United Kingdom
Holocaust Memorial
Foundation

UKHMF TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPT – RUTH DAVID

[Testimony: 1hr' 36 mins. Artefacts: 4'.30"]

A028_L003_0728RJ - A030_L001_072861

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript. However, no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended only as a guide to the original recording.

10:00:00:00
Ruth David
My name is Ruth David. I was born in Germany in 1929, not a good place to be born as I experienced the whole of the Nazi time there. I came to England with the Kindertransport, which really saved my life; and I had my children in England, and they and I continue to think of England as our natural home.

[fade to black and back up]

10:00:39:22
Interviewer
Okay, um, so when and where were you born, and tell me a little bit about your family?

10:00:45:15
Ruth David
Yes. I was born in Frankfurt. That was our nearest city, but we actually lived in the country. Er, we lived in a part of Germany called the Odenwald, which is a minor version of the Schwarzwald, the Black Forest and in a place that nobody's ever heard of in England, and very few people in Germany. It was called Fränkisch-Crumbach. Crumbach means the crooked stream and this is where we lived.
My family, I think, had lived there since 1700 and something and were recognised as good citizens.

10:01:29:07
There were not many Jewish families in Fränkisch-Crumbach and um, finally most people did get out, but we somehow didn't. There were difficulties for us, where immigration was concerned, and um, the Burgermeister of Frankisch-Crumbach, the mayor, became quite an enemy of my father. This is natural. He was a Nazi and the local chief of the Nazis,

10:02:02:08
and my father had a factory, which was no longer working. Hadn't really worked properly since about 1934, when various laws had app, appeared, anti-Jewish laws, and so the factory couldn't run.

10:02:18:21
I don't know what we lived on, but as a child, I suppose, nobody ever thought of telling me that and I was either too scared to ask or didn't think of asking. So um, the Burgermeister, the mayor, wanted my father to make a present of the factory to the village, and father couldn't afford that because by then, I imagine we had very little money,

10:02:45:02
we wanted to emigrate to Argentina. One brother had already done that, ready to welcome us, to prepare something for us. He had a very tough life there, on a isolated farm in the Pampas, and er, but tried very hard to get us out, and either the Argentinians wouldn't let us in, or when they would let us in the Nazis wouldn't let us out, and we didn't actually make it.

10:03:16:09
But the reason, to go back to the factory, why my father wanted to keep the factory, was to be able, and he hoped to be able to sell it, to raise the money to take a family with six children, to Argentina - and that just never happened.

10:03:36:18
Interviewer
Were you a religious family?

10:03:39:13
Ruth David
Not specially. I think my father was brought us, as many villagers were, to be reasonably Orthodox. My mother came from quite a different background. She came from the city. She was born in Mannheim and had studied at various universities. In Germany, in those days, it was the, she was born in 92, therefore she would be a student round about, just before the First World War, and not many women went to university in Germany in those days. They started much earlier in England, but in Germany that was about the time that women started, and there was no objection to Jewish students in those days, and she studied at Jena, Heidelberg, Frankfurt and Berlin, because it was the time when one was rather peripatetic in one's studies.

10:04:34:13
And um, she came from a family that knew the family was Jewish, but they weren't practicing and I think my mother wasn't interested in anything religious, until the Nazi forces were really very unpleasant, and she thought, well, this was perhaps the time to show that she was Jewish, and so I think we, for instance, um, ate kosher, but this wasn't easy because, um, the meat had to be brought in from somewhere and so we only had it once a week; but um, it, it was a fairly plain living kind of existence.

10:05:21:03
Although my father had been one of the important people in the villages, in the village. He, um, er, employed, particularly a lot of women, and it was the first-time local women were paid, because the local women, were peasant women, had always worked, er, in the fields and had been the wives and daughters and, er, mothers of the men, therefore th, they deserved no pay. They were just nonpaid, and my father did pay and he was the first man in the area to give um, to pay insurance for their future pensions.

10:06:08:11
So when I went back for the first time, many, many years later, I didn't go back, I left Germany in er, 39, in June 39,

and I think my first visit back was in about 1957, so that's many years later, and it was then that people told me how they had a pension through my father. Which of course my father never had.

10:06:33:16

Interviewer
What an extraordinary man he must have been.

10:06:35:08
Ruth David
Yes, I think so. He was, he brought electricity to the village. The village had no electricity. He was responsible for that. He was on the local council - I don't know why or how -but he was a member of the local council, and he um, did good things. Electricity was one of them, and the other was he built a whole estate for people who worked for him, but also for other people, and that estate is still there. Seems very good and nice houses. Admittedly they're far more modernised than they were in those day, and I think he did quite a lot really, and was well regarded.

10:07:14:09
Interviewer
Tell me about your brothers and sisters because you were part of a very big family weren't you Ruth?

10:07:19:02
Ruth David
Yes, we were a big family. My father had had a first wife, who died of a failed gallbladder operation and she had left three children. The eldest was Annie, whom I think I haven't mentioned in my book. Um, she, when my mother married my father, as a second wife, after that death, my mother had never been to the village before and didn't know what it was like to live in a fairly primitive country area, and the daughter Annie was already ill, with TB, and um, a lot of money was spent to cure her. I think she was sent to Switzerland, which is what one did in those days for TB, but TB was usually fatal, and she died, and then, and I remember her only vaguely. My brothers and sisters dispute this. Say I'm lying. I'm not. I saw her on her deathbed. I was taken to see her when she was dying, and I remember that quite, quite clearly, and that's the only time I remember seeing her. Perhaps somebody took me to see this dying girl, or perhaps she wanted to see me. I don't remember her otherwise, at all, but there were lots of pictures about, for, of her, in the house.

10:08:43:07
And then I had the two older brothers, from that marriage. We were step
er, what do you call it? Stepbrothers and sisters. We never looked on it like that. We were a complete family and I think they were very fond of my mother and she of them; so I don't think there was any problem there at all, and

10:09:05:03
um, the eldest brother eventually managed to emigrate to the United States.
10:09:12:11
The fir, the second brother had gone to Argentina, and that was in May 1938, so he did not have to go through the awful time of the November pogrom, in um, in November 38.

10:09:24:21
But um, my eldest brother should have been going to the United States just at that point.

10:09:33:12
We hoped, when we realised we weren't getting to the, to Argentina, we had relatives in the States who were willing to guarantee for our coming there, and Ernest, the eldest brother, was supposed to go first, to the United States. He had his ticket and then this pogrom happened and he and my father were arrested that night and taken to the local prison and from there to Buchenwald, and um, when, in Buchenwald they discovered that Ernest had a ticket in his pocket, to the States they kept him only about two weeks and let him come back. With, on the condition that he left Germany at once, and so he did. He came sort of overnight, back to the village, and the next morning he left for Holland, for a boat at Rotterdam I think, to the United States, but he had had that time in Buchenwald.

10:10:30:11
The elder, the older two brothers died very young. When I say very young, Ernest was 59 and Werner was 63. To me that is now very young at my age, and I think they did that because they both had very tough lives. Werner on his own, in Argentina, um, struggling to make a home for us, and Ernest, after Buchenwald, was not going to live very long, and he died actually of heart trouble, um, eventually.

10:11:01:06
Interviewer
So you were the eldest of your mother's children?

10:11:04:08
Ruth David
The, Hannah, my older sister, then I, then my brother Michael, and my youngest sister Theodora.

10:11:12:06
Interviewer
Okay, so there were actually seven, but,

10:11:14:07
Ruth David
No, we were seven and I think of us as six really, because I don't remember Annie.

10:11:19:03
Interviewer
I understand. Okay, thank you. That's why I was confused with the order.

10:11:21:21
Ruth David
Yes, of course you were.

10:11:23:01
Interviewer
Um, what was your lifestyle like as a family?

10:11:26:12

Ruth David
It's difficult to say that. Um, I thought we were like everybody else in the village. I've discovered, since then, from others who have lived in the village, that we were thought of as well-to-do. I think that may have been true at some point, but certainly not once father lost the factory, which was very early on, in about 1934, and that we were better dressed than some of the local children. I, as a child, did not see that. I didn't recognise that, but,

10:12:04:14
Interviewer
But you had some domestic staff, didn't you, for instance, Mina?

10:12:06:05
Ruth David
We did. Mina, Mina was the last. Yes we did have domestic staff. I think in the old days it was two live in domestic staff, but not in my day. In my day it was only Mina, whom I worshipped and adored, and she had to leave us, because, um, Aryans weren't allowed to live with Jews any longer. She was a very brave woman.

10:12:30:16
We moved eventually from, after the pogromnacht we mo, moved from Frankisch-Crumbach to Mannheim because it wasn't safe anymore, to be in the village where everybody knew us, and um, Mina came back to us in Mannheim, against all the rules and the laws, to help us. She was wonderful.

10:12:51:02
Interviewer
[*partly spoken over Ruth*] She was a very special lady.

10:12:52:14
Ruth David
Yes, she was.

10:12:53:12
Interviewer
We'll talk about her again in a minute.

10:12:54:22
Ruth David
Yes, thank you.

10:12:56:03
Interviewer
Um, at this point of your life, were you aware of the anti Semitism,

10:13:01:00
Ruth David
Oh surely. [*talk over each other*]. Absolutely, yes.

10:13:02:17
Interviewer
What information did you have?

10:13:04:07
Ruth David
Um, not too much from my parents. They never discussed anything very serious in front of us, or they sent us out, or I knew something was being discussed and was sent away and then I eavesdropped, which was not the right thing to do. I knew there was something up but for us in the village, um, life was different from a town life.

10:13:29:19
Most Jews in Germany lived in towns, in the cities. There were not many in the villages, and the villages were much more primitive. For instance, um, we had no tarred roads in our village. We just had the old, no cobbles, nothing. It was the old, untarred roads, as people knew them in the early 19th century in England. You know, it, it was very different and um, and the thinking, I think, of the villages were more primitive.

10:14:04:20
Um, I think we were the only people who had a radio. We were the only people who had a telephone, except the doctor. There was a doctor and then um, we also had, in the village, a rather tumbledown mansion. I won't call it a castle. Um, near a little church, near a Catholic church, and that was an old baroness, um, part of the ancient German aristocracy. We didn't really know her, but she was kind to my family when we were in trouble. She had courage. I will talk about that later, if we talk about the pogromnacht.

10:14:47:00
Interviewer
Mmm, we will talk about that. Um, you mentioned earlier, that conflict of a child, you were clearly a, a very clever young girl, but you had that ambivalence about wanting to know, but maybe being too frightened to ask. Is that,

10:15:00:21
Ruth David
Yes, [*talk over each other*] I think there were questions I knew I couldn't ask. There were ques, you, you asked me earlier and I didn't answer properly, about anti-Semitism.

10:15:09:13
Yes, we were expelled from school, as early as 1935. There was only one village school, that everybody went to, and the Head asked my parents to withdraw us, because people thought we shouldn't be mixing with other children anymore. I didn't understand that, at the time, at all. I do remember that in school we had to greet the teacher everyday with the Heil Hitler and I knew that my parents weren't keen on that idea, but I wanted to do that because I wanted to do what everybody else did. I didn't want to be the odd one out and so I did it, and the teacher said to me, I must stay

seated and not do it, when everybody else was doing it. Well that made me feel, I didn't want to go to school anymore.

10:16:04:00
Interviewer
So were you the only Jewish family in the whole village do you think?

10:16:06:13
Ruth David
Not quite. There were one or two, we were a handful. There were very few and, um, er, so we were sort of expelled and we were, for quite a long time, on our own and I didn't mind that at all, being at home on my own. At least with my, with my other brothers and sisters, but our parents were worried that it, it had happened in the whole area

10:16:33:14
and a school was set up for, a Jewish school, in a little town, about 20 miles away, called Höchst, and there there was a large synagogue, which had a building attached to it, for sort of Sunday School type of thing, and that was where our school was going to be, and that was not much fun because we had to go in an ancient car, that, with local, other, with not only from our village, but from other villages round about, er, which were equally primitive. We had to go to this um, school in Höchst and were sometimes attacked on the way there, you know. Stones thrown at us, and there were one or two very unpleasant incidents.

10:17:20:24
Interviewer
[*Talking over*] Used to call it the Jew bus, didn't they?

10:17:22:19
Ruth David
That's right, yes. Mmm.

10:17:24:11
Interviewer
That can't have felt very nice.

10:17:26:04
Ruth David
No. we w, we were aware of being Jewish and of that, was a bad thing to be, you know, so I, I must say I was aware of anti Semitism, although my parents didn't speak openly in front of us. I knew they were worried. There was always the talk about *auswanderung* - emigration, and I knew I didn't want to emigrate, because I knew I could never learn another language. That would be quite impossible, and er, we started, mother started to teach us some Spanish, because we thought we were going to Argentina. I actually quite enjoyed that, but then much later I discovered I was coming to England and I knew I could not learn English. Spanish perhaps, but not English.

10:18:11:23
Interviewer
Um, I'm just trying to imagine what it must have felt like, for your family. You talked about your father, who was obviously quite, um, a ground breaker within your village.

10:18:23:23
Ruth David
Yes.

10:18:24:14
Interviewer
He was very respected by everybody. He'd given people opportunities that,

10:18:28:11
Ruth David
That's right, yes.

10:18:29:03
Interviewer
He, that they wouldn't have had without him, and then suddenly the tide had turned and he was becoming an outcast.

10:18:36:18
Ruth David
Yes.

10:18:36:14
Interviewer
And that was a, a very interesting,

10:18:38:10
Ruth David
That was shocking. It was very shocking that this happened, because I didn't see how and why this should happen. Well, I knew that Judaism was a religion. I knew that Mina was Catholic and there were very few Catholics in the village in those days. Now it's quite mixed but it was a Protestant village and um, I k, I knew what a religion was but er, I can't say that I knew too much about Judaism or [*talk over each other*] anything else.

10:19:11:14
Interviewer
Do you feel like your parents sheltered you at this point then? From the,

10:19:14:00
Ruth David
Oh I'm sure. I'm absolutely sure they did and I think they went on doing that even in their letters to us, eventually. Er, I've seen letters, other people's letters, where parents describe how hideous their conditions are. Mine never did that, even when they were in the camps. They, because later there were sent to French concentration camps.

10:19:36:21
Interviewer
Let's talk about Mina.

10:19:38:20
Ruth David
Mina.

10:19:39:10
Interviewer
She obviously means so much to you.

10:19:40:23
Ruth David
She did, yes.

101:9:42:13
Interviewer
She helped your family, and helped you grow up?

10:19:45:01
Ruth David
Yes, and I was Mina's favourite, which the others resented, and the reason for that was that my brother, Michael, was born 364 days after me, so somebody had to look after me as a one-year-old, and it was Mina; and so I was devoted to her and she to me. And er, she spoiled me, and do you know my older brothers and sisters remember that 40 years later, how, what a spoiled brat I was. [*Laughs*].

10:20:21:15
Interviewer
I'm sure you weren't at all, but she was like your mother in many ways?

10:20:24:14
Ruth David
Yes. Yes.

10:20:26:07
Interviewer
And she was obviously an amazing woman as well, because she was a Roman Catholic wasn't she?

10:20:31:21
Ruth David
She was, yes.

10:20:32:16
Interviewer
And yet she put her own life,

10:20:34:18
Ruth David
Yes.

10:20:34:18
Interviewer
In many ways, at risk to be with you.

10:20:35:17
Ruth David
Oh she did. I mean the first time they came to get her, to take her away from us, she cursed at them in no uncertain manner. Swore and cursed and told them to get out of here, and um, and they did. They were scared of her, but the next time they came she had to go, because father said he would be in trouble if um, if he, if she didn't leave us, mmm.

10:21:03:13
Interviewer
She was trying to protect you.

10:21:04:16
Ruth David
Yes, yes.

10:21:05:15
Interviewer
Did you see her after that?

10:21:07:06
Ruth David
I saw her only once.

10:21:10:00
Interviewer
Tell me.

[cut for direction]

10:21:34:03
Ruth David
I, um, I was staying with English friends in Cologne. My best friend at college, at, at university here in London, had moved to Cologne and had invited me and I said, "well I didn't much want to come to Germany but you persuaded me," and she knew that I was looking for Mina, and I knew Mina lived in Dusseldorf - was working there - and they found her, and so that was quite an experience. I went to see her and um, um, I came to the hotel where she was working, which we found quite easily, and the hotel owner would not let her come to see me ,un, this is German order. I'm sorry to say that rudely, until she had finished washing the dishes, and so we couldn't meet

until then.

10:22:42:16
Ruth David
And so we went up to her little room. We just cried.

10:22:54:16
Ruth David
And then she gave me something that my mother had given her. When my parents were deported from Mannheim in October ‘40, Mina turned up. I don't know how she knew. Nobody knows, and said she wanted to go with them. That of course was impossible, and um, and my mother gave her a whole file of letters and those are the letters in my book, of the, the, what do I call it? The Lifelines, and if I hadn't had those letters I, I wouldn't have known, you know, how those first years of the war w, had been. Th, she kept copies of the letters that came in and also that she had sent out, so these were her letters, and um, [*blowing nose*], having my mother's letters; and so I had that and said goodbye to Mina and I never saw her again because she died; and I did go with a friend to a cemetery in Dusseldorf, no, it was in another place on the Rhine, that she had moved to Neider Bresig and a friend came with me, to look for her grave, but we couldn't find it. It was a huge cemetery and nobody could help us, so.

10:24:29:13
Interviewer
But she obviously knew how much you meant..

10:24:31:11
Ruth David
Yes.

10:24:32:02
Interviewer
To her and the other way round. She knew how much you loved her.

10:24:35:02
Ruth David
Yeah.

10:24:38:00
Interviewer
She was an angel in your family

10:24:40:00
Ruth David
Yes

[**Cut for direction**]

10:24:41:19

Interviewer
Er, I'm assuming that the pogrom you're talking about in November is known as Kristallnacht.

10:24:47:03
Ruth David
Kristallnacht. Um, and that's an interesting title because, er, so much glass was broken that night, so much crystal and glass in everybody's homes. It was an official attack which Goebbels had organized. He was the Minister for Propaganda, and that sort of thing, and, he had announced that there would be this attack on Jews because, do I tell you that story? Because, um, a young man who had fled to France from Germany, whose parents were Polish Jews. Er, they had been, um, arrested in, quite early on in October '38 and, um, dumped at the Polish border. The Poles didn't want them. And they, but they weren't allow, they weren't allowed into Poland and the Germans wouldn't have them back. So, I don't know what happen, happened to them in the end, they were stuck there. And those who knew that their families had gone there were very anxious, as was this young man whose parents had been sent there, he was in Paris. And he went to the German Embassy to ask for help. And what did they do? They mocked him. And so he went back with a gun and shot someone. Then obviously it's a crime. And curiously enough, this boy survived and he survived the whole war, in prison. I don't know why they didn't kill him when you think of the numbers killed. It's quite an extraordinary thing that they didn't. I think it was an accident.

10:26:18:03
Ruth David
And, um, and as a punishment because this was a world plot, no, it was a plot organised by Jews worldwide according to German ideas. This, er, murder in Paris from this one young man. Nobody of course had known about it. And we certainly didn't. And, er, and that was the sign for the attack.

10:26:43:16
Now the attack was called Kristallnacht because so much glass was broken.

10:26:49:03
The Germans themselves now, and I admire them for it, re, refused to use that word, they say it sounds too good and they call the pogrom. Now, pogrom as you know is the Russian word meaning an attack on Jews. And, er, it's now called Po, Pogromnacht. And certainly it happened at night.

10:27:09:00
And it happened to us in Fränkisch-Crumbach, it happened to us a day later, than everywhere else. Because news hadn't got through.

10:27:17:05
Interviewer
What happened?

10:27:18:22
Ruth David
Um, well our house was attacked at night. We heard somebody, about ten o'clock I suppose at night. Um, we heard somebody, um, smash the door in with an axe, the front door. And all the lights went out because something had been destroyed. And, heard, we lived at that point with an old Aunt and an Uncle who had always lived in Fränkisch-Crumbach. Never married, both were, well the Aunt was mentally somewhat handicapped. But she, she managed her life quite well. And the Uncle was physically handicapped, he had, um, been born at birth, I mean before the birth sorry, sorry about that stupid remark. He had been born, er, with his legs, um, not really properly in the sockets. Nowadays this can be very easily repaired at birth but He was lame all his life and had to swing himself around on crutches. Which he did and was a very bright man. I don't know that he never went to university, he must have gone locally to school. And, but he had a huge library and had read everything and had, was clever. He had made himself a wheelchair that could go up the stairs. I don't know how he'd done it but he had. And so, he and, er, the Aunt, who as I say brother and sister, had lived together all the years and the Aunt had looked after him extremely well.

10:28:57:18
Interviewer
Is this Aunt Ida?

10:28:58:14
Ruth David
Ida. Yes. And he was Uncle Gustav. And, um, he tried to get up. Er, we, we rushed, Hannah and I heard this noise and we rushed to his bedroom which was near ours. And, um, he was trying to get up. And we discovered later he'd been thrown down the stairs in his wheelchair, which had smashed. And Aunt Ida had been beaten and screamed and apparently these screams are still remembered in the village today. And, um, father and my eldest brother who was with us, Ernest. Were taken to the local prison, as I think I mentioned before. And, um, for one night and then the next day to Buchenwald, we didn't know where they'd gone, but we heard eventually.
And Ernest came back after two weeks. But the house was completely, completely smashed up, every bit of china and the beds and curtains had been slashed and feathers all over the place.

10:30:08:05
Hannah and mother and I must have cleared it all up because we had no other help. I do not remember the clearing up. I remember what it looked like. We had...in those days you didn't have freezers, you preserved fruit and vegetables for the winter, in glass jars. I think the English term is Kilner jars. And every one of those jars had been smashed on the stone floor of the kitchen and broken. So that, I remember there was just this oozing of fruit and vegetables amongst all the broken crockery and glass, china. And we must have cleared it up and I can't remember that. And yet I remember the scene very well. The broken mess
that we discovered.

10:30:53:23
Hannah and I had to fled downstairs after waking Uncle Gustav. We had been

terrified of what was going on in the house. And downstairs there was a large garage where my father's car was and we hid ourselves in the car. And didn't come back in until all the noise had subsided, it took them many hours.

And, um, there we found mother in amongst all that broken mess . And, um, Aunt Ida sobbing. And, er, and father and Ernest gone, they had been taken away. But she, she told us they would soon be back. I mean she couldn't have known anything about it at all. But she comforted us.

And the next few weeks I think we were just stuck inside the house; I think somebody helped us by bringing milk or something. I don't, I don't know who helped us. But we had some food

10:32:00:13

and it was then that the Baroness, this wonderful lady, who had great courage. And as I say one of the few Catholics in the village. She sent round a basket for, when my father came back from Buchenwald, because that must have been talked about in the village, that father was back. But we don't know what the villagers talked about. We didn't see people. And the shops all had notices on them saying Jews were forbidden entrance. So, how we got food I don't know and we weren't told in case we babbled I suppose, you know. Nobody was to find out how we had anything. And, um, er, so the, as I say the Baroness sent around a basket of fr, fruit, bread, wine - and I think bread and wine is quite significant - as a gesture. And I'm sure, it may have done father good, he looked dreadful when he came back. I mean I; I didn't want to go near him, he looked so small and shrunk. And with wounds on his head, awful.

10:33:11:24
Interviewer
You remember that basket arriving?

10:33:13:07
Ruth David
Yes.

10:33:14:15
Interviewer
And what that meant to all of you, that somebody was reaching out to you?

10:33:17:21
Ruth David
Yes.

10:33:18:11
Interviewer
Despite the fact that you were feeling,

10:33:19:17
Ruth David
[*Talking over each other*] That, that was wonderful. I've never forgotten that. I tried to write to her many years later to thank her. But by then she was dead and I think her nephew had taken over and I never heard back, you know. But it was wonderful.

10:33:37:01
Interviewer
So at this point, your family wanted to leave more than anything.

10:33:41:01
Ruth David
Well, yes we knew we had to leave the village. And, um, we were probably the last Jewish family left there.

[cut for aircraft overhead]

10:33:51:08
Interviewer
Imagine the conflict that, um. You've painted the picture of your village so beautifully and how well respected your family were. And yet how time's change very quickly and,

10:34:03:07
Ruth David
Very quickly.

10:34:04:17
Interviewer
,your family status fell dramatically from being very well respected to suddenly being outlawed.

10:34:11:15
Ruth David
That happened everywhere in Germany I gather. That the era of Hitler was so important, people were either too scared to do anything else or, as I thought, and I may, er, this is a child thinking. I felt they had become committed Nazis. After the war there was, there was a great denial of this. But I think there was a great commitment to the Nazis, it would never have happened to, as it happened if there hadn't been.

10:34:47:16
Interviewer
But your father must have felt so betrayed by everybody who he had helped.

10:34:51:02
Ruth David
I'm sure. I'm sure. And this in a way has continued, I shouldn't say this publicly, but sometime after the war a new road was built. And some fairly liberal local people thought it should be called after my father. Oh, no, no, no, no. There were still the old villagers who said, "no, no, no, no, it couldn't be."

10:35:20:03
Interviewer
Well they were most likely scared. Mm, okay. Um, so we're now going to move onto

the next chapter where your parents were desperate to try, they'd already, your brother had already gone to Argentina. And he'd already tried to start laying a new life for your family. But what happened next?

10:35:39:17
Ruth David
Well, my other brother after Buchenwald, er, after that November, um, pogrom.

10:35:46:01
Interviewer
Went to America, um,

10:35:47:00
Ruth David
He, er, er, after he'd had this spell in Buchenwald. He went immediately to North America. And he then tried. In all fairness a lot of people were trying to get into the United States. But the United States did reduce their intake of immigrants at that point. And it's the only time in their history, the years '30 to '45, when the Americans took in fewer immigrants. There's a marvellous exhibition at Ellis Island on the entrance to New York, where you can see this. They do it with little plastic figures, each figure representing a thousand people, and suddenly it gets very small. And that's the '40's. And I think that was partly antisemitism.

10:36:35:03
Interviewer
And that's just when you needed it most.

10:36:36:22
Ruth David
When one needed it most, yes indeed. Yes.

10:36:40:21
Interviewer
What measures did your parents take to try and find a route to safety?

10:36:45:02
Ruth David
Well they could only hang on and wait. There were constant visits to the Consulate, the American Consulate. Our nearest was in Stuttgart. And father would go there and queue and hope and be told, um, "we'll see, we'll see." Er, he never got real information.

10:37:05:22
Ruth David
And, um, in the United States there was quite a feeling against these immigrants.

10:37:13:14
Ruth David
Which is a sad thing to report but that's how it was.

10:37:18:08
Interviewer
And they were desperate for you to all stay together. But it wasn't possible.

10:37:21:06
Ruth David
[*Talking over each other*] Well they did want us to keep in touch and stay together. Um, they didn't want to send their children away but by the time, after the Pogromnacht, after November.

10:37:35:08
Um, mother must have heard about the Kindertransport to England. And without telling us she put Hannah's and my name down, my older sister Hannah, um, she was, she was three and a half years older than I. And, um, I wasn't told. I don't think Hannah was told either. And then I discovered with a few days' notice that I was to go off on my own. What she didn't tell me was, what my parents didn't tell me at the time, I thought it was totally unfair, why should I leave when Hannah older than I wasn't leaving? She didn't tell me about Hannah because she hoped Hannah would still be able to go. There was some error made by a committee in London that was looking after the Kindertransport. Her name had been left off accidentally. And she did eventually get out in August, days before the war broke out.

10:38:34:07
Interviewer
We'll talk about your experience on the Kindertransport in a moment's time. But can you, so we already know your eldest brother was in Argentina. Your second brother was in North America. And, and how, what happened to the rest of the children?

10:38:46:20
Ruth David
[*Talking over each other*] Well the rest of us, we, we moved to Mannheim because, um, we couldn't live any longer in the village where everybody knew us, where we couldn't shop. Where we couldn't go to school. Er, because our school had been destroyed in that night, the one in Höchst that I was mentioning and the one that was 20 miles away. And mother, I, I suppose they needed money desperately. And mother tried to find a job in Mannheim. And the reason for choosing Mannheim was that she was born there. Er, her parents lived in Mannheim until she was 13 when they moved to Frankfurt. So I only associated my grandmother, my mother's mother with Frankfurt. Mannheim was new to me, but I knew we had relatives there.

10:39:35:07
And, um, um, through knowing people she got a job in Mannheim and this job was, there was still in Mannheim the only Jewish orphanage that was left in southwest Germany was in Mannheim and she got the job of looking after the children in the orphanage. And that was very useful because there was plenty of room for us children too. Her four younger children. And for my father who was in a sad state after Buchenwald.

10:40:09:14

And she got this job and for us actually there was school, there was one Jewish school left in Mannheim and we could go to school. We weren't allowed to leave the house as a mob, we had to go as individuals more or less. So that we wouldn't be too obvious. And there were notices on the shops saying, 'Jews weren't allowed in.' And mother did occasionally send me to buy something and I hated going somewhere. And she said, "they don't know who you are, just go." And of course they didn't know who I was, as a child shopping for a pound of potatoes or whatever, you know. And, um, and then I went to school quite gladly there. It was a small school because there weren't that many people, Jewish people left in Mannheim either. They'd all tried to immigrate. But we had our school. And I could speak the local dialect, not of Mannheim but of the place where I had lived, of the Odenwald or Fränkisch-Crumbach. And the children laughed at me because I had a country dialect. They thought that was very funny. They called me *die Ruth von lande* Ruth's come in from the country. [*Laughs*] And, but that made life a bit easier for us. But it was then that we discovered mother had plans to send us to England. Because she must have heard about this movement of the Kindertransport. And we should have come together and we didn't.

10:41:40:14
Interviewer
You obviously had a very open-minded family. You were educated and,

10:41:44:23
Ruth David
[*Talking over each other*] Relatively yes.

10:41:45:17
Interviewer
Do you remember the sense of injustice and feeling angry about what was happening?

10:41:49:18
Ruth David
[*Talking over each other*] Oh, yes. I think, well I always had a sense of lack of, what I called it was 'unfair.' It was, it wasn't fair. And it wasn't fair. You know. That's really what I was constantly feeling. It's not fair.

10:42:05:23
Ruth David
And it, well you know.

10:42:07:08
Interviewer
Well it wasn't.

10:42:07:18
Ruth David
It wasn't.

10:42:08:13

Interviewer
In any way.

10:42:09:05
Ruth David
No.

10:42:10:24
Interviewer
So you found yourself on the Kindertransport. Do you remember how you were told about where you were going? Or any of the details of the journey.

10:42:16:12
Ruth David
[*Talking over each other*] Just a few nights before I went away they told me and I made no end of a fuss. I screamed and yelled and said I wasn't going, it wasn't fair. Because Hannah wasn't going. But I don't know why they never told me that Hannah should have gone. I don't, I, I don't understand that.

10:42:34:13
Ruth David
They, they must have been totally aware, per, perhaps they were just hoping against hope that Hannah would go with me at the last moment, but she didn't. And, um, they were allowed this, we were living in Mannheim.
In Frankfurt I think parents weren't allowed to come to the station with their children because it would look too awful for them. To see weeping parents. But in Mannheim, which was a much smaller place, the Kindertransports only went from the large cities. Frankfurt, Vienna, Hamburg, Berlin, um, Nietzsche, Cologne. But not from little towns like Mannheim. And so they weren't allowed to come to Mannheim, to, to Frankfurt where I was going from. But they could put me on a train in Mannheim and say goodbye to me in Mannheim, on the station, that was allowed. It was the last time I saw them. [*Cries*]

10:43:43:10
Ruth David
And I travelled with three or four other children, whom I didn't know from Mannheim, we, we'd gathered at the station. And mother, I was ten, mother asked a boy of 13 to look after me. [*Cries*] And I could see by his face that's the last thing he wanted to do. [*laughs*] And it was quite wrong of mother to ask him and he certainly took no interest in me, why should he? But I managed because, um, in, we arrived in Frankfurt and it was fairly obvious where all those other 200 children were. You could hear the noise and you could see the platform and I; I went there and I just got on the train.

10:44:24:04
Interviewer
Do you remember anything about what you were wearing? What you had in your suitcase? Do you remember any of the [*talk over each other*]

10:44:28:01

Ruth David
[*Talking over each other*] You know funnily enough, it's funny that you should say that because I had a hat for the first time in my life. A straw hat. Why mother bothered to give me a hat we'd never, we'd worn caps in the winter, woollen caps and berets. Never worn, I'd never seen a hat before, you know. [*Laughs*]

[cut for card change]

10:44:48:04
And it was navy blue straw with a red ribbon I think. And um, yes I wasn't used to having anything as fancy as that.

And we went through, very pretty country, I knew we were going to go along the Rhine. And I was glad to see places on the Rhine, which I'd never seen before, and I'd heard about the vineyards which run up the hills, next to the Rhine, and that intrigued me quite a lot. But I didn't, I don't think I spoke to anyone else in the compartment. We were all children, and um, I think I had sandwiches with me, which I did eat.

And we arrived in the dark, at the Hook of Holland. Yes, and Dutch ladies came and brought us oranges to eat. Now, oranges were something of a luxury in those days, certainly in Germany they were. And I think gave us a drink, which we thought very nice of them.

Because German officials had come through the, um, train and asked whether we had any valuables. Well I certainly didn't. And um, I think mother would not have been foolish enough to give me anything to take that was valuable in case I was in trouble about it. We were allowed to take I think, five marks or two marks in money, but it seemed no point in having any money either, I didn't need it.

And um, we arrived at the Hook of Holland in the dark, and I'd never seen the sea before, but I couldn't see it because it was dark. And I did see a ship, and I don't know that I'd ever seen a ship before either. Not, well, I'd seen boats on the Main and the Rhine, but not really a ship.

I'd never been to the seaside in Germany. I mean, we didn't have holidays, and it wasn't the sort of time when one took children away.

And I got on board, and I just stood there and cried, and some sailor picked me up, and put me in a cabin, and um, and he spoke kindly to me, and I knew this was this language that I would never understand. Terrible language. Sounded quite ghastly.

10:47:40:13
And um, I remember waking up, and we were in Harwich, and I still didn't see the sea, because we were in a sort of bay, or in a dock, I'm not sure which. And I knew I hadn't seen the sea. And um, that was disappointing, and then by train, oh yes, and then I left my suitcase standing on the platform, and suddenly somebody found it and yelled out, and it was me. And um, I had to go and get it.

And um, were taken to London, Liverpool Street Station, which I must tell you was the ugliest, dirtiest, filthiest place that I'd ever seen. East London in those days, was just covered in soot, and smoke. The smoke came from the west and brought all the soot over. And East London was very dirty. Nobody can understand that today, because things have changed completely, with different kinds of heating and so on.

[cut for technical issue with sound]

10:48:57:06
And, er, we were taken to a big hall there, and then I saw how many children we were. We must have been about 200, because that was the usual number for a Kindertransport, but to me it seemed like thousands. And names were called out. People had come to fetch the children, and I knew my name wouldn't be called out. That nobody would fetch me. I was, I was quite pessimistic,
and I was one of the first names to be called. And a lovely elderly lady, Anna Jacobson, collected me. I think she and her sister had been responsible for guaranteeing that I should come to England. Everybody had to have a guarantor. You've heard this a thousand times, I expect. Um. Had to pay £50 for them to put down in case you became a nuisance once you were in England, and this money would cover all your sins. £50 was a lot of money then, when people were earning ten, £2 a week for their wages, you know, and I think they done that.
And my mother knew Anna Jacobson and her sister Rosie, um, er, during the First World War in Germany. My mother was either studying or working in Berlin, and refugees had come in from Russia, and including those two sisters. And my mother, sort of, helped to look after them, and then they moved on eventually to England, but mother always stayed in touch with them.
And it was Anna, the oldest sister, who came to meet me at Liverpool Street, and she could speak some German which was nice. And she took me on a big, red London bus. Now, I'd never seen such a big bus before, because double-decker buses didn't exist in the rest of Europe. They were only in England. And, um, I wrote home about it eventually, saying, “I, I went on a bus that had two storeys.” [*Laughs*]. Because I didn't know the word, ‘decker’ or whatever, you know. So two, a two, two storey bus, as if it were a house, and, and that was very exciting to be on that bus. And it was a long way from Liverpool Street to Chalk Farm, where these people lived in a block of flats.

10:51:37:22
Now I'd never seen such a block of flats before. If you know London, a, at all, those flats are called Eton Rise and Eton Hall and Eton Court, and that's where they lived. I think some of them were bombed during the war, but they're still there, and they lived at Eton Hall. And it was the first time I saw an indoor lift and spent a lot of time going up and down, and up and down in a lift, because it was allowed. You could do that. My father had lifts in the factory, but these were only for tobacco packing cases and things. Um, er, and that there was a big notice on the lift saying, 'Not for human, um, er, use.' And so my brother and I used to go secretly in those lifts. You had to pull them on ropes and pull each other up and down, but it was strictly forbidden. Forbidden by my father as well. He wouldn't allowed us to do that, but we did it.

10:52:41:03
Interviewer
I want you to just pause there for a moment about those memories of arriving in the UK.

10:52:46:05
Ruth David
Yes I’m sorry I went,

10:52:47:00
Interviewer
No, no, not at all you're speaking beautifully, I just want to go back to when your mother said goodbye to you. Did you, did you know at that point that you wouldn't be seeing, did you feel that you wouldn't see her again or did she tell you that you would be?

10:53:02:16
Ruth David
She said we would soon see each other again, and said, oh, I didn't say, but I wondered, it did occur to me that may, might not happen. That was definitely in my thoughts, but then I was pessimistic, and I did believe that it might not happen.

10:53:25:07
Interviewer
And did you feel at the time, cause I'm sure she did everything to tell you that. That she was doing this so she could see you again, and this was your best chance of surviving?

10:53:34:15
Ruth David
Er, yes. I, I think she made that quite clear, but that they, they would come as soon as possible, on their way to either Argentina or New York, and would pick us up in England. I mean, did she know that there was a war coming? Perhaps she did. I don't know. But I think she still hoped they would get out. I mean, they must have hoped they would get out. They must have longed to get out. But, um,

10:54:02:05
Interviewer
And being a mother yourself now, you can only imagine how hard that must have been for her?

10:54:07:02
Ruth David
Yes, and I've bored my children out of their minds by reminding them. I was this age when, um, yes.

10:54:15:21
Interviewer
Okay. To the sisters again, now. Um, they were repaying a debt to your mother, do you feel?

10:54:22:04
Ruth David
Am I repaying, ?

10:54:25:21
Interviewer
No, were they repaying a debt? Your mother had helped them.

10:54:28:15
Ruth David
Oh, I, I [*talking over each other*] don't,

10:54:29:13
Interviewer
And they were now helping your mother.

10:54:31:08
Ruth David
I, I don't know if it was looked on like that. I think they were the sort of people who were intelligent enough, and were moved in, they had people connect, for instance, they had a relative who was an MP, and they knew people politically. Um. They weren't grand people in any sense, and it was on the whole, left-wing politics. And they, um, they knew quite a lot of people who were involved in this sort of work, rescue work. I don't think it was a quid pro quo, no. No. I think they'd, they'd been in touch and, er,

10:55:13:01
Interviewer
They wanted to help?

10:55:13:21
Ruth David
And wanted to help, yes, I think so. And they couldn't keep me with them in London. They were two elderly ladies on their own, and it wouldn't have been suitable for me to stay there. I had three nights there, and I thought it was wonderful. And I used to look out of the window, because opposite, there was a school. I think it's the Haverstock Hill School, and I used to watch children. I'd never seen school children in uniform. Didn't do that in Germany. And, er, to see these children playing happily and noisily in their yard, um, was very exciting for me. And they had summer frocks on, but they were all the same summer frocks, which as, as used to happen in uniformed schools. And later, I discovered that it was Haverstock Hill School, but I didn't know that at the time.

10:56:04:16
And I was taken to the zoo by their cleaning lady. She was very anxious to do something for me, and she took me to the zoo, and I hated some of what I saw. I hated that some of the closed animal in cages, you know, I, I didn't like it, but she loved it. And she brought me an ice-cream, and I'd never seen an ice-cream wrapped in paper. We had old- fashioned cones in Germany and wafers. No, no ice-cream in paper, and I didn't know what to do with it, and she showed me how you bite into it, and I'd never bitten into an ice-cream. I thought it was terrible. And, but she was very sweet to me, but I didn't enjoy my trip to the zoo.

10:56:53:12
And, um, and I stayed for three days with them, and didn't, didn't really want to leave them. I knew I was going to, um, a refugee hostel in the far north, near Newcastle. And they took me to Kings Cross, and I remember that so clearly, er, the Kings

Cross train. And I was shown the Flying Scot, and I wasn't in the slightest bit interested but they, sort of, whether he was flying or a Scot, I didn't want to go. And, but it's a memory that came back with the Harry Potter books, you know. [*Laughs*]

10:57:31:03 [*Interjected by Ruth*]
Interviewer
But nevertheless, although you were, um, obviously, just steeped in sadness about saying goodbye to your family, you must have felt a tiny bit comforted that you'd had experiences of kindness? That there were the, the Dutch lady coming on with the oranges. There was the kind sailor. Then there was the...

10:57:48:00
Ruth David
And [*talking over each other*] of course there was the business of getting on a bus.

10:57:48:06
Interviewer
sisters and the cleaning lady.

10:57:50:12
Ruth David
Mrs. Jacobson told me years later, I didn't want to go on the bus, because Jews weren't allowed on public transport.

10:57:57:06
Interviewer
Right.

10:57:58:05
Ruth David
And I thought I can't go on the bus. Of course you can.

10:58:04:06
Interviewer
So there was a sample of a different life [*talking over each other*] that you were going to experience.

10:58:07:03
Ruth David
Yes, [*talking over each other*], oh, yes. I was aware that there was no notices anti-Jewish, you know, anti-Jewish notices anywhere. I did realise that. And I was told you could ask the policeman a way, the way if you got lost. Well, you couldn't in Germany, you know.

10:58:23:19 [*Interjected by Ruth*]
Interviewer
So now you're on a train, The Flying Scotsman. Still not speaking the language. And you're on your way to Tyne and Wear?

10:58:30:23
Ruth David
Newcastle.

10:58:31:24
Interviewer
Newcastle. Okay.

10:58:33:07
Ruth David
Er, I was in fact travelling with another child. Er, the, the Jacobson's knew that they, they had to meet someone, somewhere, at Kings Cross, who's going to be travelling with us. They didn't let us travel on our own, because this girl who was also travelling, Stella [*Schipper?*] from Vienna, she was a little bit younger than I. She was not yet ten, and I was the big girl of ten. And this lady, who couldn't speak any German, was with us, and she spoke to us in English, and I knew more and more what a barbarous language it was, and, um, she stayed with us. And I recognised York, because my aunt had moved a few months earlier to York, and I didn't know any of the other names. I saw a lot of adverts, which I didn't understand. In those days, there were so many station adverts. And, um, arrived at Newcastle. We were fetched by somebody who had a car; somebody from the committee in Newcastle. There was this small Jewish committee in Newcastle that had set up the hostel in Tynemouth for us. They thought they would do it for six months to a year, and they were prepared to do that. But, of course, war came and they had to do it for nearly getting on for seven years, and I think it must have been very hard on them, financially, because these were not super rich people. They were good people and kind people, and they were wonderful, the, this committee.

11:00:13:19
And from Newcastle, I was taken by car to Tynemouth and it's not very far from Newcastle. I can't tell you now how far, but suddenly we came up a rise. [*gasps*]. And suddenly I saw the sea, and it was the real sea and it was miles and miles and miles sea, and it was a never-ending sea. But it, it scared me too, because I realised the sea separated me from home. If it had been land, you know, there was the possibility of walking back, but you couldn't walk back over the North Sea and that was very final, and I didn't, didn't like that idea. I, I never really enjoyed that sea. It was noisy and, and then during that first year of the war, there were somewhere, there were ships. I saw one ship torpedoed and on the horizon, and there were things found on the beach, shells and some. [*Clears throat*]

11:01:20:22
Interviewer
You were at that hostel, as you said just then, for seven years.

11:01:24:21
Ruth David
Nearly. I was there from June '39 till, yes, till March '46.

11:01:37:01
Interviewer

What were the matrons like who ran the hostel?

11:01:39:01
Ruth David
Um, well we, I thought they were very nice at first. They were two women from Vienna, who had also come as women refugees. They were quite fortunate, I realised later. Because my aunt, who came to England, and mother's cousin who came to London. Um, women who had professional jobs in, er, in Germany, had come in on a domestic permit and they were housecleaning for others. And Mrs. [*Urbach*?] And Mrs. [*Seiber*?], the two matrons, both widowed, um, I would think in their 50s. I mean, I thought they were ancient, but thinking back, er, I would imagine they were in their 50s, late 40s, early 50s. Mrs. Seiber had run a very smart cinema in Vienna, which didn't at that time have many cinemas. So she was quite well known there. And she worked there, at her own cinemas.

11:02:41:07
And Mrs. Urbach had run a famous cookery school in Vienna and had written the most famous cookery book that was ever produced in Vienna, called *So Kocht Man in Wien* - That's How We Cook in Vienna. And when all Jewish books were burnt, er, any books by Jewish authors were collected up and burned. They didn't collect up her cookery book, because everybody wanted it. What did they do? They changed the name of the author to, not only did they change it from a woman to a male name, they changed to, er, a different name. A man who had nothing to do with this book. And her book went on being published and bought in Vienna while she was, um, and what I was going to tell you was that they got this job instead of a cleaning job. And so they were, in some ways, very lucky, because the dirty work, the cleaning work, we did that, and I think that was quite alright, that the girls should do that work. We looked after the cleaning of the house, the washing, the mending, the ironing, the cooking. Mrs. Urbach cooked, but we did the, all the cleaning and, er, peeling of the loads of potatoes that you need for 24 girls, and, er, and preparing food and washing up. We didn't have dishwashers or anything like that. We did all that, and I think it was right that we did that.

[cut for direction]

11:04:12:02
Interviewer
Um, I read somewhere that you used to cry every night.

11:04:16:19
Ruth David
I did, yes. I think a lot of us possibly did. It was not anything. You didn't do that. You tried not to let other people hear. You know, you, I ducked under the bedclothes and, you know, but I think a lot of us did.

11:04:34:10
Interviewer
You all must have been missing your families so much.

11:04:37:02

Ruth David
Of [*talking over each other*] course. Hm.

11:04:38:10
Interviewer
Did you hear from your family?

11:04:39:21
Ruth David
Yes. Er. My parents were marvellous in trying to, I mean, um, they must have spent most of their time writing to their children, if any spare time that they had. Because there was a letter for me from my parents when I got to London. There was one for me as soon as I got to Tynemouth. And then they wrote, I think, twice a week until the war broke out.

And then of course, for a time, we didn't hear anything, because letter's could not pass between enemy countries. And, um, er, but my parents, like other parents also, did something that was illegal. They sent letters to neutral countries. To people whom they knew in neuc, neutral countries and those people sent them onto England.

11:05:33:01
Now in my case, the neutral country, the first one was Holland,
where my sister had an older, a friend, exactly her age. Er. This was a girl of 14, who was so responsible that she sent on our letters to us in England, er, the letters my parents sent and the other way on. How she got money for the stamps, because mother couldn't send any money there. It was impossible. Nor could she send stamps. And, um, not that they had any money - or not much. And, er, but those letters came. Some got lost, obviously, after the war started. And we don't know how many letters got lost, but I've still got quite a lot of letters and think I had more letters than anybody else.

11:06:19:06
And, um, in October 1940, Hitler tried his first mass deportation, and it was a deportation from southwest Germany from, er, the bit that jutted onto
France and Switzerland, across the Rhine. And that was the first, what he called, ‘cleansing of an area of Jews.' And because my parents lived in that area, um, they like all the others, were arrested on, I think it was October, either the 20th or the 22. I'm not sure now, er, when they were arrested, and had to wait outside Mannheim's castle. Mannheim had a big famous castle, sort of copied after Versailles. Not quite as big and not quite as beautiful, but it was based on Versailles, and there they had to stand. I don't know whether they sat at all with their little belongings. And it was seven thousand Jews in southwest Germany, which isn't a large figure for a large area, but by then, there weren't that many Jews left. And they were the first to be deported out of Germany in any numbers. And as I say, it was about seven thousand. And they were not sent to Poland. A, because Poland was on the other side of Germany, and B, because the death camps weren't ready in Poland. So they were sent to concentration camps, er, in the Pyrenees.

11:08:08:13
The French had set up camps for Spaniards who fled from the civil war in Spain.

Spain had a very unpleasant civil war in 1936. A lot of Englishmen went to fight there, because they thought it was right. It was again Franco. Franco was a fascist, just like Hitler and Mussolini, but in the end, he didn't join Hitler and Mussolini because Spain was a bit out of the way. But, um, it, he treated people very badly, and people fled over the Pyrenees to France, and the French set up camps there. And my parents were sent to one of these camps. It was called Gurs. Gurs is the name, G-U-R-S, of the little village. And, um, um, it was built for, I don't know, four thousand, and the French had already sent a lot of people there, enemy aliens, once the war had started, to Gurs. And so by then, there was six or seven thousand. And when my parents were there, seven thousand came there. There were 13 thousand in the place that was meant to hold four thousand, so quite impossible. And it was a bit of forest that had been cut out, and you know how the soil is very soft in, in forests, it became mud, just mud, and very deep mud. Old people sank into it, on the way to the latrines which were on the edge of the camp, and, and couldn't, get their legs out again. Either died, or if somebody could help them they were helped. But it, it wasn't a death camp, but that first winter, 800 people died, just of the conditions. And that's where my parents were, with my younger brother and sister.

11:10:06:08
Interviewer
How do you know that?

11:10:07:14
Ruth David
Um, from there, they were able to send letters, because it was unoccupied France, and hence, officially, a neutral country. It wasn't really neutral, because the government there was the Vichy government. And the Vichy government was hand-in-gloves wi, glove with the Nazis. The French haven't quite got over this yet. It's still a, a, a nasty, dirty history.

11:10:31:20
Interviewer
What did those letters say to you?

11:10:34:11
Ruth David
What did.,?

11:10:35:01
Interviewer
The letters? You said your parents still wrote to you from there. What did those letters say?

11:10:38:08
Ruth David
Well,, they told us that they'd, they'd left, and that they didn't say, didn't call it a camp, but it was called in the address, 'The Camp de Gurs.' The camp of Gurs. And, um, er, we knew that there were loads of people there, because it also said, 'Baraque, ‘which we imagine was barrack, spelt differently in French. B-A-R-A-Q-U-E. And, er, and so we, we knew they were in poor accommodation, but they didn't

ever complain. I've seen other letters from there sent to other people, where people spoke dread, desperately about the conditions, but our parents did not mention it.

11:11:27:05
They wrote letters to the older brothers, which were more serious, which I've now got the older brothers' letters. And, um, there, they talk about that they would still like to try and emigrate; and they could, but some people did succeed in getting out of France to Spain and then from there by boat. For, from Portugal by boat to the States, but that stopped because the Americans joined the war. But our, my parents didn't get out.

11:12:01:20
Interviewer
Was it some comfort for you to think that they were still together?

11:12:04:20
Ruth David
Well, yes. Well, they weren't actually at first. Er. Well, they were at first in Gurs. But then, even the French understood that you can't have 13 thousand people in a place built for four thousand. And so, they started to spread them around, and there were different camps then that grew up, Rivesaltes and Les Milles.

11:12:24:23
My father was sent to Les Milles, which was a camp originally for quite well-known people for artists. Chagall was there and various other German artists who'd fled to France were there, quite well-known names. And some got out, because Americans were willing to help them, but they couldn't help everybody. And, er, so father was at Les Milles,

11:12:50:23
and mother was sent to a different camp with, um, with the children. They managed to be in touch by mail, and, but, yes, they were separated for two years, but they did come together again when it was the final deportation to, to, to they go to Auschwitz. Mm. Father managed to let mother know that I'm going to be, he said in German, 'Verschickt.' That means, 'cchicken' is to send in German and, 'Verschicken' is what you do to a parcel. You send it from one place to another, and that was the verb he used, that he'll be 'verschickt.' And, er, and, and mother managed to get away, mother was, by then, free. She wasn't. She was allowed to work in a family to earn her living and to, so that nobody had to feed her, but the Germans knew exactly where she was. She was dependent on a local camp, but she was in one senses, in one sense, liberated, as the French called it. She wasn't, but she, the camp, that father's camp, Les Milles, wasn't so far away; it was about 30 miles. And she managed to get a bus to go there, and then be deported from there with him to the east.

11:14:21:23 [*They talk over each other*]
Interviewer
Would you rather carry on talking about your parents now,

11:14:24:24

Ruth David
I don’t mind, whichever way you like.

11:14:26:02
Interviewer
Or would you like to talk about what happened to you, because you then moved to Windermere, didn't you?

11:14:29:23
Ruth David
Yes, I moved to Windermere. I'm sorry, how much time have we got?

11:14:31:23
Interviewer
No, don't worry about the time.

11:14:33:06
Ruth David
You sure?

11:14:33:23
Interviewer
Don't even think about it, please.

11:14:34:23
Ruth David
Right. Er, we went to Windermere, and I much preferred that to Tynemouth. We went to school there, which I loved. The school was one of the old-fashioned kind, a church of England school, next to the church, where the vicar came in and taught us religious education every morning. Um. They said the Jewish children needn't come to that, and we were busy pouring milk for all the others. The milk was delivered in a, this is when school milk started. The milk was delivered from a local farm in a churn. We had to bring our own cups and to clean every jug, and so on, that was used for the milk. And we had to boil water on a gas ring, because that was all we had in the school for boiling water. And, er, it was a very old-fashioned little
place. We had gas light. There was no electricity in the place, and I won't tell you what the lavatories were like and, um, but awful. I trained myself not [*laughs*] to use them. And, um, er, the people were so, the, the staff were wonderful to us.

11:15:41:03
Interviewer
By this stage, had you learnt the barbaric language [*talking over each other*]

11:15:43:08
Ruth David
No, [*talking over each other*] not much. Well, I'd learned it, but not brilliantly. Yes, I had learned it, but I was better at arithmetic and things, than English. And, yes, we, we had learned quite a lot, and we fitted in. And the children were nice to us, but they had a whole school dumped on them from the north-east coast, from South

Shields. And so, this poor school had to manage with two schools in it, um, with two head mistresses, who, I don't know how they survived, and two lots of staff. And it wasn't easy, but they were good to us children, and kinder than they were to us in the hostel. The hostel started, got more difficult every year, because those women didn't intend to do this job forever, but in wartime, they had to stay where they were. As enemy aliens, they could not move either and get new jobs. And so, er, they went on looking after us, but, er, we found it harder.

11:16:49:22
Interviewer
So, at this stage, how old were you now?

11:16:52:08
Ruth David
Well, I was there from, from 1940. Um. In fact, we had a, a an epidemic in the hostel. We all got diphtheria. Now, when I say all, ten of us got diphtheria, and were taken to an isolation hospital in, um, in n, North Shields, I think. Um. And we had air raids there, where we had to go into the shelters at night. We weren't allowed to mix during the day. We, I, I had distinguished myself by being on my own in la, tiny little ward, because I had not only got diphtheria, I had scarlet fever as well. I wasn't terribly ill. I mean, I was treated like a very sick person, but I wasn't all that ill. But I was on my own, and in the first air raid they forgot me, and I was alone seeing the search lights and the bomber in between the search lights. So I got up. And with, with diphtheria, you're not allowed to get up and you're not allowed to really sit up either for the first three weeks. Well, I got up, and somebody found me staring at these search lights, and took me to the shelter where I got into trouble for getting up. [*Laughs*].

11:18:12:24
Ruth David
But they'd forgotten me, and, um, only once. And, but I was in a little ward on my own, and the others were altogether, which was very much nicer for them. And I wasn't allowed any of the books, because of having two diseases. They could then not go back to the other diphtheria ward or the other, scarlet fever. I have never been so bored in my life. It was awful. Eight weeks of diphtheria, and then when we left the hospital, we, we didn't know the hostel had moved. And we had to wait for each other to get better, before we could be taken with a coach across the north of England to Windermere. We never went back to the Tynemouth hostel, because of this diphtheria episode, and that was not very nice. Um. The nurse and the doctor came round every morning and said, "How are you?" And I always said, "Thank you, very well." And they told me this was bad English and I had to say, "Very well, thank you." Could I remember? I got it wrong every day. [*Laughs*]

11:19:27:11
Interviewer
I think it sounds rather charming, ‘Thank you very well’

11:19:27:23 [*Interjected by Interviewer*]
Ruth David
And but it was always pleasant to see the doctor, because at least it was a face, you

know, you could see. It was awful. It was quite awful. I mean, we weren't treated badly, but it was just so lonely.

11:19:40:19
Interviewer
So lonely when you were ill and you wanted comfort.

11:19:41:22
Ruth David
Yes, yes, yes.

11:19:43:20
Interviewer
So, now, I'm lost in terms of time. So, [*talking over each other*] are we towards the end of the war now?

11:19:48:18
Ruth David
Went in towards the end of the war. Um. I was expelled from the hostel, because I was, I was the only girl who had gone onto a sep, a, a new school. We had all failed the Eleven Plus, because we didn't know English, and so, we couldn't go to the grammar school. And so, we, school leaving age was 14 then, and the girls left at 14 and went into some job, hairdressing assistant or a grocery assistant. Or very simple jobs, where the salary was something outrageous like £2 a week, you know.

11:20:25:21
Interviewer
And what did you do?

11:20:26:17
Ruth David
And I, um, the head mistress of the junior school, of the primary school, up to 14, had said I ought to be at a grammar school, and she took me around. There was only two grammar schools in West Mullen. She took me to one, to one in Kendal and to one in Ambleside, and they both said they couldn't make an exception for an enemy child. So I couldn't, they said it wouldn't be fair. So I couldn't go to the grammar school.

11:20:56:00
And then the Jacobson's in London said they were willing to pay fees for me at a private school. And this was a small private school in Windermere, um, run on a shoestring, and they never put up their fees. Their fees were £10 a term, which wasn't much even in those days. £30 a year, and the Jacobson's paid that for me.

11:21:20:19
And I went by bicycle to school; it was about five, five and half miles each way. And in the winter, sometimes quite difficult in snow. And, um, but the matrons got very fed up with me because I was an exception. I was the only child still at school, when all the others were working. I'd, I worked in the hostel. I spent every evening doing the dishes and doing the potatoes and doing ironing and so on. I had a lot of work to do.

I hardly had time to do my homework, but the school was very nice about that, they understood that. And, um, but I was constantly in trouble, because I was helping all day and I wasn't earning. And so, on my, was it 16th or 17th birthday, they said I had either to leave the school or to leave the hostel, and I had no choice. I had to leave the school. And I told the school, and they were horrified, and said I could live with them. And so, I was expelled from the hostel and lived in the school, and that was very nice for me. I mean, I felt I was an intruder in some ways, and I was, you know, but they were good to me, and I was able to go on then.

11:22:41:14
And they took me onto A level, to highers, and I got scholarship to London University, on the intercollegiate scholarship exam, and fortunately, because that would pay my fees you see, because I had no money.

11:22:58:09
And, er, meanwhile, my brother in Amer, in North America, had tried to do what he had promised my parents, to gather us together. And, er, and my visa came just about the time my scholarship came, and I said I would not go to the States. I would take the scholarship and come later.
And my sister, Hannah, who was in the south of England, took the visa and went to the States at that time, in '47, but I didn't. In '47, I went to university. And then I never did go to the States. I visited. But I felt after I'd finished my degree, well, I, I'd gained a lot in England; I ought to teach in England and taught languages. Hm.

11:23:49:10
Interviewer
And what of your parents?

11:23:51:07
Ruth David
Well, my parents, of course, um, in 1942, which was the height of the killing in the east. My parents were gathered in, in August '42, in a very hot summer, and sent to Drancy in, um, Paris, which was the sort of collecting centre for people who were going to be deported. And from there, deported to Auschwitz, and I know the exact date.

11:24:20:07
Interviewer
How do you know that?

11:24:21:14
Ruth David
Because, yes, that's interesting, because most people don't know that. Um. A young man in Paris, whose father had been deported, was struggling to come to terms with this and went all over Paris to find people who could help him. And they found that the Germans, when they left Paris rather quickly, when the Americans came up from the South in 1944, they found lists of all the deportees from France. They were organised lists. There had to be a list to go on the train. There had to be a list for the concentration camp, and there had to be a list for the Gestapo in Paris.
And at the end of war, instructions came, everything had to be destroyed, but

somehow, they left Paris and hadn't destroyed those lists. So those lists were put together by the young man that I mentioned before, who was looking for his father, and his Serge [*Klatzfeld?*]. And he married a German woman, and between them they did a lot of protesting in France at what had gone on in the, after the war, they pretends that everything had been okay and it hadn't, you know. And they brought out a book with all these names in and the dates when they were deported, and what were, what's happening that day. And so, that is how I know exactly the date and which transport - number 20 - they were on. I think I've said it in my book, and, um, and taken to Auschwitz and presumably killed as soon as they got there.

11:26:09:00 [*talking over each other*]
Interviewer
That must be extremely hard to absorb.

11:26:11:09 [*talking over each other*]
Ruth David
Well, it's better to know than not to know, I think.

11:26:18:03
Interviewer
Have you been to visit Auschwitz?

11:26:19:16
Ruth David
No, I've been to Krakow, and I went with a friend and I couldn't face it. [*pause*] And in some ways I feel ashamed of that, but I just couldn't do it.

11:26:36:22
Interviewer
I can understand that.

11:26:41:12
Ruth David
I can see why people go, and I think perhaps people should go. Not that it's the same now as, as it was. I mean, nobody can, none of those camps look as they once did. I have seen Dachau, and I've seen Buchenwald, but it doesn't really compare with what they were like. You have to imagine an awful lot, you know.

11:27:02:20
Interviewer
But your parents survived in that they somehow managed to, um, have safe passage for their children, which for them would have been a great [*talking over each other*] comfort.

11:27:12:08
Ruth David
Well, I wish they had known that, because by the time they were killed, Germany was at its most successful in the war. It still looked as if Germany would win the war.

11:27:24:07

Ruth David
And, er, I don't think they would have known that. I think there would have been the anxiety that, certainly, Michael and Theo, the youngest ones, were in hiding in France, after, the, my parents had got them out of the camps. The camps were guarded by, not by German guards. It wouldn't have happened with German guards, but by French guards who took this a bit more easy. What does it matter if kids escape, you know. And so, the children got out and were hidden, and stayed hidden until France was liberated, and then came together to Paris. And a family that my mother had slightly known, er, in when she was working for people in the south. When she was sort of liberated, they had promised that if they survived, they would take the children, and they did.

11:28:20:18
Interviewer
Your parents sounded like they were amazing people.

11:28:23:19
Ruth David
Well, so were others, you know. I mean,

11:28:27:18
Interviewer
Hm.

11:28:28:21
Ruth David
Hm.

11:28:31:01
Interviewer
And they would have been extremely proud to see what happened to you?

11:28:34:07
Ruth David
I don't know. [*Chuckles*]. I don't know. I don't know that anything,

11:28:41:20
Interviewer
Well, you were a very brave young girl, weren't you?

11:28:45:11
Ruth David
Well, one didn't have much choice.

11:28:51:01
Interviewer
Um. Did you ever return to Germany?

11:28:55:00
Ruth David

Yes, um, it took me a long time. My first time was, as I think I told you, invited by an English friend, my college friend who had gone to live in Cologne, and I didn't want to meet any Germans then and they were sweet. They collected me from Brussels. So that I wouldn't have to go into Germany over a border. You know, in those days it wasn't the quite the united Europe. It, it was already united Europe, but it wasn't quite as, um, border-less as it is now. I mean, there were customs and border guards still, to pass, and they didn't want me to do that. So they brought me by car through to their home in Cologne, which was very good of them. That was when I saw Mina.

11:29:44:12
And then after I'd written my first book, which was first published in Germany through friends. Um, I, er, somebody in the State, Germany is a federal country and has separate states, which have their own parliament and so on. And in the State of Hessen, where I come from, somebody had, um, heard that I'd written this book. And the, the people who governed Hessen, Every, every West German State, after the war, had to have someone in charge of teaching history in a different way that it had been taught. History and politics and economics had all been port dot, taught a long way in Nazi lines, and that had to change. And this woman, who was responsible for that had seen my book, and she had., through her, I was invited for seventeen years, every year, to Germany to visit the schools. And each year, I went either for a week or two weeks and daily, went into different schools or libraries or colleges, and slowly, other people started to ask me as well, I went to. In Berlin, I did some reading, although that had nothing to do with my state in Frankfurt. And in, I, I done a lot of readings from my books in Germany.

[Cut for card]

11:31:28:17
Interviewer
So we are reaching the end of your interview and your story, and we would all like to say thank you to you for being so honest and reliving so much of your pain. Because it's so hard, and reflecting on what you've said, it strikes me that you've experienced the best of human nature, and the very worst.

11:31:49:12
Ruth David
Yes possibly.

11:31:50:16
Interviewer
That you experienced intense love, from your family and real closeness, and that your family was touched by hatred and horror, and prejudice, and then again you experienced the love of strangers. Well Mina was not a stranger was she? But of people outside your family, and then there were the Dutch ladies who came on the train, and the sailor, and then the sisters. And I wonder what perspective that gives on life for you?

11:32:23:04
Ruth David
Yes that's a difficult one because, you do wonder about your own children, and what

their future is, and how much I have affected them in a good sense, and how much in a not so good sense. I mean, I'm sure I've had some sort of influence which wasn't entirely beneficial. And, and one worries about the future for young people, generally.

11:32:56:02
Interviewer
Which is why I imagine you are giving your testimony today.

11:33:01:08
Ruth David
Well yes. I think it's possibly the right thing to do, and I'm very impressed that you are all part of this, and doing this very sincerely, and I think very kindly. I find it impressive.

11:33:18:24 [*Interjected by Ruth*]
Interviewer
One of your granddaughters is roughly the age that you were when you said goodbye to your Mum, that must be hard to look at her and imagine that as yourself.

11:33:28:15
Ruth David
Yes, and um, yes and I sometimes ask the wrong questions, I shouldn't ask. I'll say to my son, do you realise that she is now the age I was, when, and it's an unnecessary thing to say.

11:33:45:04
Interviewer
But we all need to learn from your experiences, and that's why this testimony is so important. Don't you think?

11:33:55:01
Ruth David
Yes, yes, and I'm glad you are doing it.

11:33:59:16
Interviewer
What do you feel are the biggest lessons that we should learn from that period of history?

11:34:13:10
Ruth David
I think, we should learn that we are all people together, in one big lot. And we still have a lot to learn. How to get on with people that we don't know. Or people who are less well educated than we are, and who may know less than we do. And I think one of the only things I've learned is that in the end it comes to education, and I also know that education takes an incredibly long time. [*pause*] We learn very slowly.

11:35:08:00
Interviewer

As a culture, do you feel that we have learned something?

11:35:11:21
Ruth David
Yes. I think so.

11:35:16:09
Interviewer
You described on a number of occasions - and I completely understand - why would you ever want to live in this country? Why would you ever want to learn this language? Why would you ever take this as your home? But this has become your home.

11:35:31:20
Ruth David
Oh I think so, yes. And I do know that this is the only place where I really want to be. Quite definitely now, although I have travelled a lot. I think this is where I do belong now.

11:35:50:03
Interviewer
How driven do you feel to talk about your story?

11:35:53:22
Ruth David
I have inevitably talked about it a lot, because I've been invited to do this in Germany, for a very long time. And um, I still find it difficult at the start. Whenever I do it. I still think, this time it is not going to work. But it usually does.

11:36:24:15
Interviewer
And it certainly did today, so thank you very much indeed.

11:36:28:03
Ruth David
Thank you all very much, all of you.

ARTEFACTS

ARTEFACT 1: Scan of photo captioned ‘Michael & Ruth 1932’
No commentary

ARTEFACT 2: Scan of photo captioned ‘Mother with Hannah Ruth and Michael 1932’
No commentary

ARTEFACT 3: Scan of photo captioned ‘Hannah Ruth Michael and Feo Picture kept by Heinrich Hartmann’
No commentary

ARTEFACT 4: Scan of collage 1a [two girls]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 5: Scan of photo captioned 'Oppenheimer children 1938'
No commentary

ARTEFACT 6: Scan of photo captioned 'Mother and Feo 1938'
No commentary

ARTEFACT 7: Scan of photo captioned 'Father 1939'
No commentary

ARTEFACT 8: Scan of photo captioned 'Mother 1939'
No commentary

ARTEFACT 9: Scan of photo captioned 'Michael 1939'
No commentary

ARTEFACT 10: Scan of postcard dated 25 July 1939 [front & back]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 11: Scan of postcard dated 26 July 1939 [front & back]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 12: Scan of postcard dated 7 August 1939
No commentary

ARTEFACT 13: Scan of letter 10 April1940 [front & back]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 14: Scan of letter 23 April [front only]

ARTEFACT 15: Scan of letter 13 May 1940 [front & back]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 16: Scan of undated letter [front & back]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 17: Scan of undated letter [front & back]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 18: Scan of undated letter [front]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 19: Scan of undated letter [front & back]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 20: Scan of undated letter [front & back]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 21: Scan of undated letter [front & back]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 22: Scan of undated letter [front & back]
No commentary

ARTEFACT 23: Scan of photo of Edith Rossmann (Windermere)
No commentary

ARTEFACT 24: Scan of photo of Paula Katz (Windermere)
No commentary

ARTEFACT 25: Scan of photo of Paula and Marian Mendelssohn (Windermere)
No commentary

ARTEFACT 26: Scan of photo of Helga Reiss; Ruth Oppenheimer; Dasha Deutsch (Windermere)
No commentary

ARTEFACT 27: Scan of photo of Lisl Scherzer (in Vienna)
No commentary

ARTEFACT 28: Scan of photo of Anni Henfeld (Windermere)
No commentary

ARTEFACT 29: Scan of photo of Sophie Goldschmidt (in Germany)
No commentary

ARTEFACT 30: Scan of photo of Sophie Goldschmidt
No commentary

ARTEFACT 31: Scan of photo of Elfi Reinert (Tynemouth)
No commentary

ARTEFACT 32: Scan of photo of Ruth Fisch
No commentary

ARTEFACT 33: Scan of photo of Ruth David (Windermere)

ARTEFACT 34: Scan of photo of Margot Hirsch

ARTEFACT 35: Scan of black and white photo of Ruth and daughter
No commentary

ARTEFACT 36: Scan of colour Polyphoto of two of Ruth's children
No commentary

ARTEFACT 37: Scan of black and white photo of Ruth and her three children
No commentary

ARTEFACT 38: Scan of black and white photo of two children in the sea
No commentary

ARTEFACT 39: Scan of photo of Ruth and two of her children [mounted as a coaster]

ARTEFACT 40: Scan of colour photo of Ruth and a woman (possibly sister)
No commentary

ARTEFACT 41: Scan of colour photo of Ruth's family in a sitting room
No commentary

ARTEFACT 42: Scan of colour photo of Ruth and family round a dining room table
No commentary

ARTEFACT 43: Scan of colour photo of Ruth and family by a blue-painted hut
No commentary

ARTEFACT 44: Scan of colour photo of Ruth & family sitting on steps
No commentary