. But - my brother, my older brother, who was then 16, had left the house the night before. My grandmother was looking after us, my mother's mother was looking after us. Anyway, on the - I think it was round the - 15th of October 1938, that Jews were - Polish Jews, or Jews of Polish nationality, were rounded up all over Germany. Berlin was the only town where male - males - were rounded up. The other places in Germany whole families were - collected and - or rounded up. Berlin was, for some reason or other, only male. And I was just on my way to school at the time. I was going down the stairs when I was approached by - three - men. And I was asked was my name Engelberg, where was my father, where was my older brother. And I said I didn't know. I said my father was away in Czechoslovakia. And I had my thatchel as one would say, and I was asked to - well I was told, not asked, I was told to follow them and I was taken to the police station in Berlin at Alexander Platz. That indeed stands out very much in my mind.

You were just 15 actually, weren't you, in 1938?

Yes. Yes, I was 15. I was given then a good beating at the police station. I just don't know what - how it happened, why it happened. Well why - I know, but I just walked into the police station. I was taken to a room. And a boy of 15, I was given a good thrashing. I was thrown from - all along the room. I thought that was it, my time had come. And I was pulled up by my hair. Taken out into the yard at the back of the police station, where I could see there were hundreds and hundreds of people. Just - of Jewish people, just standing around. And the rumour then was that we were going to be deported to Poland. And - by that time I sort of - got my - composure back and I wasn't - I remember had I gone to school I was faced with a lot of examinations. And here again I thought being a boy of 15 - a mixed feeling of adventure of - at least I didn't have to go through my exams. And - in a way - although I took it serious and yet I - I couldn't grasp it really what was happening. And that is really where sort of my - life started in a way. Being on my own, not having my parents on my side. And - fighting for your survival. And the rumour was rife. We were - transported to Posen. And we were put in goods trains. And we arrived in Frankfurt on Oder. And if I remember rightly we were then put in lorries. Which took us to the Polish German border. And that was then late at night and bitterly cold. The funny thing is an aunt of mine who got to know that I was at the police station, managed to bring a little case with underwear and - In those days boys at 15 still wore short trousers. And all I had was my short trousers. And she managed to - to - get through, through the police cordon somehow and throw that little case where I was standing. And it was a sort of blessing really because she had put some - in those days we still wore knickerbockers. And we then had to march from - from that particular point - I would say 15 to 18 kilometres through the night. By that time there was an accumulation of women, children, old people.

How many of you?

I would say in the region of 2-3,000 at that point.

Was this the time when both your parents were away in Czechoslovakia?

Yes.

So that was the time they weren't at home. And your two brothers, where were they?

My younger brother was with my grandmother. You see here again I suppose German precision came in. They would only take as from 15 years onward. So my brother was too young. Females they didn't take from Berlin. So my grandmother was alright.

And your older brother?

He had gone into hiding. We marched. And eventually we ended up at a place called Spozyn.

Were there any people in this crowd of thousands that you knew. Did you pal up with somebody?

Oh yes. We soon palled up. Everybody sort of became everybody's brother and sister.

There was nobody that you had known before?

No. No. Nobody.

How long did this whole operation take before you got to this last place?

I would say from mid-day till well into - into the night.

Was this still the same day that you had been beaten up at the police station. Or was this the next day?

By that time I would say that was early morning the next day. And - we were guarded by German soldiers on the march, with machine guns.

Not by the SS?

No, they were German soldiers. And apparently it was done with such precision that the Poles didn't even know what had happened. Because we sort of landed in no mans land and the Poles started shooting over our heads from one end. And the column started moving back and the Germans started shooting. Not into the crowd but over our heads the other way. So we were sort of wedged in between - in the middle of the night. And of course here again I must say speaking from personal - my personal feeling and experience. I wouldn't say I looked upon it as a joke, but I could take it in a way, but what about the thousands of women and children, old people, it must have been absolutely - terrible.

How did people around you behave?

They were pretty calm, pretty calm, because I think everybody was sort of in a way numb. They sort of didn't know what - what hit them, you know. If you are faced with a situation whereby you know what's going to happen you take it more in. But this was so sudden, so out of the blue, that - you just - almost didn't believe what was happening. And there we stood for about 2 days. Until the Jewish organisations in Poland - got organised. And they were - actually - well fantastic. Because huts were built and - blankets came and food. I mean we were without food and water for about - 48 hours. Nothing at all.

These were all people who probably had no idea of Polish life or their Polish nationality was just a thing written on paper. They really were Germans. But happened to have Polish nationality. And this is what happened to them. They were excommunicated from Germany?

Exactly. Absolutely - horrifying.

But you were 15 and a bit of you saw it as an adventure and a bit of you was terrified?

Exactly, yes. I would say yes. I would put it in that sort of category.

What came then?

Of course my parents got to know obviously what was happening. And flew back to Germany. My mother said she had - she's never been in a plane, but in those days obviously planes weren't what they are today. And she was petrified, but she wanted obviously to get back to Berlin as quick as possible. The story really is - somewhat weird, because - what I was told, because I wasn't there - but my mother went up to the Gestapo headquarter and - went into hysterics. Why did they take a boy of 15 and etcetera, etcetera. And actually she wasn't, one would say, treated badly, she was told to leave, there was no - it was out of their hands. All Polish subjects were rounded up and - and - and send out of Germany. Well, my mother was a very determined person. Apparently she went to one of the consulates in Berlin. I think it was the Bolivian consulate. She bought a - a affidavit. And went back to Gestapo headquarters and said "look, there's affidavit, my son can leave the country if you let him come back". And she did succeed. And the paradoxical thing is with the help of a Gestapo man. Who had followed her from the building and she was aware that she was being followed and she thought well, that's it, that's her - story coming to an end. But he took her into - he asked her to come into a - into a house - what do you call it - you know the houses have usually got sort of doors where you walk in - a porch - a sort of dwelling. And he said although he was a member of the Geheime Staats Polizei he was very disillusioned of what was going on. And if he could help my mother in any way he would do so.

Amazing?

Yes, it was absolutely -

A miracle?

A miracle. And of course she still didn't believe him, she still thought he was after money or - or he was just trying her out or something or other. But it turned out that he was genuine. That he said "leave it with me, I'll sort your son's paper out. I'll come across them and we'll see what we can do". And after 8 weeks in the camp, which was then a camp, I was given permission to leave. And there was only 2 people out of the whole camp that got out. And the rest - well - who knows.

Did nobody ask your mother where your father was. They weren't after him at all?

No. This operation was a 24 hour operation. Anybody that survived that operation wasn't touched. Yes. Yes. Anybody that survived that period - I suppose it was a question between 6 o'clock in the morning and 12 o'clock noon. Whoever you can get hold of grab. Those people will have to be deported. And after that that was the end of the operation.

Did your mother at that time know at all where you were. Or did this Gestapo man have to find out where they had sent you?

No, it was known then that it - the camp was in Sponzyn. Etcetera, etcetera. By that time say 2 or 3 weeks had elapsed and - I did get one or two -

Your mother was really an incredibly brave lady, wasn't she?

She was.

She risked being taken in herself by doing this?

Oh yes. Her attitude was I couldn't care less, I want my son back.

Meanwhile could you just give me a bit of feeling of what happened at the camp. You were there for how many weeks?

8 weeks.

What was it like for you and for the others?

It was a - a feeling of - a feeling of despair. We had no guard or - we weren't - beaten. Because there was nobody to beat us there. It was no mans land. But it was a feeling of helplessness, of despair, of - well I just don't know how to -

How did you live, in huts?

In huts, yes. We lived in huts. We were given straw sacks to lay on. Blankets.

And the Polish Jewish Committee looked after you?

Yes.

Did you meet any resident Poles?

No, it was in the open country as one would say. There was no villages or - or towns of course. It was just fields and fields and fields.

They just dumped you there really?

Yes.

To fend for yourselves?

Exactly, yes. Like cattle. As I said, babies and little children and women.

You really felt dehumanised?

Exactly, exactly. It was just a complete and utter disregard of human life.

But you were not ill treated?

No. There was nobody there to ill treat us.

So then after 8 weeks you were suddenly told - you and one other person were able to leave?

Were able to leave.

So what happened, how did you do it?

I'll never forget, it went round the camp that 2 people were leaving the camp. And it was just like a - a big celebration. Everybody came to see us off. It was a very moving experience. I understand that a few months later boys between the age of 15 and 18 were sent - or were taken from the camp to - through the Polish community onto what was called then Haschara. And I think one or two groups did reach Palestine. From Poland. It was sort of - it was done sort of - everything on the quick. But I would say that the majority obviously eventually perished.

How were you sent back, the two of you. Was this another young boy like yourself?

No. It was a - much older person. A man. I can't remember for what reason he - he was given permission to leave the place. But those were the only 2 people.

So how were you sent back, by train?

By train.

Accompanied?

No. We - if I remember rightly, we were taken by car to the nearest railway station. And from there on to Berlin.

You were given some papers?

Oh yes, yes.

Can you explain your arrival in Berlin?

Well, that was - I mean the joy was - absolutely tremendous. But you see I was only given 6 weeks. I don't know if I - if I mentioned that before. I had that - affidavit to leave Germany. In actual fact you couldn't follow it up, it was just a symbolic - document.

It was totally unpractical?

Yes. It didn't carry any weight.

Why didn't it?

Like everything else I think - consulates and countries were after money. And it was a question of what one calls bribery and corruption. So - we had to work very fast, my parents had to work very fast. And in those days a law was passed in the British parliament in - I think getting on 1938, that - I think that was the beginning or the creation of the kindertransport. And my mother went to see the Jewish Council in Berlin. And she told them that I had come out of the camp. Which they didn't believe at the time. I had to prove that I had actually been released. When I think I was just over the 15 years of age I was put on the list as top priority to come over to England. But my mother didn't want to take any chances. Because she had a brother in Holland. And she felt if I could reach Holland - I might then be safe within that 6 weeks. So not only did I try to go to Holland, two or three cousins of mine were taken to Anhalter Bahnhof and given tickets to be - to go to Holland. Now we reached the German border - Dutch German border. The Germans let us through. But when we arrived on the other side of the - into Holland. We were sent back again by the Dutch authorities. And my mother's brother stood at the station wanting to take us, there was all his nephews, and they wouldn't -

He couldn't receive you?

End of F310 Side B

## F311 Side A

So you were actually sent back?

We were sent back. Because when we had reached the German border again - we were taken off the train and stripped. Not ill treated but life was sort of made very, very difficult for us. We had to stand all night in a - in a cold - police station on the German side. Questions were thrown at us - why did we come and who are we and why and -And that interrogation went on for hours and hours. And next morning we were put on a train back to Berlin.

How many of you were there. Was it a whole trainload of people?

No, no, it was just 4 of us. 4 cousins.

You were all related?

Yes, all related, yes.

To go to your uncle in Holland. And you were sent back?

Yes. I suppose looking back today here again it might have been a blessing in disguise, because had we been able to stop in Holland most probably we - eventually months and months later we would have been caught in the web of the German - of the German advance.

Did your uncle survive?

No. No, no, he was killed.

It must have been terrible for you at the time?

Oh, it was absolutely -

So you went back home?

We went back home, yes. And of course then my parents started - pleading with the - the - with the council to - They said "The next transport going to England your son will be - will be on that transport". And I didn't live at home just in case I would have been faced again with the Gestapo - brutality. So I stayed in an aunt of mine in Charlottenburg. And eventually the letter came that - I should report and the transport would go on the 3rd of March 1939. That was the next transport. And I got on that.

You alone, not your younger brother as well?

No.

Or your older brother?

No, just - myself. And the transport consisted of about - 600 youngsters. And here again it was a very moving - experience. Mothers and fathers on the train. On the platform. Saying bye bye. Of course the bulk of parents never saw their children again. And so that was my first step to freedom.

Were your cousins with you?

No. No. Here again I was by myself.

Do we stay with your parents for a bit and hear what happened to them?

Yes.

Would you like to talk about that?

Yes. Unknown to me my parents, especially my mother, used to go to Czechoslovakia practically every year. Of course she had a sister who lived in Prague. And her sister's husband was bank manager of one of the banks in Czechoslovakia. And he - and as I said, unknown to me, but my mother used to take money over to Czechoslovakia to be deposited in a bank in Czechoslovakia and my uncle in turn, for some reason or other said "England is the safest place". And he transferred for about 3 or 4 years all these sums of money to England.

That was a clever move?

Very, very clever, because that really saved my parent's life. Because they could prove then that although England allowed children to come over they also allowed people of independent means to come here. Or if they were willing to come as domestic help. So you've had the three categories, you've had the children, the domestic section and people that could prove they would not be a burden to the State. And my parents came under that category. Obviously it couldn't be - discussed or be in the open. Before I left my mother gave me the address of the bank in London. And the name of the bank. Which I had to memorise. Because I had to see - my first step was to go to the bank and tell them to put things into motion for my parents to be able to come over. And actually we landed at Dovercourt. We were in the camp there for - 4 or 5 weeks. And then were split up into various groups. People who wanted to - come to London or the provinces, etcetera, etcetera. So I was lucky, I was able to come to London and then started getting the ball rolling.

You were all of 16 at that time?

Yes. I saw a bank manager, who incidentally was Jewish. When he heard my story I think he nearly burst out into tears. And he said "Felix", he said, "I will do everything in my power to get your parents over". And somehow he got the ball rolling through Home Office, proving that my parents had money here in the bank, that they wouldn't be a burden, etcetera, etcetera. And my parents actually came on a Friday. War broke out on the Sunday morning. And they arrived on Friday afternoon.

Something like the 1st of September?

Yes, yeh.

In 1939?

1939. With my younger brother. My older brother was on Haschara in Germany. And came over with a group to work here on - on agricultural -

To prepare himself for going to Israel?

To Israel, yes. So in actual fact as far as my very immediate family was concerned I was one of the lucky ones to -

When did your older brother actually come over?

He came - I think it must have been in January - or February 1939.

So he came before you did?

Oh no, I beg your pardon. No, no. No, I'm sorry. He came 3 months after me.

In the summer of '39?

Of '39.

Until your parents arrived in England you first lived in Dovercourt, which was a camp?

A transit camp.

How did you live after that. Did you and your parents move together. Your parents weren't there to start with?

No, I was moved to a hostel in - at London. Nightingale Road. We were a group of about 25 boys. We couldn't carry on unfortunately as far as education was concerned. We were asked to be grateful - being - in England and not to be a burden to the State. Would we please pick on some sort of trade and earn money. Of course the Jewish community in this country were absolutely tremendous. Any help that could be given by Bloomsbury House etcetera, was given. And it was still my ambition to go to Palestine then. And I had written to Israel and asked what is required as far as a trade is concerned. And was told baker. So I started becoming a baker. Or rather learning the trade as a baker. And I was given 5 shillings a week. After 3 months the fellow who had been there for years was unfortunately thrown out because I had become so good for so little money that - It was a terrible thing. But -

Did you actually dislike it or did you get quite used to it?

I got quite used to it.

You got some enjoyment out of it?

Oh yes, yes. And it was - it was - for some purpose, you know.

Was this a big bakery?

A big bakery in Stamford Hill.

And what happened socially. You were living in this hostel?

Yes. Social life was very good because - a lot of people came and visited us and wanted to know all about - our lives in Germany. And - I think I mentioned it before, you've had to grow up pretty quick so as a boy of 16 people always would say "Look at my son at 16, he's a baby against you". We said "Well, we've been through a lot as boys and girls".

You must have been absolutely delighted when your parents came?

Oh, it - I never forget, I went to Liverpool Street. I had baked my first cake and I stood on the platform with ein Streussel Kuchen.

That was something, because the English didn't know about Streussel Kuchen. So how did you manage to get that recipe?

Well, I've told the fellow in charge that - they had something very similar. But I said "No, if you bake a cake and you put all that stuff which is crumbs on top. It's butter and sugar and flour. And you do this, that and the other". He said "Do you know, this is fantastic". I said "Well, bake that and put it in the window and see what happens". So I introduced something new. My mother of course didn't believe that I baked it. She had to - she had to come to the - to the bakery and - and get convinced that I in actual fact baked it.

How did they live to start with. Did they manage to get rooms somewhere?

Yes. It wasn't difficult in those days to get accommodation. And the fact that they had money here. I think it was in those days in the region of £4,000. Which was a lot of money. They managed to - get a flat. Or rent a flat. My father tried at the beginning of the war to get back into some sort of business. Of course he was still a relatively young man. But because of the language difficulties etcetera, he just couldn't make a go of it. But he found himself a job. And carried on. When the blitz started they left London and moved to a place where my older brother was on Haschara, which was out in - near Ely in Suffolk. Which had a Haschara there. However, of course the war had broken out by then and it wasn't possible for people to go to Israel in those days.

They had to discontinue that?

Discontinued. But remain on the farm for about 3 or 4 years. And then moved back to London.

And your father took a job. What sort of a job did he manage to get?

Working on the fields. He worked on the farm as well. And my mother.

Did they quite enjoy it?

Oh yes, they thoroughly enjoyed it. Yes.

What happened to the grandmother who had been left in Germany?

My mother's mother managed to get to Holland. Because her son took her over and of course perished with the son.

So what happened to you?

Well, I was - by that time I was obviously getting on for 18 - in that region. And I was - it sort of became an obsession with me to join the army.

This is very upsetting for you, isn't it. Why is it so upsetting?

I don't know, it's -

Don't worry about it, just be upset if you feel like that. Was it the sudden having to grow up or ...?

No, I think it was -

Was it your anger against the Germans that you felt you had to fight?

Exactly.

Of course that is very understandable?

But the obstacles obviously were tremendous.

Did they take you in the Pioneer Corp to start with?

Eventually I managed to get into the Royal West Kent. And I was transferred, because I was born in Germany, to Pioneer Corp. But I wasn't happy because I wanted to be in a fighting unit. And - Churchill at that time said that the Jewish fighting unit would be formed and any Jewish personnel from the British Army who wanted to join could do so. And there was actually 3 of us. They used to call us The Three Musketeers. We volunteered for the Jewish Infantry Brigade. And I remember going in hysterics because I was stationed at the time on Hampstead Heath. We lived in Belsize Park and I used to come home for breakfast. I mean those were my dissatisfying army days. And I thought that's no good to me just wearing a uniform, I

was a fraud. And - I was then very, very happy to be transferred to the Jewish Infantry Brigade which was at the time in Italy. And - I saw some action there.

What was your job in the army?

I was a very good Private.

But what did it entail?

I was in an infantry unit. We arrived - there was about a hundred - soldiers from the British Army that had joined the Jewish Brigade. We started off from London. We were given further training. Then we arrived at Naples in Italy. We had further training there. And then we were posted to the Jewish Brigade which was by that time somewhere up north, north of - Rome. In those days there wasn't a tremendous amount of fighting. It was of a static war. But I saw action with the - I was in the Third Infantry Brigade. And I took part in - in patrol activities. And the last push over the River Po in Italy.

Was there anything very much that sticks out in your mind?

Yes. During those patrol activities on the Italian front the Germans got to know that the Jewish Infantry Brigade was in line. And they - the first few nights they would - despatch or - it was no man's land, and they would fire leaflets over to our line saying that if we don't take prisoners, they won't take prisoners. Because it was known amongst the Eighth Army that Jewish Brigade soldiers never took prisoners. Only for interrogation. And we were known as the - funnily enough as the British SS.

You interrogated them and then you shot them?

That was the usual thing, yes. I remember one incident whereby I wasn't on this patrol - part of one company took over from the Canadian battalion and the officers discussed before they left what the procedure was at night. And they said "Well, the Canadian officer said to one of the Jewish officers there's a farmhouse in no man's land and it's a sort of unwritten law one night we go in and one night they go in". So the Jewish officer said "Well, whose turn is it tonight? He said "It's the Germans turn". So the officer said "Well, we'll give them a little surprise, we'll go in first". Which they did. And I understand - as I say I wasn't on that patrol, where two or three soldiers amongst the Israeli, or Jewish troops, who originally came from Germany. And as the Germans - they went in an hour before, laid in wait for them. And when they came in - they didn't open fire, they said "Die Juden sind hier". And they were absolutely flabbergasted the Germans. And the first thing they said "Wir sind sozial demokraten". And anyway, they were taken prisoners and used as a shield to - to withdraw back into the Rhine. And the Germans must have got to know what was happening, they were putting up flares and the whole place was lit up like daylight. And they shot - in actual fact I think they shot three of their own men. Because they were used as a shield as they withdrew.

The Jews kept the Germans as a shield?

As a shield.

So the Germans would shoot their own men?

That's right. And that is exactly what happened.

You must have been laughing up your sleeves?

Oh yes, indeed we did. Other little incidents. The war had actually finished and one night we were stationed up on the Austrian Italian border. It must have been about 3 or 4 days after Armistice. And we were told that there was resistance in one of the mountains and we were taken out of bed - or we had to get up. To climb up into the mountains to see what was going on. The whole company went up. In actual fact there was 3 German soldiers and 3 women. And those were SS personnel, because obviously they had ripped everything off, but we could still see the SS - thing on their lapels. And - they had a very good interrogation once we brought them down. I didn't take part in that. I was asked to take part in the interrogation, but - I didn't mind going out fighting, but I could not beat somebody just for the sake of beating. However bad I felt.

These were Italian women they had picked up?

Yes, yes.

So were they shot in the end?

No, I don't think so. But I'm sure that at times they wished they were dead.

Were you a very angry soldier really deep down. Or had you come to terms with it. How were you feeling inside while you were a soldier?

I was angry, oh yes, I was very angry and - I didn't care what would happen to me as long as I could fight. Actually I've got a thing here which was published in the Jewish Chronicle in 1945. "My return to Germany as a Jewish Soldier".

Where did you go from there. You on the Austrian Italian border?

We were told, and that you will find in my article, that we were going to take part in the occupation of Germany. This was a - a wonderful - experience. Or we thought, you know, it was going to be a wonderful experience. And - because I don't know if you know, but the Jewish Brigade wore the - the Magen David on the sleeve. And also the - the inscription of the Jewish Infantry Brigade. And all our lorries had the Magen David on the lorries. And of course that was a wonderful feeling. I mean this really has always been one of my proudest moments to belong - to be part of the Jewish Brigade. If anybody looks for fulfillment in life, what have you achieved, what have you done, I always think back of my time in the Jewish Brigade. That is why I can't - not so much today - well many years after the war, that sometimes you spoke to Jewish fellows and - and I'm sure there weren't many of them, but there were

some who would say "Oh, I managed to keep out of the army". And to me that was just despicable. Just something I couldn't - I couldn't associate with.

Did you have any sort of social life while you were there. Or was it all fighting?

No. We've had a certain amount of social life.

Did you get on with each other?

Oh yes. Oh yes. We had to - you see the hundred soldiers who came from England, very few of them that spoke Hebrew. And it was one of the things that was so wonderful that everybody in the Brigade spoke Hebrew. I mean commands were in Hebrew. The talk was in Hebrew.

Was it because most of the soldiers actually came from then Palestine?

Well, all the soldiers - all of them came from Palestine.

That is where that part of the army was formed?

Oh yes. It was formed actually in Egypt. It was a unit - originally it was a unit that was sort of in a pioneer capacity in Egypt. But when England allowed to - for - Palestinians or Jews to form a fighting unit that's where it started off, in Egypt. And they were then transferred as a fighting unit, infantry unit, to Italy.

So I suppose you made strong friendships?

Oh yes, indeed, indeed. It was wonderful. We were given about 8 weeks - if you could speak English and Yiddish or German, any language you like, but after that it was what one would call Rag Ivrih.

It must have been quite hard, because I mean you didn't learn it, not to that extent?

No. But living among soldiers that speak all the time Hebrew, I learnt it - well I picked up so as to make myself understood.

That was very useful?

Exactly, yes. Yes.

End of F311 Side A

## F311 Side B

You showed me this very interesting article you wrote. Would you like to read it to us. I think that would be quite interesting?

This article was written when we got to know that we were going to take part of the occupation of Germany, or be part of it. And I was motivated to write to the Jewish Chronicle in 1945, '46. It goes like that:

"My return to Germany as a Jewish soldier".

"We are going to Germany, that was the sudden cry which rang through our camp. Confusion, excitement, shouting, running. All this took place within a few seconds. Fellows of my company stood in little groups discussing the many problems which would confront us once we arrived there. So after all it was us, we the Jewish Brigade were given at least the opportunity to take part in the occupation of Germany, the land which converted its soldiers into beasts and cannibals. Its special SS forces who cold bloodedly murdered millions of our people. Murdered them in a way which has no precedence in the history of the human race. Jewish soldiers were moving slowly along the dusty roads in their lorries, forward into Germany. We did not have the same kind of feeling as we did when we were in the lines, or when we crossed the Po River. The feeling of killing as many Germans as possible. To keep the Hun on the run until he begs for mercy. No, it was a feeling of pride and satisfaction which each one of us carried in his heart. I look back on those dark days of November 1938 when Jew baiting and programs reached its peak in Germany. And the burning of synagogues, the looting of shops, the beating up of women and children in the streets took place. Yes, this was the beginning of Hitler's new order. Every Jewish family lived in fear in Germany, not knowing whether they would live the next day through. Was Hitler's promise to exterminate the Jews to become a stark reality. Was it really a question of TO BE OR NOT TO BE? We have suffered, but because of our suffering we have been taught an unforgettable lesson, the lesson of being more conscious of ourselves. We have come to the realisation that a Jewish Homeland is a vital necessity.

As our lorries move along the dusty roads into Germany the Germans in the streets are watching us with a rather bewildered look on their faces. They can see the Star of David on our lorries. The star which every Jew had to wear in Germany, in order that every Nazi in the street could beat them up. That star today is being worn by the men of the Jewish Brigade, with a pride that few men in the army can boast of. What will happen to us Herr Muller or Frau Schulz might wonder. Through our appearance we will show these Huns that we still exist. Yes, this is our aim in the occupation of Germany, not only to show the Germans that we still exist but that we are the very foundation of a new Jewish Nation".

That is absolutely wonderful. Extremely moving. Thank you for reading that. So what happened then, where did you go?

We must have been about 100, 150 lorries. The whole Brigade was moved - into what we were hoping to - as I mentioned before - to be part of the occupying force in Germany. But as we moved up from Italy into Austria we had to stop obviously on many occasions. And the bitterness that existed amongst the Jewish soldiers as we

camped a few nights in Austria, was too much for British High Command. They would go out and start burning down places, look for Nazis, look for all sorts of things. And it wasn't practical - for British Military Command to - let us be part of the occupying force. So we moved on. Obviously we had to move through Germany. But the sight of our lorries and the flags that were flying. We weren't allowed to show the Jewish flag on all the lorries. Which I didn't understand at the time, but later on I did understand. It wouldn't have been - it would have almost looked too overpowering. But the first, I think, 6 lorries were flying the Magen David. And it was a most wonderful sight to see people standing in the street with their mouths open and seeing Jewish soldiers. But we passed on then to Holland and Belgium. We took part in - not in the occupation of Holland and Belgium, but part of the - allied personnel that - had various duties to perform. It was then mainly guard duties, etcetera, etcetera.

Were you given a marvellous welcome by the Dutch and the Belgians?

I would say moreso by the Dutch than the Belgians. I've had my suspicions with the Belgians - for some reason or other. They were cool and very reserved. Yet the Dutch - the Dutch opened their homes and welcomed us and we felt very, very much at home with the Dutch people. Wonderful people.

Did you personally try to find out what had happened to your uncle there and then. And your grandmother?

Yes, I did. But I went to Scheveningen. But I couldn't get any information at all. I couldn't get any information. All you did get was shrugging of shoulders etcetera. But I must - bring back in here that two of my aunts survived in Berlin. Lived underground. They survived. And two cousins. One aunt with two sons. And an aunt that never got married.

Could you give us their story?

Ah yes. Oh my gosh, that is a long story. Eventually we made contact with them all - or my parents. I couldn't - I was restricted being in the army, we weren't allowed to travel. I don't know how, but somehow obviously contact was made with my aunts and cousins. And of course there was great jubilation. Jubilation. They had lived in a garden shed for 4 years. Hidden by non-Jews. By friends of theirs.

In Berlin?

In Berlin. Yes. One aunt unfortunately later on died of - Parkinsons. And the other aunt she lived to the age of 82. But she committed suicide. Which I assume must have been obviously sort of went back to her time of living underground. One cousin died of leukaemia in Berlin. The other cousin is today one of Germany's well known actors. And lives in Munich. And of course I have heard all sorts of stories from my cousins. And - aunts - apparently when the Russians came into Berlin there was a tremendous amount of street fighting. They run out in the street - shouting, you know, "We are Jews, we are Jews". And at first didn't believe it, they didn't believe

them. And then they were taken to Russian headquarters in Berlin and they had to recite the Sh'ma Israel. And there were Jewish officers, Russian Jewish officers -

To prove that they were Jews?

That they were Jews, yes. And my aunt said it was unbelievable, the jubilation - the way they kissed them and - and - she said it was absolutely wonderful to - They spoke Yiddish to them and - it was a wonderful experience.

There were how many of them in this garden shed?

5.

And this family must have been able to feed them, because they had ration cards?

Yes, I think at times they - at night they would go into the house and - it was a very weird existence of course.

It was pretty good that they were able to stay in that place for all those years?

Yes, yes.

They weren't shunted around?

I would say it was a miracle.

And they had marvellous friends obviously?

Oh yes.

How did they keep warm in a garden shed in winter?

To be honest every time I sort of went into details with my aunts, to tell me more about it, they would burst out into tears and - so one didn't - too many questions really.

How many months or years were you in the occupational forces?

The Jewish Brigade then was sent back to Palestine. And as one knows it was the time of the war of independence. And politics comes into here. They were shipped back to Israel and immediately obviously all arms etcetera was taken away from them. I had the opportunity of going with the Brigade to Israel. I could have changed my name - etcetera, etcetera. But I was advised by the officers of the Jewish Brigade - it wasn't advisable because my Hebrew wasn't fluent enough. And every soldier that arrived back in what was then Palestine was interrogated by the British authorities just to make sure there was no stranger amongst them. And then of course I had my parents here. And - my mother hadn't seen me for 2 or 3 years. And I couldn't - I didn't have the heart to just wander off. So in any event I came back to England and I applied at the War Office to be interpreter at a prisoner of war camp in England. And

I was immediately - I had to do various examinations. And was posted to various camps all over Britain as interpreter in the army. I was immediately made a Staff Sergeant. I was asked to sign on another 2 or 3 years and take a commission. I thought well, I think I've done my share and - left the army in 1946 I think it was.

How did it feel when you interrogated German prisoners?

It was a wonderful experience for me because - prisoners were sort of put in various categories. A, B's and C's if I remember rightly. The A were the type that were one believed they weren't members of any organisations except maybe the Hitler Youth. Which they had to. But no other organisation. But the funny thing was, if I may just bring up one little incident. I was in Bristol. And I was in the sergeant's mess. And it was Yom Kippur. And I decided to go to Shul. And I didn't tell anybody. We had German prisoners that were batmen in the dining room etcetera, etcetera. And I said to one of the batmen, I said "I'll be out all day and I'm not sure whether I'll be back tonight. So don't worry about me - sort of making any food". Of course I was hoping that being in Shul as a soldier all day long, one would come up and ask you "Have you got to go anywhere to break your fast".

Ask you for supper?

Yeh, ask you for supper. Well cut a long story short, I was never asked. I walked out of Shul and Shames followed me and said "Oh, are you going anywhere". I said "No, I'm all right". By that time I was very upset and annoyed and I went back to camp. And as I came into the sergeant's mess was a white cloth laid out with knife, fork and spoon. And - I didn't think it was - it was for my purpose. Anyway, the batman came up to me and he said "Oh, I'm glad you've come back to camp, I'm sure you haven't eaten all day". I said "Why, what makes you think that?" He said "It's Yom Kipur today". So I was absolutely stunned. I said "How do you know". He said "My parents had very good Jewish friends. And I remember - I've looked it up. It was your fast day today and I was hoping and praying you were coming back". And he said "I've made you a nice noodle soup". And I'll never forget that. As a matter of fact this prisoner who was repatriated a few months later, I have kept up quite a correspondence for - for quite a number of years. So, you know, it is - so funny, you know, you - you are human, you try and treat your - your fellow men as a human being. And so he was an ordinary - I suppose ordinary German soldier who was - who was - who had to fight obviously. And yet - wouldn't say one felt an affinity, but - you could act as a human being.

One thing that people listening to this tape might not understand, and I don't quite understand it, is how a German prisoner of war could be a batman to an English non-commissioned officer. They were quite free at that time?

Oh yes, by that time they walked around the camp, they did work.

But they were still classed as prisoners?

Oh yes. Oh yes, they were prisoners. But they worked - for instance I worked in an office and I had 10 German prisoners of war under my - well not command, but

jurisdiction. I ran that office and - Actually they were all - as one would say, very nice fellows, you know. We got on extremely well.

This was about 1946 I suppose?

Yes, 1946.

What happened to you personally after you were demobbed?

I didn't have a - trade as such. I was a little bit confused. What am I going to do. My idea was still to go to Israel, but - my parents - I think there was that bond, you know. Because my parents were getting on a little bit and - as my mother said "Now you've been away for so many years in the army, you can't just run off again to Israel". Of course then I started - I said "Yes, but I haven't got a trade. I don't know what to do. I've got no money". Etcetera, etcetera. Eventually obviously I want to get married. What are my prospects. So - 2 or 3 years later obviously I've met my wife. By that time I started in a - tailoring business. I was beginning, or trying to learn the tailoring trade and cutting, etcetera, etcetera. But I didn't earn a lot of money and I wasn't really financially in a position to get married. But - my wife's brother promised - took a liking to me, promised to take me into his business. And really that's how I really started. The business wasn't very successful after 2 years. And I started on my own - buying and selling. And eventually managed to open 3 shops, 3 dress shops. With the help of my younger brother, we were partners for 25 years. And I've made a living through that.

Your younger brother, did he go into the army too?

No. No. He didn't pass his medical.

And your older brother didn't either?

No, he remained on the farm and therefore was excluded.

Did your older brother then stay in England as well?

Yes, he's still in England.

Is your wife of German origin as well?

No. No, she was born in Manchester. As a matter of fact when she first met me and introduced me to her mother, apparently her mother hit the roof because for some silly reason because I came from Germany she didn't like the idea. Because her husband got gassed in the First World War and she had a dislike for - almost a hatred for Germans. But I said "Look, don't class me as a German. In the first place I'm a Jew and you are a Jew". And the funny thing was as the years went by I became a favourite son-in-law.

Where did you meet your wife?

Ex-service club. Jewish ex-service club.

What had she done during the war?

She worked in Manchester in a - aeroplane factory. She's very proud of the fact that she was a rivetter on the Lancaster Bombers.

And then you moved to the South later on?

I met my wife here in London. Her mother had moved from Manchester to London. And we got married in 1950.

And you had 3 daughters?

3 daughters, yes. 3 lovely daughters.

Did you ever talk to your daughters about your German Jewish experience?

Oh yes. As a matter of fact - here again I've - of course I haven't mentioned that yet. We lived in Israel for 3 years.

Would you like to talk about that for a bit?

Yes. In 1982 after I had sold the shops. It was getting - not too much, but I could see as a shopkeeper, as an individual shopkeeper, things were becoming very, very difficult. So I thought I'll - sell up and - renew my life ambitions and go to Israel. And our 3 daughters were absolutely flabbergasted. Said "How can you do that - leave us", etcetera, etcetera. But I was quite determined to -

Were they all independent by then?

One was married. And Jackie, which is the middle one, she's - she's - well they're all very independent. As I say, they were flabbergasted. But they wished us luck and gave their blessings. However, - that again was a wonderful experience. But after 3 years we decided to come back, not because we didn't like Israel, but - one of the daughters, my older daughter, wanted to get married. The little one, the younger one, was also courting. So we felt we ought to be with our daughters at least during that period of their - getting married etcetera, etcetera. Why should we be away from them. So after 3 wonderful years in Israel we came back. But during my stay in Israel I was interviewed by someone who for her thesis at university had to find a man, or a person, of unusual history. And I think I fitted the - fitted in. So here again it's all written down.

What did you do in Israel?

I worked. A cousin of mine who had a shop in Haifa offered me a job to work as a salesman. Of course my Hebrew wasn't - wasn't all that marvellous. So I was known as 'the English salesman'. It was very - it was very good. We lived in Netanya. And we went as what they call Oleh Chadash. And you get certain privileges. And I

bought a car which I could purchase without tax. And I used to commute between Netanya and Haifa practically every day. And I thoroughly enjoyed it.

And your 3 daughters were here all that time?

Were here all the time, yes.

So of course the pull of the family was quite strong?

It was. The phone bills were astronomical.

End of F3ll Side B

## F312 Side A

Then you decided to come back to England?

Yes. Of course - having been through all my married life in business, it was - by that time obviously I thought I had reached the age over 60, it was obviously difficult to - find a job. But I think I was quite lucky, I made contact with one of my suppliers and - I think I mentioned it before - I ended up with Norman Linton Which is a dress manufacturers. And I've been there ever since.

What happened to your daughters. And how do, or did, your daughters feel about your experiences in Germany. You had talked to them about it?

Oh yes. I've made them all aware of what had happened to me. And also, you know, it is all written. And - all I can hear my daughters saying "We are very proud of you dad".

What are they doing?

Well, my older daughter she is a teacher. And she lives in Wales. My middle one, I think I've mentioned to you before, she's a counsellor and - she also became - years ago she became a teacher. But she gave it up and was sort of more interested in youth work, youth leader. And now she has sort of become a counsellor.

A counsellor of what kind?

A general counsellor. And now she has taken up - I think she's formed the first group of - AIDS counselling. And there is a nice article today in the Jewish Chronicle on - and there is a picture.

Where does she live?

She just lives round the corner.

Is it a social work job in a way, or is she an independent counsellor?

Independent, yes. She's called upon -

Where was she trained?

I'm not sure. She'll kill me when of course she'll listen to the tape. But I will give you the Jewish Chronicle and of course obviously I'm very, very proud. I'm proud of all my 3 daughters in their various fields.

Which ones are married?

The little one. The youngest one. And Vivian. Carol and Vivian. Jackie is so wrapped up in her - in her work and profession I don't think she's got time to -

So the teacher daughter is married?

Is married, yes, yes. Her husband is also a headmaster.

And she lives in Wales?

In Wales, yes.

Did she marry a Jew?

No, No, she married out. She married out. He's a wonderful - wonderful husband and wonderful son-in-law.

How did you feel about that?

Well, at the beginning obviously we - we felt a bit - we were upset that she didn't marry - within our faith. But - here again I think the feeling of being a human being comes to the surface. And as I say, we are very happy. He's a very sincere, caring man as far as his in-laws are concerned and as far as his wife is concerned. And that - to me that's what counts.

Have they got children?

No. No.

If they had would they bring them up the Jewish way, do you think?

Ah. That is - that is the - 75,000 dollar question.

And you lead quite a Jewish life?

Well - not religious. Not in any religious way. Yes, we keep Shabat. When I say we keep Shabat, my wife will light the candles on Shabat. I will say the - the blessing over the wine. It's sort of more traditional. We brought the children up that way just to show them some - some Jewish - Jewishness.

And you go to the synagogue?

Occasionally, occasionally.

I was very moved when we went out of your back door just now and saw the rubble which the storm had made terrible damage to your roof and the tiles and drainpipes coming down. And your wife apparently said "I must go to the synagogue and thank God that I am saved". Because she could have been under this drainpipe and been killed. But her first reaction was "I must thank God for being alive"?

Would you like to say something more?

Yes, well I've always been - conscious of the fact that I never - finished my education. Obviously I was grateful that - that I survived. And that was obviously top priority, to survive and to - be alive. Coming back to the war years, here again if - if a bullet was meant for me, well that would have been it. But - it's always been sort of on my conscience that I never finished my education. And I made a point that my 3 daughters were not deprived in any way, for any reason, to have a good education. And - not that I want to live through my daughters. But as you go through life and you feel when you mix with people, and you lack something, it - as far as I'm concerned anyway, it does - or it can become depressing at times. So many, many years back I thought to myself well - I must find some way of sort of - educate myself and - be able to mix amongst people that at least - not academics necessarily, but at least be able to have a - what shall I say, intellectual conversation or have a certain standard of - of - conversation. So as a matter of fact I - about 3 years ago I decided to take up German. And I've done my O level and my A level German.

At adult education classes?

Yes. About 3 years ago. I've got certificates to prove it. And I was going for a diploma about 2 years ago at the college. And unfortunately before the examinations I was taken ill. And I was rushed to hospital and I had a bypass operation.

How amazing. You look so well?

I had 5 bypasses. But I feel - touch wood -

You look so young and well?

Yes, thank you very much. So just before examinations I was taken ill and I couldn't do my diploma. So now I'm still carrying on at college, once a week.

What are you doing now?

A commercial course in German. And I thoroughly enjoy it. I'm not the youngest in the class. But -

You're not the oldest either?

Mmmm, well - I think I might be, yes.

Has this increased your self respect or your feelings of I am somebody and I've made something of my life?

Oh yes, oh yes. Especially when I did the A level. Which was mainly literature. And I had to do a tremendous amount of studying on Schiller, on Goethe - and - more contemporary writers. Boll. I've forgotten half of them already, but anyway - I found tremendous satisfaction in that.

You must be very proud of yourself really?

Well - yes, I think - I've had a lot of - fulfilment in life. Sort of looking back. And I was blessed with a lovely family. And friends.

What happened to your parents?

My mother only died 4 years ago. She had reached the lovely age of 84. And - my father died youngish I would say, he died at 65. So - altogether I've got - I've got no complaints. I was really one of the privileged and lucky ones. I class myself as a survivor. But - at the same time, as I said, I'm one of the few that are here to tell the story.

Do you want to add anything else?

Well I'm pleased that I've had the opportunity of - of putting it on tape. And in years to come that people will take note of the little I have said in my way. And that things like that must never happen again. And here again I think I'm very, very - always come back to Israel again. That - as far as I'm concerned and - in a way I'm unhappy that my daughter is going to - settle in Israel. But on the other hand I'm extremely pleased she will bring up her children in a Jewish land. Of course today which was the 2nd of February 1990, and I've opened the paper, the Jewish Chronicle, and I see hundreds of youngsters standing giving the Hitler salute. I think to myself well what future is there - talking long term - for the Jewish people anywhere in the world, except Israel.

Where was this happening?

In England. So-called football fans. I know they are scum and they are yobbos. But it's still - it does exist.

It's a warning, isn't it?

It's a warning.

And in a way do you feel your daughter is kind of fulfilling your ambitions as a young man and as an older man too, by going back to Israel?

Yes, yes.

She is fulfilling something in you?

And I might add that - in maybe 2 or 3 years time that we will return to Israel again. Of course I didn't mention my return to my place of birth in 1988. I went back to Karl Marx Stadt, to Chemnitz, with my daughter Jackie. And this of course was a very emotional experience. I visited the place of my birth. I've met the neighbour who - she must be in her 90's, who remembers 3 little boys. And I said "I'm one of those little boys". And she burst out into tears. So it was a wonderful experience. And of course I wrote an article which was published in Germany, translated in German. And in various papers here in England. And I shall give you.

I suppose you cried many tears in Chemnitz?

Oh yes. It was - I was so - taken. It was just unbelievable. When I reached the street - the actual street - I took a taxi. It took me 6 hours to get a taxi, but eventually I got one. And I directed him into the street where I was born.

The town hadn't changed to that extent?

Well this part hadn't changed. The centre was destroyed through fighting, street fighting and bombardment. The Town Hall still stood and I remember that place. But apart from that it's all new. Karl Marx Platz which must have been destroyed during the war and they made a huge square.

Do they still speak German there. It's not Polish?

No, no, I was so - in a way thrown, to hear the dialect. And of course it brought back - obviously it brings back memories. But I might add that when I went to Germany that I wanted to visit the place of my birth, that a lot of people said "I don't know how you can go back now". You get that group of - of people, or that kind of thought from some people, "I don't know how you can go back after all that happened there", etcetera, etcetera. And I've really got no - firm or real positive explanation for it, why I want to go back. And I sort of mention it in my article. It isn't curiosity, it was just - something I couldn't explain.

You were pulled back by your roots, weren't you?

Yes.

By your beginnings?

Exactly.

Very important?

I think so. And a lot of people can't understand that.

I think you will be glad all your life that you've gone back?

Oh yes, exactly, exactly.

You have allowed yourself to get in touch with your feelings?

Yes, yes. I think yes, that's sort of putting it - in perspective, yes.

So you are really happy that you did that?

Oh yes. I'm very happy. I'm very happy.

Would you like to say anything else, or shall we finish there?

Well - I think I've taken up quite a bit of your time. And - not that I want to say - you know - when I go to my class the teacher, she is German, she is a tremendous person, and she always insists of - when we get homework - to give sort of more, to write more. And I turned round to her once and I said "In der Kurze steckt die Wurze". And she was absolutely laughing her head off.

Meaning "if you keep yourself short you can get an awful lot into it"?

Yes. Or, "it isn't the amount you say, it's what you say".

Thank you very, very much for a wonderful interview?

My pleasure. And I hope that it will serve the purpose of what it's meant to be.

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End of interview