IMPORTANT

AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
AJR
Winston House, 2 Dollis Park
London N3 1HF
ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Edmonds
Forename:	Dr. Herbert
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	24 July 1930
Interviewee POB:	Karlsruhe, Germany

Date of Interview:	5 March 2020
Location of Interview:	Bromley
Name of Interviewer:	Jayne Reich
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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV251
NAME: Dr Herbert Edmonds
DATE: 5th March 2020
LOCATION: Bromley
INTERVIEWER: Jayne Reich

[Part One of Interview]

[0:00:00]

Today's the 5th of March 2020. And we're interviewing Dr Herbert Edmonds in his home in Bromley Kent. My name is Jayne Reich. Can you tell me your name please?

Herbert Edmonds.

And what was your name at birth?

Herbert Emsheimer or, [with German pronunciation] Herbert Emsheimer.

And when were you born?

24th of July 1930.

And where?

In Karlsruhe in southern Germany.

Dr Edmonds, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Project.

Pleasure.

Could I ask you to start by telling us something about your extended family in Karlsruhe, or in Germany?

My family- obviously, I had a mother and a father. I had a grandfather who lived in Karlsruhe and my grandmother, who lived with him in Karlsruhe. I had a younger sister, who was two years younger than I- I am. My other grandparents lived in Pforzheim. They were not very wealthy, because they were wine merchants and they lost their money during the, the very high inflation period in the early 30s. And they- they unfortunately, were transported to a camp called Gurs in France, which is near the Pyrenees. My grandfather died there. And my grandmother was transported later on - this is my father's mother - transported from Gurs to Auschwitz where she was murdered. That's about the extended family.

So that was your-

Sorry, the- my, my, my- I was- also had a great-grandmother who was alive till I was twenty-three, funnily enough.

Where did she live?

She- she lived in a place called Mannheim.

What was her name?

Her name was Karoline Retwitzer. And her- her- my great grandfather, he died in 1936.

[0:02:40]

So do I understand correctly that your mother's parents were in Karlsruhe?

Yes.

And what did they do?

My mother's parents, i.e. my grandfather owned a factory in Ettlingen, which is a village outside Karlsruhe, which manufactured paper.

Paper for- what kind of paper?

Wrapping paper and the- yeah.

And what kind of life did your parents have in- well, first of all, how did they meet?

I imagine they were introduced. My- my father studied law at a university called Heidelberg. And he, he- he practised law when he left university. And I remember- I do remember that we lived in a small place called Lörrach, which is on the Swiss border, where he was a junior judge until Hitler arrived and he obviously lost his job.

So, do you have any idea how your parents met?

No, I don't; they were introduced, I imagine.

And how did they come to live in Karlsruhe then, where you were born?

Because my grandparents lived there. I mean, the- the-

So your father-?

My, my mother's parents-

Your mother's family-

Who- who are called Vogel.

Yes?

He was also called Doktor- Doktor Vogel. He was a- studied chemistry at the- Berlin University when he was younger. And they lived in Karlsruhe.

And your parents moved there to be near them perhaps?

I imagined so. Yeah.

And did your father practice law in Karlsruhe – as well?

No, he lost his job, as I said in Lörrach.

[0:05:00]

And what kind of life - coming to you, now- what kind of life do you remember in Karlsruhe? What were- what were your early years like?

Don't forget, I- I was quite young when I left. I was just eight years old. I don't remember anything about Karlsruhe. I remember about - which I told you earlier. We lived in Ettlingen.

Yes.

And I went to primary school in Ettlingen. My father, when- when he lost his job was employed in the factory by my grandfather- in the paper factory in Ettlingen. But he, he was not really a commercial animal. He was a lawyer, he- it didn't suit him very much.

And do you have any childhood memories in Ettlingen at all?

Except this primary school, I- I- no, I don't remember. I mean, the- talking about mainly the, you know, I don't- I didn't feel that there was any anti-Semitism. I remember outside the school - you must have heard this from other people - there was a poster in a, in a, in a- in a glass cabinet with- of a newspaper cartoon of anti-Semitic drawings. I mean, have you heard about this sort of thing before?

Yes.

And I remember that, and I remember thinking, what on earth was that all about? And coming back to the main point of this interview, I mean, I do recall that on Kristallnacht, which was on the 10th of November 1938, being shocked that my grandfather had his front teeth knocked out by some thugs who just knocked at the door and knocked his teeth out. And that was- that was my- the trigger why my grandmother said, “We're leaving. We’re- we’re-” So we're talking about early memories.

Right.

I- I also remember that my, on- on that Kristallnacht, I think the day after, my mother was dragged through Ettlingen on a cart, on the back of a cart, drawn through the village with, with the- there- with other Jewish- Jewish people. There weren't many, but maybe three or four in this cart, just being dragged through the cart. And when they reached me, some neighbours who were friendly just said “What a,”- in German, they must have said, “What a terrible shame.” I do remember- that’s all- that- I think that's the limit of my memories.

[0:08:08]

Do you know by whom she was dragged through?

No. Local thugs.

And the school that you went to? Was that a non-Jewish school?

Yes, yes. A normal primary school.

Were your family religious, at all?

Not at all.

Not at all.

Mnn.

So, you're saying that Kristallnacht seemed to be a turning point – what happened-?

It was a turning point for my grandmother, who said, “That’s it. We've got to leave here.” And they- they left in 1938.

Before that, going back, though, you said your father had been practising law?

He was a- a small- a junior judge in Lörrach. Yes.

A junior judge. And how did the onset of Nazism affect his employment?

He lost his job.

What year would that have been?

[19]34.

So, quite early.

Yeah – ‘34, ‘35 as far as I remember.

You would have been quite young, and perhaps not aware.

Yes, four – four years old.

Were you aware that- of any tension and stress besides this poster that you saw-?

No.

In the street?

None. That's the surprising thing. Not at all.

Do you think your parents protected you?

No, I- I just, and I- I mean, again, I was eight years old. I was out and about, I think- I must have had local friends. I never felt any anti-Semitism.

You never had any incidents?

No - except these posters.

And you said you had a sister.

Yes.

Was she older or younger?

Two years younger. She was born in 1932.

So-

Unfortunately… She, she died quite young at the age of forty-four, with cancer - in this country. Died in this country.

[0:10:16]

Right. So, can you tell us a little bit about what you remember about this incident with your grandfather being attacked? You said he had his teeth knocked out?

No, I just- I- I wasn't there, obviously. It was in-

You didn't witness it?

No, no, no, they- he was in Karlsruhe, we lived in Ettlingen. But much- I saw him the day after and he just- with this, and I do remember this, how, the seeing where you know, his front teeth being missing.

And what- can you tell me something about the motivation that then led to your family deciding to leave Germany?

Well-

Who- who in the family-?

My- my grandmother was the moving influence. Because my, my grandfather had this factory, and he- which he didn't want to give up. But he said, "That's enough," you know, "we- we can't stay in this country." And - he was remarkable man, because he must have been about sixty-five or sixty-six when he left. And he had to take with him his mother-in-law, i.e. my grandmother's mother. And they- I don't know quite how they ended up in Cardiff, but they- he was clever enough to- he had enough money when he arrived in Cardiff- The motivation of Cardiff was that he was offered a- a small industrial site in a place called Treforest, which is north of Cardiff.

Yes.

[0:12:22]

And there, then, he was offered a building. And I remember he telling me he went just before the war, and then just after they arrived, he went back to France. And with the little money he had, he bought second-hand machinery to make cardboard in this factory in Treforest, which he brought back and with the help of, obviously, engineers assembled this in Treforest. And the other part of this story is, because when the war broke out, they were regarded as 'enemy aliens', and they- they had to- they were sent up to the Isle of Man. You must have heard this from other people. And when- when, when he was released from the Isle of Man, the family - not me, but obviously I had to go with them - had to be twenty-two miles north, of- of any, any, any water. So we moved to a place called New Tredegar in the- in the valleys in Wales. And I remember, we lived with a Baptist minister who decided that he wanted to baptise me.

And I decided the water's too cold for that; I didn't want to be baptised. I mean- But yeah, that's, I mean, we'll come back to my own history later on in the interview.

[0:13:53]

Yes - yes. Because I- I want to go back to what actually happened when you- before you left Germany, how- how was it arranged that you-?

I have no idea. Amongst the documents, which you have, you have, you have a- a certificate, which is signed by some local authorities, which is- was the authority to leave. And presumably, somebody must have - I don't know. My mother must have paid money for that. I don't know how they- how that was arranged. And I- I don't recall being put on the Kindertransport. I don't remember boarding this train. It must have been in Karlsruhe. If I go on, and what happened after that. I- I don't remember travelling in that train. I had my- just my- myself and my sister. I don't remember other kids being around us. There must have been other kids certainly on that Kindertransport. We arrived- travelled from the Kindertransport by train, I do remember, to the Hook of Holland. And we would have arrived in Harwich. And I remember we would have got on a train. I do remember that, going to Liverpool Street in London, where I was fortunate enough to be met by my grandmother, who had travelled up from Cardiff to-…And the- the other- the only other recollection is of that- of those early days is, is getting on an escalator and getting on the underground. But other than that, I have no- I have very little memory. I do remember going to Cardiff and I remember arriving in- funnily enough, I remember the address Insole Gardens where we lived before, we had to move north of- twenty-two miles north, as I said earlier. Yeah, that's about all I remember about that.

[0:16:22]

You said you left- you know that you left from Karlsruhe, though. Were your parents in Karlsruhe as well, at the time?

My- my father had already left for Switzerland-

Had he?

The idea- the idea being that he would learn French, and later join us in England. Unfortunately, the war came, and that never happened. My mother was still there. And she left- I don't know how that was arranged, but she got out just before the beginning of the war in August 1939.

Going back to your father -

Yes.

Do you know when he left for Switzerland?

I'm, I'm- early 1939, I- I would be guessing. I - yeah.

Right. And-

And he- he went to Switzerland and I know he, you know, he, he, he worked on- on the- in the fields in a farm to make a living. He ended up actually doing- being very recognised in Switzerland for what it matters, as being the Head of the Swiss Immigration Service? funnily enough-

How interesting.

I mean, and he, he was- he got his Doctorate in Heidelberg. And because of his high position in Switzerland, the work he did on unification between the people, the Jewish people, and the Germans, he was awarded - what was it called? The- the, the, the equivalent of a- of, of a knighthood. I mean, the German- What- what was it called, the cross?

Herbert's wife: The Deutsche Kreuz.

Hm?

Herbert's wife: Deutsche Kreuz.

Deutsche Kreuz.

Yeah. [Bundesverdienstkreuz] Yeah, he was awarded this medal, which unfortunately, we can't lay our hands on. I'd love to give it to my family. But he- he was- and he- and because of all this work, he was awarded another Doctorate by Zurich University. So, I remember – he was quite a modest man. But he had on this card: 'Dr. Dr.' And I [laughing] Doctor, Doctor - two Doctors on his card. And I pulled his leg about that. Anyway, that was the German habit of - you know, *Herr Doktor Doktor*.

[0:18:40]

Yes – yes. And so this implies that he stayed in Switzerland.

He- he stayed there.

And did not-?

He died there. Yeah, but you know, we- we- we, we caught up with each other later on in life. And I saw quite a lot of him. I was very fond of him. And he had- he had a- a lady friend, who- were- we were very fond of called Margaret Hongler. But somewhere along there, there's a- it's a picture there isn't it down there? But we can't- can we-

We'll look at that later.

May we? Yeah, okay.

Yeah. And which part of Switzerland did he live in?

Zurich?

In Zurich.

Yes.

And coming back to you now. And you've said you were met by your grandmother, and you went to Wales. Did you know at that- do you remember anything- about not knowing that- whether your mother would join you, or-?

No, I don't- don't recall. Sorry. I didn't- I must have thought about it, but I don't I remember thinking about that. Again, I repeat, I was eight years old.

[0:20:05]

Yes. And were you aware of having this- was your sister with you?

Yes. I was aware she was with me. Absolutely. Yeah, indeed.

And did you have any sense of looking out for her, or-?

No, I mean, she was with me. And- I- I never- there was never- there was no- no problem about any of that on the Kindertransport. I mean, we were together, and we were a close brother and sister.

And were you close to your grandmother who lived in Wales? Did you- did you feel close to her?

Yes - indeed. She was an amazing lady. Again, later on, there'll be a picture of her- a big portrait we have in this house, and a picture of her when she was younger. As I said earlier, she came from a household where they had servants. She never did any cooking. And when she came to Wales, she had to learn to cook. And she was a fabulous cook! She learned it very well and she cooked for us. I mean, she was a very- very able lady. Whereas my grandfather was very much in charge of the business, and in charge of the family, she, she looked after the family, and she took care of that. Yes. So, I felt very close to her, yes.

Do you- when your grandfather was interned on the Isle of Man, do you remember that at all?

I remember thinking how, you know, how sad I was. I- I do remember that, you know, he'd gone. Well, why on earth are they doing this to this old man who's no- who's no danger to the British state whatsoever?

Right. And do you remember how long he was gone for?

I think, four weeks, six weeks. Not- not very long. I don't- I mean, I'm guessing.

And was he able to build the factory quite quickly? How did that develop?

[0:22:15]

No, no, he'd started working. I mean- I also recall that had it not been for the war, he thinks the factory would not have survived. The reason it survived, they made cardboard, and the cardboard- other people must have told you this. The military, when they were called up, they- each- everybody was issued a cardboard suitcase. And this- the cardboard he made was used for these suitcases. Everybody was issued with a gas mask. And the- the, the boxes for these gas masks - you wouldn't remember - the boxes for these gas masks were made out of his cardboard. So, there was, you know, because of the war, there was this tremendous demand for cardboard, which he happened- fortunately had a factory which made this cardboard.

There must have been a lot of skill that he brought from Germany-

Yes, he-

From the paper business.

He was a paper and cardboard maker. And he was-… My grandfather was part of a large family. He had three brothers. The youngest of which was called, also was called Arthur, the same as my father, who he teamed up with, for reasons I don't know in to, to, to, to build this factory. They- they teamed up together. The other brother Leo, he emigrated to the United States from the United Kingdom. And the- and the other one was Willi, who was unmarried. He lived in London, and he died there eventually.

So-

So, that's my grandfather's family.

Grandfather's family. Right. So, you already had- it sounds like there were connections with the United Kingdom pre- prior to the war.

Yeah, I don't I know, I don't know why you say that. I don't know what connection there was to the United Kingdom. I can't explain. There must have been distant relatives who vouched for him. We think maybe other people in the paper industry, who had previously come to the United Kingdom. I don't know who they were, who, who maybe vouched for him. My- imagine- I imagine so. But I don't know the actual reasons for that.

[0:25:14]

Right. And how he actually came to be able to build a factory.

Yeah.

Right. Coming back to you. What do you remember about schooling? When you got- when you arrived in Wales?

Oh, okay. I was- I went to a primary school, the name of which I cannot remember, in Cardiff. I remember that the teacher single- singled me out and said in the form, "Now, you must help this young fellow. He's a refugee from Germany, and we want you all to be friendly with him." And there is this chap called Neville James, who became a friend in Cardiff who I'm still in touch with today - from those days. I must have been fairly quick at learning, because I- I did- I had to learn the new language and I picked that up fairly quickly, I think.

And you were eight years old?

Yeah. Nine in July.

Nine in July. And-

So- so, I arrived in April. And I would be nine in July.

So, very soon thereafter you were nine.

Yeah.

And do you remember anything else about the school experience?

No, no, I just- I don't remember much about that school. But I remember- I think as I said earlier, when we had to move twenty-two miles north-

Away from the coast, yes.

Away from the coast because we were dangerous- enemy aliens.

Yes.

I remember going to a school called Pengam. At- at least that, which was fairly new- near New Tredegar where we were. Had to move and we were housed with a- with a- my grandfather and I had to share a bed, which was all very temporary, in New Tredegar with a Baptist minister, who was called Davey. I remember his name, funnily enough. And he think- he thought I ought to be baptised, which, in fact, never happened. But I do remember going to Sunday school in New Tredegar. And he was very keen to try and convert me to Christianity. And I don't think- we didn't live in New Tredegar for that long. I sat the eleven- what was then the 11 School Entrance, I think it was called. 11 Plus, or whatever it was, in Pengam. And strangely enough, how I managed it, I don't know, I came top of the whole lot. And it eventually be- because of the Treforest factory, we moved to a town called Mountain Ash where my grandfather rented a house. And just as a reminder, he had quite a household. He had my grandmother, my great-grandmother, my mother and my sister. So, there were six of us who had to be housed. And he- he had to feed the lot. And I went to a school called Mountain Ash County Grammar, where I eventually sat the- what was then the- the O-levels.

And I managed to get through those with quite a number of distinctions. And eventually I did A-levels at that school which I certainly remember what that was. That was chemistry, botany, and zoology, which eventually ended me up in Cardiff University.

[0:29:42]

Right. Do you remember any particular teachers that guided you in your interests in the secondary school?

Yes, there was this chap who- I mean, the- the chemistry teacher was of interest. I- I also remember the headmaster whose name was Idris Jones, at Mountain Ash County Grammar. And I remember in those days if you are naughty, you're being caned. You- you had to- held up your hand and you were caned with a, with a cane. That's the only time I was caned in my whole life, and I- not in my backside, but on my hand. Why was I caned? I was- we were playing rugby with the ink-wells, and one of the- unfortunately one of the ink-wells was full of ink and that splattered on the wall and covered the wall with ink. And I was hauled down to the headmaster and caned. I do remember-

Was it just the once?

Just the once.

Just the once. That's lovely. And so you- you got through you're A-levels and you said you went to- applied to Cardiff University.

[0:30:52]

I went there for university and eventually got a degree in honours chemistry, from where I- I had a friend there called Ken Morgan, who was- also studied chemistry, and he went on to Leeds. And he must have mentioned- mentioned to the professor there or the tutor or whatever, that he's got a friend- And he was looking for people to do research on his behalf. So, I ended up in Leeds doing a PhD. And I certainly remember what that was about; I've still got the thesis upstairs, which I can't understand anymore. But it was on the growing metabolism of the- of the bean shoot. *The Protein Metabolism of the Bean Shoot*. Of all

things to write a PhD, which I got in 19… yes, ‘52 or ’53. Very- I- I got it very quickly, in record time. Not because I was very clever. Or- or I had a particularly good PhD that my supervisor - whose name I've forgotten for the moment - wanted to leave and move on to somewhere else. And he said- had to get rid of his PhD students fairly quickly. And they decided that my thesis were good enough to grant me a PhD in 1953, from where I go on- shall I go on about my-?

[0:32:35]

Yes, if- if we could- before you do that, if we could go back a little bit to the family-

Yes-

- in Wales. Your mother arrived?

Yes.

You say just before the Second World War started.

You are right.

How did she occupy herself? What did she do?

She- at the beginning, not very well. But she also learned English quite quickly; she was quite smart at that. She was good at typing. And she managed to get some work in- later on in Aberdare as secretary to people and did- doing secretarial work.

Right.

And she managed it, and part time and managed to earn a bit of money out of that.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Were you aware of the effect the move had had on her? Did she adjust? Was she happy to be in Wales or-?

Yes, and- yes and I think- I think she fairly settled. But I think it was hard being alone and my father not being there. But I- she- I was never conscious of her being terribly upset, or that- she- she'd get on with it. She very much- I mean, she, she – no, I wasn't very aware of any particular unhappiness.

Right - right. And then where- did she remain in Wales?

Yes, she stayed in- absolutely. Eventually, the- when my grandfather sold out his interest in- in- it's a- basically to the other- the- Arthur's, the other brother's son who was called Howard. He eventually took over and he sold out his interest. I don't know how much money he got for it. The family moved to Golders Green in- in London. And again, my grandmother, my grea- mother was- my great-grandmother was still alive. My mother and my sister and myself, by which time I had- by the time that happened, I mean, I must have been- I was fairly independent, because I had been- finished my PhD. And I then had to do National Service.

Right.

[0:35:18]

And-

So, you're saying that the entire family moved in the early 50s, say, would it have been?

Yes. Around '50, '52. Yeah.

Right.

As far as I remember.

Okay. And are you aware- did the paper factory - or the card factory - keep going?

The pulp factory.

The pulp factory. Did it-?

Yes, yes. It kept going and kept going. And I mean, obviously, we lost contact with it. We had nothing to do with it.

Right.

But it kept going.

It kept going.

My grandfather had no financial- financial interest in it any longer. Yes.

Right. So- so you said you weren't really living- you were almost- you'd almost left home by the time the family was in Golders Green? Do you want to take us from there? To your professional-

Interestingly enough, you know, it's at that point I changed my name. Because I didn't think when I found out that- that I was going to be commissioned in the Royal Air Force, I became a young officer in the Royal Air Force – that I- I don't know why I thought this, but I don't- I didn't think the name Emsheimer was appropriate. And why we chose Edmonds, I don't know. But my mother decided also to change her name, my sister did as well. And I was commissioned in the Royal Air Force. And I think it's an extraordinary coincidence that when the- they interviewed me to be commissioned, and deciding what they're going to do with me, they decided that - "Ah! Chemistry!" - they will make him an armaments officer. So I spent, I think, eight- eight weeks in Jurby. Funny, going back to Jurby where they were interned. That's where the RAF OCTU - Officers Cadet Training Unit was, was in Jurby in the Isle of Man.

[0:37:23]

I see.

And that's where I spent eight weeks marching up and down and learning to be an officer and they- teaching all sorts of stuff, how to be an officer. And how to salute, and go how to march and god knows what. I remember we had this Warrant Officer, Parry. It's funny how we remember these funny things. And he watched me marching and I had been skiing and I- I'd still got a tear across my leg before- just before I joined- I joined the Air Force. I remember this Warrant Officer- Parry shouting out, "Edmonds, you march like a pregnant duck!" [all laugh] And I thought, typical, and they- also later on they- those- those of you who- who are listening to this, you might have been- also had some form of military training. There were certain instructions you give when you're on a parade ground. And it's, "Fix- Bayonets Fix!" And I remembered saying- for some reason saying this twice in front of this warrant officer, and this warrant officer says, "Edmonds, if you fix any more bayonets, you'll have a pitchfork!" [all laugh]

[0:38:58]

Oh dear, funny how you remember these silly little things. Anyway. I think it's an extraordinary thing that this emigree from Germany was then posted to RAF Wittering which is a RAF station just south of Stamford where the- where we, the country, the RAF housed its atomic bomb. And I was attached to - this is no longer secret, so it can be broadcast - I was attached to a thing called - funny how I- I do remember certain details - called 1325 Flight. And if you look at up in the internet, you put in this '1325 Flight', you will see that this flight was- had- was attached- had a bomber called the Valiant. There were three- three bombers of those times. There was the Victor, the Valiant and the Victor- the- the Vulcan. And the Valiant was there. We had- it's funny how I remember its- I remember also its number - 3-2-1 - because I got a tankard in a cupboard somewhere, which they gave me when I left the Air Force as- as a thank you, my co-officers. And this 1321 Flight was led by a Squadron Leader Roberts – I remember his name, too. And he- he used to say, "Edmonds, I've got to make sure that you've secured this," - we only had a concrete filled bomb, which we had to practice putting on this Valiant. And- and I remember, on the odd occasion, we had to fly with it, he said, "Edmonds, you're coming with us. I want to make sure that this bomb is adequately attached to the Valiant." And we took off and on one occasion, we- the whole point of it was

to measure the trajectory of this bomb filled with concrete, which was similar weight to the actual atomic bomb, which all three were housed at Wittering, by the way. We never actually loaded the live atomic- atomic bomb. That was there for- in case of need. Fortunately, never- we never did. But we- I remember going up with the aeroplanes having to drop this atomic bomb in the North Sea. And then the Valiant sort of jumped up as- as they released the bomb. And the idea was to measure the trajectory of the bomb falling into the North Sea; you make sure they cleared it of shipping before we came along.

Aha- aha. So they didn't have a big piece of concrete falling on them, yes.

[0:42:04]

After that I- I came out of the Air Force. This must have been in 1956. And I joined a large drug company in Welwyn Garden City called Roche Products, where… after a short time, I became a Plant Manager, making vitamin B1 in Welwyn Garden City. And I remained there until I was married. And you've got all the details of my wife there. And-

How did you- how did you meet your wife?

We were- we- we were introduced by friends of my future- future father-in-law and my- funnily enough, my grandparents. And I was invited to dinner there and we met and that was it.

Was that in London?

Yes. That was in London.

Going back to the RAF-

Yeah.

Had you volunteered or were you called up?

No, no, this- this was National Service.

National Service.

Yes. Everybody in- in that age-group had to do two years. I was reasonably good at it because they tried to persuade me to stay on, to- to stay on in- sign on for a- what they called a 'Short-term Extended Commission'. And I decided no, I've had enough. I'm getting out now. And while I was in the Air Force, I was interviewed by Roche Products.

I see. And did your studies help you to get your first job?

Oh, I- I imagine so, yes.

Yeah. Your chemistry and your zoology-

[0:44:00]

Yeah- no, I imagine if you have a PhD.

Yeah.

Not everybody had a PhD and then they- they- Roche Products gave me a job. I remember the starting salary which they thought was enormous was 800 pounds a year - which they increased fairly rapidly when I was made a Plant Manager. Anyway. I left there when my father-in-law- he had a- he'd built up a successful steel trading business in partnership with a company called Coutinho Caro, who were steel traders in Hamburg. And my father, father-in-law who had had a steel yard, stock yard, in Alexandria in Egypt - which is where my wife was born - and he was Coutinho Caro's representative. And that's why he met these, this gentleman called Herbert Coutinho who had a trading factory- trading company in Hamburg, And they formed this 50-50 company in- in London. And he had lost his wife. He was concerned that if anything happened to him, and he had a large- he had a large family. My father-in-law had a son and four daughters, of whom my wife was one. He was concerned that if he- anything happened to him, what would- how would they have an income? So he persuaded me to join him, much to the disgust of Roche Products, who had just promoted me to being a Plant Manager. And they said- and I said to them, "I prefer to be on the

commercial side. That's my natural inclination." And I said, "No, I'm joining my father-in-law." And that's what I did. And I don't know whether the rest of my history there is much of interest generally, but there we are.

What kind of role did you take in the- in the company you joined?

Well, he made- he- I- I- I found a niche for myself in finding- persuading suppliers - mainly British Steel Corporation companies before they were nationalised and put into one group - Consett [Iron Company Ltd], Colville's, Steel Company of Wales, Richard Thomas and Baldwins, persuading all the people to give us supplies to export from this country. And we did a- a large export trade. And obviously, I soon became a director of the company, having established a niche for myself in that. And we built up a large company, with offices all over the world - eventually employing 2000 people. Yeah.

[0:47:26]

Were you still speaking German at this point?

No, I'm- I- I had to speak German because my great-grandmother never learned to speak any English. So, I, I- I managed to retain some semblance of German even- no doubt with a Welsh accent.

Right. And tell me a little bit about your family life, your- your children. When- when did they come along?

Well, we- we've got a large family. I mean, that- this can go on for a long time because we have four kids. The eldest, Philip, who eventually joined the trading company. The second one called David, who- interestingly enough, they- they all ended up in-…The boys ended up in Dulwich College. When- when we had moved to Bromley - I don't know how we got there eventually in- in this interview, but they went to Dulwich College. They all did well. Philip went on to Oxford to study maths. I remember being- I remember my wife being interviewed by the- his Master at the Dulwich College where he- in those days certain people at Bromley still got a scholarship. He got one; we never had to pay for Dulwich College, which is a large private public school in South London. I remember being interviewed by the- his Form

Master, Philip's- said, "We've never- never had a boy who was top in every subject." So that was Phillip. David, on the other hand, we were interviewed by his Form Master later on in Dulwich College. He was a paying, paying- paying student. We were interviewed, "Afraid that we- we're- we're going to put David down- down a form, because he's not keeping up very well." This is why you should never make up your mind about your offspring because he ended up in Oxford. And he got a First in PPE at Oxford. So this is a young man who was put down. Richard wanted- wanted to be different. He wanted to go to Cambridge. But he failed and he ended up in Bristol, where he was- Bristol University, by the way, was highly recommended to anyone who's listening to this. And he was very happy at- at Bristol. Our daughter Julia went on to Bath University, having been to Bromley High School, and she did very well at Bath. She nearly got a First. She was on the edge of getting a First at Bath. She got a good 2.1 in, I think it was called European Studies. So like her mother, she became a language teacher- and a very good one. I mean, she's really, really is- yeah. So these four kids have produced between them eleven grandchildren.

That's fantastic.

And the eleven grandchildren, to put them in perspective, and quite interesting- our eldest son was married to a Dutch lady. Unfortunately, that didn't work out. But before they divorced, they produced three sons: Sam, Joe, and Hugo, who are incredible. They're all quite smart. They are absolutely bilingual in Dutch and English. When they- they- we see a lot of them. When they come to this country, they speak English to each other. When they're in Holland, they speak Dutch to each other. Sam, for what it's worth, is studying engineering at Delft, which is- apparently Delft University is well-known for its engineering department. Joe is at- is at a university which I'd never heard of - you might have heard of - called Erasmus University in Rotterdam. You have heard of it?

Yes.

[0:52:15]

You have? Hugo's still at school. He's going to be an entrepreneur, no doubt about it, and he will study business studies. Perhaps- I don't know where yet, but that will be decided. My eldest son who we're talking about, Philip, eventually, fortunately met a partner who we are

very fond of called Tana. And they have produced Czech grandchild - number eleven. Talking about languages, she's interesting because she, she's three, and she talks- she's very- well-advanced. She talks English to her father, German to her mother. And she babbles or understands Croatian because Tana's parents, who- he's a medic - moved from Croatia to Düsseldorf and they see a lot of Maya too. And they speak to her in Croatian. So, the poor kid of three has to learn three languages. And she's- she's doing well.

There's a circularity there. Can I just come back and ask you a little bit about your children? Did you talk to them about your experiences of emigration or-?

Not really. No.

When they were growing up?

No – no. No.

Did they express any interest?

No- they do now, but at the time, no. I don't remember talking to them about it. No, they didn't.

Right.

No.

And when did you first go back to Germany?

Um, interesting question. Remind me to come back to the rest of the family-

Sure.

Cause we haven't finished. This paper factory, which my grandfather owned, he eventually repossessed. And- and eventually sold again.

[0:55:07]

But was that a compensation? A-

Yes, I mean the state-

Yes-

Saw to it that they were re- repossessed.

Right.

The- anyway, it was run by a- the- the Managing Director of the repossessed firm was a man called Nippe – N I double-P E. And my grandfather had the strange idea that I might eventually go back and run this factory. Which would- nothing was further from my mind. I'd- I explained to you earlier, I'd become so anglicised, I had no intention of going back to Germany. But you asked me the question, when did I go back? I can't remember the exact year. It might have been '56, '57. And I mentioned in- I remember staying with this family called Nippe in Ettlingen. They were very kind to me. And I stayed with them. And I went to this paper factory in- obviously as a student. Yeah- yes, I must have been at u- I must have been at-… I was possibly still at university when this happened, I can't remember the exact date. Anyway. I- I remember, just spending time in the factory and- to please my grandfather, to make sure that… Anyway, I came back and decided I'm not, "Sorry, I'm not going- moving back to Germany." So that's the first time I went back. Since then, we travelled back quite often to Germany. You know, on holiday in various places we had- it's funny enough, this- my- my wife had a connection there in Germany, friends, who- we held the agency here for a company called- what are they called again?

Herbert's wife: Nolte

Nolte. And they had a house in Germany, which we- in the Black Forest where we stayed at. Yes, we went back fairly frequently.

Herbert's wife: You went back on business. Not-

And of course, I went back- and, yes, quite. To Hamburg. To, to the, to- you know, I was the link between our company and the- the shareholders and had very much, working with them. And I had very good friendships there. So, shall I get back to the family?

[0:57:57]

Sure, yes. Do.

I think we'd finished. David we'd ended up saying that he got a First at Oxford- he. Anyway, listening to this, he's a regular broadcaster with BBC. He's got a number of interesting series. And he's got one which he's doing a series called The Big Idea, which he himself produces and promotes and announces, and introduces various people. I won't go into detail about that, but it- he's- he's very successful - with the BBC. He is also a successful writer of books. He wrote a book called- he's written a number of bestsellers. There's one called *Wittgenstein's Poker*, which, believe it or not, has now been translated into twenty-four languages. And you can- he's got this whole shelf- bookshelf at home with all these people, the publishers- he's got books in all these Japanese, Chinese, you name it, Russian, all these languages, in which his book is translated. *Rousseau's Dog* is another one. The latest. There's one on chess which, which is called *Bobby Fisher Goes to War*, which is a whole- the history about the Spassky-Fisher chess match. I don't know whether you're interested in chess-

Yes, I remember that.

Chess. And what's the latest one called?

Herbert's wife: There's just been a play which was based on his book in the Hampstead Theatre-

Called?

Herbert's wife: Which was called…

[1:00:06]

Would You Kill the Fat Man.

Herbert's wife: Oh, Would You Kill the Fat Man's another book but-

Yeah.

Herbert's wife: But I mean the play wasn't called that.

No. *Would You Kill the Fat Man-*

Was the book you were telling us about.

Was another book that he's written.

Right.

Anyway, he- what's the- what's the play that? Well, anyway, it's not- it's not that important. Anyway. Anyway, they've got two kids. He is married to Liz. It's an interesting marriage because Liz - called Liz Klein before she was married - clever lady - is fairly orthodox. And my philosopher son, David, who's written all these books and worked for the BBC is fortunately, a vegetarian. But he's a- he's an ardent atheist. So, despite that it's a very happy marriage. They are both very tolerant of each other's beliefs. They have two kids: Saul and Isaac. Saul is smart at his age. He reads quite well. Isaac is a very smart young lad. He's seven years old, plays chess above his age, and has what, I believe, really believe, is a photographic memory. At the age of seven, he can name every prime minister. Where he gets it from, goodness knows. He can- he can relate to you every previous king and queen of England. At the age of seven.

That's impressive.

Yeah, amazing. Okay, that's- that's David. Richard lives in New York, married to Jennifer, who's also Jewish - not believing. They have two daughters. Olivia… who- and Zoe. Zoe

interest- is interesting because we were on holiday with them somewhere outside Boston in the Cape - Cape of Good Hope. And they had travelled up from New York where they live. And I looked at Zoe and I said, "What's the matter with her?" She's- she's very thin. She was I think nine or ten at the age, at the time. Any other symptoms? They said, "Yes, she has to go to the toilet a lot." I said, "I think you better take it to the local hospital. I suggest she's got diabetes." Which they confirmed. And I- I remember being very, very impressed that that night they- an ambulance took her to Boston Children's Hospital. Boston Children's Hospital, you would know if you'd lived in the States, is one of the top children's hospitals in the world. And they kept her in overnight and stabilised her and what have you, and eventually sent her home. She is quite remarkable. She obviously has to inject insulin. She measures her own food. She's got a thing on her arm. And what you can do with modern technology, if she's low in sugar, it- it sends a signal to their parents on their iPhone and they wake her- they- They wake up and give her sugar or whatever, or give her an extra dose of insulin. And she's quite remarkable young lady. So- and Olivia's a normal kid. Despite her problem, which you wouldn't notice with Zoe – lively, lovely kids - they- she is an outstanding skier! And she's been in time trials where they go - they rent a house in north of New York - where they rent a house.

[1:05:14]

And she's an outstanding skier. Yeah, that's Richard. Julia, our youngest, is married to Adam Adam Sanitt, who is Jewish. They are not devout. Adam is- happens to be an extremely clever lad. He studied law at Cambridge, got a good degree in Cambridge, then got a postgraduate degree in law. He is- he's quite remarkable, because he, he didn't despite having studied law, he fairly recently got a PhD in mathematics. Quite extraordinary, you know, and in his spare time, for those who are interested in, he- he writes the- he, he writes the crossword for *The Times* and *The Financial- Financial Times*. He actually writes them and he gets probably paid a pittance for that, but there- there we are. By the way, back to David, another thing he- he, he- and I don't know whether any of your colleagues I'm sure they would read *The Jewish Chronicle*. He- he's a regular contributor to *The Jewish Chronicle*. He writes there. And also in *The Prospect Magazine*, he's an assistant editor at *Prospect Magazine.* Julia has three. Adam, by the way, Adam is a senior lawyer with Norton Rose. I don't know whether you've heard of them, as a big firm of lawyers. He's Head of Knowledge. I don't know what that means to anybody. In other words, if- if any of the partners have any

doubts about- he would- he would have a department where he would either know himself or look up the behind certain bits of law that he- he would-

Inform them.

He would- he would inform them about. That's Adam. Julia, as I say, did languages at Bath. She became a very competent teacher. She had a number of jobs with teaching German and French. They live in Hampstead Garden Suburb. And opposite them is probably the best state school in the country called Henrietta Barnet. Where she literally in her road called Northway lived opposite Henrietta Barnet. So she was lucky enough to get a pregnancy job, where the teacher was pregnant and she got a job there.

Maternity leave.

Maternity leave job - literally walking across the street. I only tell the story because she taught German at O-level. And she- they have very clever kids at Henrietta Barnet. Every one of her pupils at German O-level got an A-star. The whole class! And it speaks for the kids, and it speaks for the level of teaching. Anyway, she had to- eventually the pregnant teacher came back and she had to find another job. And she now teaches at Mill Hill public school, which is another very good school where she's very happy, which is not far from where they live. And she travels there every morning. She's teaching there right now. And they have three kids, who happen to be quite smart. Ethan is about to do his A-levels. Interesting story because he is clever. And he was interviewed by Cambridge. He got to the interview stage of his college at Cambridge. He was turned down and it's all to do with this- Cambridge and university being pushed to take state school pupils. And he being at a public school, was- I think that's one of the reasons. He's certainly able. We'll see how he does in A- levels.

[1:10:11]

He will- he will get clean A-stars and he can apply again. I'm sure they- Leo, the second one, is also quite smart. The youngest, who is called Jackie, is also at private school doing very well. She's interesting in that she's- all Julie's and Adam's kids are all, I have to say, very smart. She is not only very good at schoolwork - North London Collegiate she's at school - and she is top virtually in every subject. And she is a cricketer, and she plays for the

Middlesex Under 13 cricket team, as captain and wicket keeper. So, a talented young lady all around. That's the- that's the family.

That's the family. And what- what kind of identity did you want to pass on to your children? Is there anything of the German or-?

What sort of identity? Straightforward and honest. I remember, one of the people working for me at Coutinho Caro, eventually becoming Stemcor is a separate story we needn't go into. And we bought ourselves out. When I retired, one of the- one of the- one of my colleagues who reported to me, said, "Herbert, you're an absolute bastard," - he was being kind – "but there is one thing I must tell you. Each one of us knew exactly where we stood." And that- and when he's talking about an identity, that's something which my kids are - honest, reliable, trustworthy. No airs. Don't try and out-be or out-smart yourself. That's it.

[1:12:43]

Lovely. And how do you imagine your life would have been if you had stayed in Germany?

I, I- I don't know. Assuming that- I imagine I was fortunate enough to be born with a bit of a brain. I would have gone to university in Germany. I imagine I would have been, if Hitler hadn't come, I imagine I would have been persuaded to- I don't think I would have gone into law like my father. I imagine I would've eventually been persuaded my- to join my grandfather's factory. Cause I've got a commercial bent, I mean, that side. Yeah.

And-

I've never thought about that, by the way, it just never occurred to me, that.

And how would you describe yourself in terms of your identity? I asked about your children. But now what about you?

I'm not sure what- what you mean. I mean, I've described myself and what I want my kids to be. And then that's, that's, I think that what this colleague says - straightforward, honest.

Right. Nationality doesn't really come into it so much? It sounds-

I am proud of the way I have assimilated into the United Kingdom. I'm proud of the fact that the way, for what it's worth, I'm proud of the fact that I've got a certificate up there, signed by the Queen, saying, you know, “Your Trusted Servant”. And have- by the way, her signature’s failed, has nearly faded out. I've got- I've got to send it back to her, “Dear Queen, would you please go over this? My proud Certificate when I was made a Commissioned Officer in your Royal Air Force has faded. Please go over it.” I’ve got it upstairs, you don't need to take a photograph of that.

[1:15:26]

And do you have any message for anyone who might watch this interview?

I don't know whether anybody is going to watch it, but no, I, I hope that some of what I've said is of interest, and- I like to think I’m a fairly modest person. And, and I hope that comes out in the interview.

It certainly does. Dr Edmonds, thank you very much-

Thank you.

- for agreeing to share your story with us. And we'll come back and look at some of your pictures.

Thank you. Well- that's it. That was longer than I thought. Good God. How- can you tell how long it is?

[End of interview]
[1:16:13]