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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Forename:	Edith
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	16 October 1919
Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV184

NAME: Edith Argy

DATE: 7th July 2016

LOCATION: London, UK

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 7th of July 2016. We are conducting an interview with Mrs. Edith Argy. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London.

What is your name please?

Edith Argy.

And where were you born?

In Vienna.

And when were you born?

On the 16th of October 1919.

Mrs. Argy, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for Refugee Voices. Can you please tell me about your family background?

Sorry I didn't hear...

Can you tell me about your family background? Can you tell us a little bit about your family?

[0:00:48]

Oh, I see... OK. ...Well, I... I had one brother who was almost ten years older than I was. And we didn't sort of- we weren't very close, because he was so much older than I was. And my father adored me. There is no other word for it. But I remember very little about my mother. I have hardly any memories because... she died when I was four years old. She died in a mot- In a- in a car- in an accident. She was hit by a car when we were on holiday in - in the country. And... And my father- we were sort of reasonably well off. Until my mother died. Because she seemed to be in this- the businesswoman. And my father was not a businessman. He wanted to write. And, and, and I remember when I was eight years old- no I'm sorry, I forgot. A year after my mother died, he married again... to somebody called Claire, whom I called 'Mutti'. And she was the one who looked after me…, well, from that time until the time I left in September 1938, when I was just a month away from my nineteenth birthday. And... I- I remember that at one time my father wanted to- he felt Vienna was- he wanted to move. He came upon a nice flat in the 9th District, and we were going to move to Salzburg. And then he didn't like Salzburg. He thought it was too anti-Semitic. And we had a wonderful time for about.... three-and-a-half months in Altmünster, which is in the Salzkammergut. And- And we were there until September. Then in September 1928 we moved back to Vienna and first of all we had some rooms...somewhere. And then we moved in with my grandmother, in the 3rd District. To Krieglergasse... number 8. And- and we had two rooms there. My parents had one room and I had a camp bed in the sort of dining -living room. And it was very, very primitive. Just one cold tap... in the hall. And... no hot water.

And...

So, sorry…

And this was your father's parents, or your step-mother's parents?

My father?

You said- whose parents? You said it was the grandparents... From which side? The grandparents. You moved in with the grandparents...

[0:04:13]

With- with his mother.

With his mother.

Yes.

And what was her name?

Oh, both my grandfathers had died by the time...by the time I - I was born. They both died young. But... my mother's family the Veiths, I was very close to them. Closer than to the Tintners actually. And they were... very agnostic. And sort of ...They were the ones who introduced me to books. And, and, and you know they were intellectual whereas the Tintner were not. So, I spent a lot of time with them.

And where did they live, the Veiths, where did they live in Vienna? Where did they live?

What?

Where did they live, the Veiths?

They lived in the 3rd District but in a, in a different area. Closer to the *Hauptzollamt* – I don't know if that area, you know. But what I used to love to go there and had my special ...ringing tone, you know, short- Long, short, short Long. And I really had my happiest times there at my aunt's place, my mother's sister. And…well then, I went to school, and by the time we had moved to – to my grandmother's place I - I was at the *Gymnasium*. And... And I loved languages. I was good at languages. Not math. Not science. And ...well that went on and I left school because one of my teachers died, and I didn't want to go to school anymore. And my father who gave in, you know, whatever I said, he would never say- really try to persuade me

to. So, I didn't have *Matura,* if you know what that means. You know they're like the A-Levels.

Yes, you left before...

And, and I took a job when I was fifteen and- in an office as a very, very junior employee. But then after about a year I got a job in the firm where my brother worked. And he was already, by that time he was already a junior executive. So, I got a job there and was happy there, until Hitler came in 1938. And I'll never forget that day. It was the 11th of March, 1938. And I was with a cousin of mine, a much older cousin. With a Veith cousin and I was at some rhythmic - not dancing - rhythmic gymnastics class. And somebody came in and they said, "Hitler is at the border." And that was so absolutely, you know, we all, everybody left. And I went home to, to, to that that District and Lily my cousin went to the 7th District. She was already married by that time. And it- all night long we could hear the chanting: "*Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil! Wir danken unserem Führer!*" And it was I think the worst night of my life. It was terrible. And you know it's so dreadful to wake up the next morning and find that you are an *Untermensch*. You are a sub-human being. So then, I knew from that moment on that- you know. Yes, I got – I think - a few days later I had a letter on my desk at the office, that I was what was called '*fristlose Entlassung'*, that means... 'discharged without notice'. And it was a Jewish firm, there was a Jewish Managing Director and a Jewish Chairman. And they too could be dispensed with. The firm was going to be 'Aryanised'. So, there I was, without a job, and don't know what my father was doing at that time. And, and, and I knew that we had to get out. And- but where? You know this is why I'm so sorry for the refugees now, because I know what it means to be desperate. I know what it means to be frightened. And so, I didn't know what to do. But I had an uncle Veith, my mother's youngest brother, who had lived in England and whose English was fluent. And he put an advertisement in one of the papers, of the British papers, putting my- You know, offering my services as a domestic servant, which was my only hope of getting out. And I got quite a few replies, and I think he helped me choose somebody - a headmaster in Southsea.

[0:10:19]

But he was based where, your uncle, was in Vienna? He was in Vienna?

He was in Vienna. He was in Vienna, but he had lived in Manchester before - before the First World War. And so, I accepted that. And, and then on the 6th of September 1939 – '38, sorry – I left Vienna. I had about, about three days in Paris, where my cousin was waiting for an Australian visa. And then when I went to Southsea by train. And these poor people, waited, you know they met me at the station. And the Headmaster, his wife and daughter. And on the way there she said, "Oh, I expected you to be taller and stronger, from your photo." [laughs] Anyway, I went there... and I felt terrible. First of all, I was hopeless at housework. Secondly, I had never been away from home. And I remember sort of when I, I, I was in the kitchen eating alone, and I just wasn't used to that. We had never eaten in the kitchen. Even when we were poor, we ate in the dining room. But- and then this feeling of being absolutely alone. It was so awful, I just wanted to die. So, I - I don't know how - how much I really wanted to die but I turned the gas on. And after – it must have been just a day or two- and of course they wanted me out; can you blame them? So, they contacted the local rabbi. And he took me in. and... And he was really wonderful. He had five children. So, I became his sort of sixth child. He was so kind; they were very kind.

Edith where was this?

In Southsea, sort of near Portsmouth, you know.

Yeah...

And, and he found me a job in London with a Jewish family. But I mean I had so many jobs I don't remember much about that one.

So just to clarify, so you literally went to the kitchen and put on the gas? Or what did you do?

What, in the...?

In that...

Well, I, I just, you know, I don't know if it was after one day or two days. I don't- I suppose the memory is selective and you don't what you want to forget. The memory blocks out so I don't know. I just know that I sort of... turned the gas on, you know, and, and I ...and then I

went to some Jewish family in Golders Green. And all I remember about that, is that I couldn't sleep because the alarm clock was so loud. And I remember the ticking of the alarm clock. How long I was there, I don't know. I had three jobs in London with the- and, and the second job was also with a Jewish family. I honestly don't remember. And the third job was in, in- No this was- The Golders Green was the second job. The third job was with, with a young Jewish family. And they had a little boy, I remember. And, and then Kristallnacht. And I was thinking everybody had- you know, I was – I was trying to get Claire over. And- and I thought, because she would have made a wonderful domestic service, servant. And I tried, I pleaded with the people you know to find a sponsor for her. To find somebody who would employ here. And I assured her that she would be a treasure, unlike me. [half-laughs] And she did find somebody. And- but the Home Office wouldn't have her because she was two years too old. She was fifty-seven, and they said the age limit was fifty-five. But although I know people who were older and got over. My aunt was older, and she got over, because the Quakers got her over. I suppose it depended on the sort of clout you have. And, and I couldn't get- and I never got over that, you know, that I... I couldn't save her. So, and anyway, so I had nine jobs. One as a mother's help in... where was it, at Stamford, Stamford Hill. That very Jewish area. Yeah. Stamford Hill. And there I looked after a little boy; I was mother's help. And I liked the little boy. They were called... what were they called? Minsky. And, and I looked after that - that little boy. And, and that I think, was, they treated me like one of the family. They were the only ones who, you know, I ate with them and I ... But for some reason I left there too, after a while. Because I was in Worcestershire. I had so many jobs... that I can't remember. I had nine job. And as I said the last one was- last domestic job was in Exeter. And then my, my careers in offices started. And I made lots of friends, especially in Maidenhead, where I spent the last three years. And... But you wanted to know about Vienna?

[0:16:32]

We rushed, so now... We will come back to that, but let's just go back now to Vienna. I wanted to ask you about your... your - your birthmother. What was her background? Where did she come from?

My birthmother?

Yes.

Well, she came from a very, as I said, they were sort of in…her father was a very successful businessman. And... he chose- he had a heart condition and he said, he thought the climate wasn't good enough in Vienna so he moved to Lugano. And he- she was the one he took with her to help him with the business. And then…she was supposed to be, because I remember nothing about her, but by all accounts, she was very attractive and bright. And...

How did she meet your father?

How did she meet my father...I don't know, I just remember that he told me once that he, when he proposed to her, she said, "Why not?" But where they met I don't - I've forgotten. I don't know. Because you see, as I- Because I couldn't talk to my mother, I don't remember any conversations with my mother. But I, I do remember that my father told her he met her somewhere, and he said- and she said, "Why not?" And married him. And the - the fights, you know, her family were scandalised that... No, that was my mother, sorry. No, they were scandalised when they married only a year after she had died. But- and I don't know what their marriage, you know, because, because I didn't know my mother...

Yeah...

And I don't know whether it was a happy marriage or not. I just don't know.

Yeah. And what about Claire?

What about Claire?

How did they meet, or how...?

Well, there was always the poverty, the struggle for, you know the, the, the... struggle - struggle to survive. And- and she, I think she was the victim of, of that all and she- because she - she married. She was already- she was born in 1881, so she was only a year younger than my father. And my brother resented her completely. He made her life absolute hell, because he felt that she had, she had come to replace his mother, and he had adored his

mother. Whereas for me, you see I didn't really remember. I do remember throwing a tantrum one day. I do remember that, and saying, "Where- where is Mama?" And they said- and my father took me in the garden and he said, "Look, she's in heaven." So, I said, "Well, why isn't she coming back? When is she coming back?" And then he said people didn't come back from heaven. She wouldn't come back, but she was very happy there. And that's all I remember. And, and then poor Claire had to put up with...with my brother, who, who made- I remember I had, you know, I was in primary school and I was very, by that time, and I was very, very ambitious. I wanted to be- do well, you know. And there were my books all in this…brown paper. And he put stepmother or *Stiefmutter* all over my... That I remember. And he left when he was - just after his sixteenth birthday. He left home. So, she had that. And then everything was alright while we were still in the 9th District.

Where did you go...?

We had a nice flat, and a live-in maid. And, you know, we were sort of middle-class people. You had to have a live-in maid.

[0:20:45]

What was her name, the live-in maid?

A live-in maid...

What was she called? Do you remember her name?

I think she was called Gretel.

Was she Jewish or not Jewish?

The maid? There wouldn't be any Jewish maids. No. No. She wasn't. And...

One question I wanted to ask you, did you know, you were Jewish? Did you know?

Oh yes! First of all, I knew- you know there were always, we and, you know I always knew that I lived in an anti-Semitic country. And that we were different.

You knew that?

I knew that, and, and also it said in my school reports- it gave the religion and it said, *Mosaisch*. Mosaic. So of course, I knew I was Jewish, yes. And- and from what I can remember, all my friends were Jewish.

You said, so there was anti-Semitism before Anschluss? We are talking much before? [Edith has not heard] *You felt there was anti-Semitism?*

Yes.

And this was before the Anschluss?

I never- What I have to say, I never, ever experienced any, because until Hitler came of course. And even then, you found some very decent people. But I, just as when I came to England you hear now that – you know. Refugees said there was anti-Semitism and there was xenophobia. Well, it- I'm sure it existed. Otherwise, there wouldn't have been- what was his name, that awful man, Moseley?

Yeah... yeah. But in- you said...

But I didn't experience any. I…In Maidenhead I made friends very quickly. And I lived in a boarding house. And…and people were- they did everything- you know, they could have resented me. They could have been at least cool, and, you know. But they, they really spoiled me. I was the youngest. I was twenty at that- twenty-two when I got to Maidenhead. And I made lots of English friends.

But in Vienna, you said...

But in Vienna one just always felt one was Jewish, and different.

How different? In which way? Because you were not religious you said...

No! Not at all. But even then, you knew- and, and of course they all- everybody spoke sort of- knew a bit of Yiddish - Yiddish expressions like '*meschugge*'. And…Do you know what that means? And, and '*nebbich*', and that sort of thing.

[0:23:26]

So, you had different language.

Somehow, I knew from the beginning... that I was Jewish. And of course, there were Jewish- I had to go to the… religion, you know there was a Jewish- to you had to do at school. There were the Catholics and…and the Jews. And a few Protestants at, at, at grammar school, and at the *Gymnasium* too. I remember there was a priest standing, when you came in there was a priest standing there. And the Catholic children were supposed to kiss his hand.

And the Jewish children? You didn't have to...

Oh, God...we didn't kiss his hand.

So, you had religious instruction in school – Jewish religious? Or you just didn't go to the other one?

What?

In school, did you have your own Jewish studies teacher, or did you just...?

Yes! No, no. We had a rabbi.

You had a rabbi.

Oh, we had a rabbi and we made his life hell. We did everything, you know we did our homework, we read under the... And he said, "Girls, girls, don't you know that we are in…vulnerable?" ...It didn't make any difference.

This was in the Gymnasium?

We were noisy; we talked. That poor man. I think he- as far as I know he managed to get to Israel afterwards. His name was Kupfer. ...Doktor Kupfer.

And which synagogue? Did- you ever went to synagogue?

Only when I had to, because he sometimes- it was sort of semi-compulsory. Sometimes he did a *Gottesdienst* service in a synagogue on a Saturday afternoon. And I think we were supposed to go there. And also, to a wedding - I remember Bar Mitzvah – that sort of thing. Yes, I did go.

And which synagogue? Where was it?

In the 3rd District, well, or in the 1st – wherever they lived, the people. You know the... But I never went willingly.

You didn't like it.

No... sorry.

So, you said there was a feeling of difference.

But you knew, you knew that you were different.

Yeah...

You know, you knew there were... There were 'us and, and them'. We and they.

Yeah... And what sort of friends did you parents have? What circles did they mix with?

What...?

What sort of friends did your parents have? Your father and your mother, yes.

My father?

Yeah...

What do you mean, about...?

What sort of friends? What sort of friends? Did they have Jewish friends? Non-Jewish...?

[0:26:06]

Well, my, my – Well, my father I think he had- Well there was only one I remember. He ghostwrote for him. He wanted – he was a headmaster or retired headmaster. And he wanted to write a hymn for Burgenland. You know, it's one of the provinces of Austria.

Yeah...

And... so we went there so many times, my father and I. And, and once my father told him that we were Jewish, they couldn't believe it! [half laughing] Because we were 'such nice people'. And- And, but you know we were friends until Hitler came.

And then?

And, and then I think it- my- my father once met his daughter who had always been very nice. And she said, "I can't talk to you."

And what happened to you? Were there friends who stopped talking to you? Did you have people...? You said your work gave you dismissal – dismissed you.

At work?

From your job. Yes.

Yes.

But did your friends...?

Well, there... At work where I worked in the, you know, in that particular office they were all Jews apart from one half Jew. She was very- she was half Jewish. And of course, they all there were some known Nazis. But there was one boy there about my age. And... he was so kind and nice. I remember I had a difficult tooth. You know some- something to be done to my teeth, or... And, and, and he insisted on coming with me. And waited. And insisted on taking me home. And he told me that he had fought. You know there was a sort of civil war in 1934 where the... just very, very brief. It only lasted a week, in February 1934. And he said that he had fought for the *Schutzbund* which was the Social Democratic...

Movement...

What do you call it like a... oh God... you know there was the *Heimwehr* and the *Schutzbund*... it was a sort of …an army, not an army, a-

Movement? A movement?

Something like that.

Yeah?

I can't think of the word- You know that's one thing I can't think of...

Yeah. Don't worry.

But it was the - the *Heimwehr* and the... *Schutzbund*. And the *Schutzbund* was the Social Democrats, and the *Heimwehr* was the *Vaterländische Front.* And it was the end of a democracy after that, because the *Heimwehr* won.

Yeah?

[0:29:04]

And... And, and- but he always thought- You know, I thought he was a Social Democrat. And when I came after the Anschluss, when I went to the office on the Monday, he was there in a- In an SA uniform. And I just couldn't believe it! I looked at him, and he looked back at me you know, sort of rather sheepishly. But this is what you – you, you had terrible surprises. And the Nazis of course were very well-known Nazis. And they of course were jubilant. But I didn't expect him to be in a, in a, in a, in a Nazi uniform.

And did you speak to him? Did he say anything?

He just looked- you know he sort of looked down. He - he was embarrassed. But then as I say, a few days afterwards, I was sacked. So... And then that was a terrible time, that time ...after March to September. And I was just waiting- every day I was waiting for that permit to come.

What happened to your brother in that time? You said he moved out...?

And my brother was- he was sacked. Well, he was in the... He, he lost his job, and he had a wife and a little girl of three.

What was his job? Where was he...?

He had a very good job; he was, as I said, he was some kind of executive. Although he was only – how old was he at that time? - twenty-eight. And I was eighteen when Hitler came. And, and he was trying three times he was trying to get out. And was always... sent back to Vienna. But then finally he managed to get into France. And, and, but you see I could correspond with him, and, and, and with my, with 'Mutti' until war broke out. Well with, with my brother I could correspond even after war. Until the Nazis, you know, until Germany invaded France.

Yes, so a bit longer. So, when did things change for you? Was it with the Anschluss?

Sorry, where is my...?

This is yours...

I need some water. [short break]

When did things change for you?

[0:31:55]

Well, they changed from the first – do you mean when Hitler came? Well, they changed from the first moment, because I was without a job. I was trying to get out. I needed –to get out you needed all sorts of- you know you had to queue for, for, for permits... and the income tax, to see that... And I was so afraid. Because I knew that my father owed income tax. And I was- I was a minor, because at that time you know that, you were twenty…so-and-so... But then there were some people that managed the income tax was really nice. And he wanted me to... you know, gave me that, that certificate. You found really nice and polite people in, in, in various- Not everybody was a Nazi.

And what was your aim? Was it to... Were you only considering England or were there any other countries you were thinking of going to?

Pardon?

Were there any other countries you tried to go to, or was it only England?

No, I don't- where would I go? There was nowhere to go to. And we had no money, and no connections. And, and, and as my uncle said, you know it was my only chance. You know, it was that or... you know, Auschwitz or something like that. So, it was my only chance to get out.

And what did it say? Do you remember? You said you put an ad in the paper. What did the ad say?

I can't remember. He- I, I really can't. I, I wish I knew. No, I can't remember it. It's too long ago.

Yeah...

If I ever knew. Because he did it- well, he must have shown it to me.

And did you prepare something? Because you said you didn't know much about housework. Did you prepare yourself in cooking? Did you try to learn something?

Well, I went to a- [half laughs] I went to a class... Some enterprising Jewish women had started a, a class in the 2nd, you know the 2nd District, the '*Mazzesinsel*' where mostly Jews lived. And all I remember from that class is that you had to serve from the left. And that's all. I came totally- [laughs] I had never even held a broom. I, I was totally- I was useless. And you know nowadays I feel sorry for these people...who employed me, as I do now for myself.

Yeah... yeah...

As I did then, for myself.

And were you - when you were applying - were you still living with your mother and father?

When I...?

With your grandparents... When you left Vienna, were you still in the same flat?

[0:34:49]

When I left Vienna?

Yeah.

Well, I, I, I remember that I must have gone to the *Westbahnhof*. And of course, they came and my brother said that he was there, but I can't remember. I can't remember. I think that's

another thing that my memory has... blocked it out, because I don't want to remember. It was too painful you know, to leave.

You don't remember leaving Vienna?

No. I remember- afterwards I remember being in a- being on a train. And being with a woman who started a conversation. And [she] said "Well, where are you going?" "To Paris." "Oh," she said, "To learn French?" I said, "Yes." And at that time, you didn't have to have- I had an ordinary Austrian passport, not the one with a 'J'. And she said sort of did I- and she offered me sweets. And then she said how good it was that the... what was that Czech-, you know the first before Czechoslovakia, you know the Germans occupied...

Sudetenland... Sudetenland...

Sudetenland. How good it was that the Sudetenland was going to be liberated. And I said, I said, "Yes!" to everything. [laughs] I wasn't going to discuss...

So, you were going to Paris first? You were going to Paris?

And I said- she thought I was going as an au pair. So, I said, yes... I was going as an au pair. I mean what's the good of... discussing it. And then I was alone in - on the train. I remember that. And... and, and I thought, Oh, God. You know I was so afraid of the – of the frontier. Because I had heard of stories where Jews were taken off the trains and - and interrogated and... You know; and I was- I was scared. But all that happened was a man came, a conductor came and looked at my passport. I had the, the, the English- the French transit visa and the English. And he...and I said, what did I say- I put... you know just said something. I said I had put my shoes on the...you know where you put...

On the rack?

Yeah, on the rack. And he said, "Quite right too. When it pinches," you know, "better to get rid of them" or something. He was so friendly. Stamped my- and that was it. And I was in France. And was in Paris. And loved Paris. And from there then I went to Southend.

And in Paris, was your brother already in Paris by then? Was your brother there?

[0:37:50]

He wasn’t- no he wasn't there yet; he left after me.

I see, so who was in Paris?

It was my cousin. Lily. The one- and she had married a non-Jew, very social – you know - very exposed politically on the left. And she and he were there to wait for an Australian visa. And I had somebody – somebody else. A, a relative by marriage, I stayed with her... for the three days.

Yes. And were your parents married at that point?

I then I went on the channel, I went whatever, where did I go? It wasn’t Dover... The longest one.

Hoek of Holland? No... Folkestone? Dover?

I can’t remember. ...Anyway, it was a very long crossing. And I remember saying, somebody saying to me, “Oh, you are a good sailor.” And two minutes after that, I wanted to die. [laughs] And it was terrible. I’ve been frightened of- I’m not; I am not a good sailor at all.

And do you remember, were you scared leaving Austria? Was there a feeling of relief? How were you feeling on that journey?

I don’t know. I was just- you know- it all came home to me when I had that job. This is when I noticed. This is when I felt terrible. There I had no feelings. I saw Paris. I loved Paris. And…you know, I just took it all in and that was all. But it was- it hit me when I was in that - that first job.

Yeah.

That was terrible.

And did you have any English? How was your English?

Well, I had only had- well, you know, my school wanted to produce classical scholars. Latin and Greek. But I had one year of... what do call it when it's not compulsory. I can't think of words. You know, of English, but you didn't have to do it. It was privately... what do you call it?

Voluntarily?

[0:40:18]

Well, yeah, either you – optional!

Optional...

That's the word. Sorry, I can't think of words. And... it was optional. And we had a bad teacher. He wasn't, he wasn't good. But my cousin, Lily, the one who was waiting who went to Australia. She had done her degree in English and Latin, so she gave me some lessons before. But I, I, I could understand but I, you know it was difficult. It was very poor, my English. I had some; I could understand what people said. But ... And, and, and my vocabulary was very, very limited. But that was the least of my worries because I learned very, very quickly.

What things were you allowed to take in your luggage? Do you remember, what you were allowed- what did you take?

What?

In your luggage... What did you take?

Everything I possessed. [laughs]

Such as?

Well, which wasn't much. You know. My clothes...and - and some books. I had to have a couple of books.

What did you take? Do you remember?

I remember it was some... Some poems by Kästner, Erich Kästner. And then something by Ernst Lothar. "*Meine Kleine Freundin","Kleine Freundin"*, or something like that. This was- you couldn't take many books.

And clothes? Anything else?

And, and, and all I took was clothes and, you know, I can't think what else I would have taken.

And at that point, was your father still with your mother? Were they still together? When you left...

[0:42:12]

Claire and...and my... Yes.

Yes...

Yes, they were still together. And they, they were together, and he, he, he stayed with her until- Oh, it's too complicated, because he had married somebody before, in 1934. Jenny. And I - I went to live with them. And then, then I hated it so much that I said, "I want to go back to Claire." And my father… didn't want to be without me. So, he went back to Claire too. So, we were all together in 1938. He had three wives.

So, he married in between...

Yeah, he had married, then I don't know whether he re-married Claire or whether they were... It, my - my family, you know my, my life was not very...

What was the name of his second wife?

It was a bit complicated but anyway then, after the war, Jenny came. She came as a domestic service. Jenny, his third wife. And she was in London. And, and, and I saw her very, very rarely. But she was the one he lived with in Paris afterwards.

I see...

And then in London. And she was the one who was with him at Leo Baeck House.

Right.

And she was about twelve years younger than he. And she died a year after him.

What was her name, Jenny...?

Jenny Fritz.

Right... And he married her in...

I think it must have been about, was it '34...'34 perhaps, yes.

So, it must have been quite traumatic for you?

But I didn't- I only stayed there for a few months.

You didn't like it.

No, she had- although there was a room, there was a flat in the Fourth District with a bathroom and a live-in maid. But I didn't want to stay there.

So, you moved back to – to Claire.

So, I said, “I’m not staying here.” So, I went back, and my father soon followed.

But then ...stayed married to Jenny.

Yeah... yeah. I think they-

They had an arrangement of some sort.

Yeah. I think they probably re-married. I don’t know. ...It was so complicated, you know...

And she was- She came as a domestic because she was younger.

Jenny was much younger.

Yes...

She came as a domestic. She was somewhere in... in Highgate.

Yeah...

And I went to see her once and ...the... her employer said to me, “You know, your mother is difficult.” [laughs] So I thought, “I know.”

[0:45:11]

Yeah... yeah.

And- but anyway, she stayed there all the time I think until she went to France... to join my father. And I was so much against it. You know, I said, “You shouldn’t.” There, there was a choice between a French woman... and Jenny. And, and, and I said, you know, “It’s crazy, you shouldn’t – you shouldn’t marry her or be with her...” or something. So, he said, “Well,

she is my- she- I had married her. She is ”*meine angetraute Frau”* [she is married to me] or something like that.

Yeah...

I couldn’t- but, but, but actually I feel very guilty about her. Because... After she looked after him when he was blind at the end, and then after he had died, she was very ill. And I think a doctor phoned me and he said, “You know your mother is... You, you should come and see her.” And I said, “I’m busy and she is not my mother.” Which is terrible. Because I shouldn’t have done that. But you do things that you regret afterwards.

Yeah. But anyway, when you left you were- when you left, your father was living with Claire. And you left from that flat in the...

Well, he left Claire and then he went back. And he was with her right...

Right before the emigration...

Before he emigrated. And he told me- I said, “Why- why didn’t she come?” He said, “She said she wouldn’t- she wouldn’t emigrate illegally.” Because I mean it was illegal; they didn’t have a visa. You know, he went- whatever my brother told him.

Aha, he managed...

Via Italy and, and it wasn’t a- so then apparently this is what she said.

So, Claire didn’t want to come with him?

Claire.

Didn’t want to come?

She didn’t want to – to go. Apparently. That’s what he told me and I don’t know.

Because Claire must have thought that she could come as a domestic. Did she think that she could come...?

And she left- she was left behind.

Yeah...

And then I don't know of course what happened. She would have been transferred to a *Judenhaus* I suppose. She wouldn't, wouldn't have been able to stay in that flat, but I don't know.

And what happened to Claire?

Yeah.

What happened to her?

That was all, you know after- when I couldn't correspond with her anymore. It was during the war.

[0:47:53]

And did you find out afterwards, after the war, what happened to her?

I just- there wasn't anyone. There was just a, one cousin of mine who survived, because... one of my uncles had married out. And he said he was- all he knew, that she was deported, and that's all he knew. And- but he didn't tell me any details about how, you know... There's nobody I could have asked because they were all deported the people that...

Yes...yes. I think we found in your- you wrote an article. It said that she was deported to Izbica...

Pardon?

Izbica. It said that- you wrote that she was deported to Izbica... to a camp- to a ghetto and then to a camp.

Yeah... yeah.

Yeah...

Yes. Yes, I put it there. And, and then as it happens, she was deported- I had a best friend there called Liesl and she went to the- to America, to New York. She emigrated. And she got a visa for, or affidavit I think it was called, for her parents but it arrived too- you know, it was too late. And they went on the- her parents were on the same transport as Claire.

Aha...And what happened to Claire's parents?

Their daughter, Liesl's daughter, now has settled - an American, you know – she settled in Vienna. I can't- I find it very difficult to understand. But she- anyway, she says she feels at home there. Although she had no German at all.

She went to Vienna?

She went to Vienna. She's now in her early sixties. And she- she went to Vienna and she loves it there.

What is her name? What is her name?

I could have never...

What is her name? Liesel's daughter?

Liesl was Shaw... and then she married Otto Holländer. So- and, and Vera kept her Holl- although she was married and had two children, she kept her maiden name. So, she's Vera Holländer and she lives in Vienna now. And every time I go to Vienna now, I see her and we Skype.

You Skype with her?

Yeah.

And you find it difficult to understand that she went to Vienna?

Mn?

You find it difficult to understand...?

[0:50:39]

I find it very difficult. I could have never, ever gone back. But- and who- I talked to somebody else about this, who is also the daughter of refugees. And she said she can- she was probably looking for her roots. She can understand it; she was probably looking for her roots. But because both her parents were born there. But her father got his family out, and her mother didn't.

Yeah. And what happened to Claire's parents? Claire's parents? The ones you were quite close to?

To Claire's...?

Parents. What happened to them? Claire's parents?

Sorry...

Claire's parents. You said you were quite close to Claire's parents. What happened to them?

To Claire's home?

Parents. The grandparents. You said, you were very close – they were quite intellectual - Claire's family.

No- no, that was my mother's family.

Oh, that was your mother's family?

Sorry. Claire came from, from Prague.

OK.

And she only had- she had a sister and a mother. Her sister never married. And I had been there twice, to Prague. No, no. They were called Lederer, and then I saw them very rarely. No it was my mother's...

Your mother's family.

Rosa's family.

OK. And what happened...?

[0:52:10]

And they all got out, and I'm sure my mother would have got out too. They all got out. First of all, everybody would have had more money if she had lived, because the business, you know, would have been all right. And secondly, her youngest- her- Ida, her eldest- her older sister- there were four of them. Her older sister came to England. The Quakers got her out. And she was a wonderful baker. And she – she was...she, she- the Quakers found her a job as a baker. You know, at a patisserie or something like that. And her husband was a sort of, he was much older than she, and he died very soon before the war. But she - she got to England. And then afterwards, she did sewing, you know, finishing. And... that was Ida. Then- and there was another brother, Sigi and he spoke about twelve languages. And he got to South America. I've never heard what happened to him. I wasn't very close to him. And then there was Arthur, the one who had lived in England, in, in Manchester before the First World War. He was the youngest and he managed to- he had one son, Herb, Herbert at that time. And he managed to get to Melbourne, and started a business and was very successful. And his wife died of cancer. And Herb became the most extraordinary- I wrote an article about him too.

He was an amazing person. He married out to a, a practicing Methodist and had three children. And, and then he did his Doctorate. He went to university and got his BA or whatever and then he went as a volunteer to Indonesia. And he became an expert on Indonesia. And he was the most amazing person. He was eleven years older than I am. I mean, younger, sorry. He was born in 1930. Nobody could be eleven years older than me. [laughs] And the, and he went to university there and then did his Doctorate in America. All about Indonesia. And he became a Professor of Politics at a, at a university in Melbourne. And after seven years, he didn't- he demoted himself to Reader. He didn't want to be a Professor. And he was all- you know whenever you went to his home there were refugees there. And, and he was very, you know he helped everybody he - he could. He would march with his students if there was something for- you know. He was a member of Amnesty International. And... he was an amazing- can you imagine anybody demoting himself from being a Professor? And when I asked him, he didn't want- money, status meant nothing to him. He is on the Wikipedia you know, and, and whatever... on, on there's a whole lot about him on Google.

What's his name? Herb...?

[0:56:00]

Herb- he called himself Herb- Herb Veith.

Feith?

Well, they call themselves- it's Veith of course, but they call themselves Veith in Australia.

Oh... Veith, yeah.

But it was Veith.

Yeah... So, they all – the siblings - managed to emigrate? Your mother's? Your birth mother's?

Yeah, they all and, and either to England, Arthur to Australia. And Sigi to…. Nobody's ever heard of him since too, but I know he got to South America somewhere.

And did you stay in touch with some of them? You stayed in touch?

Mn?

Some of them you stayed in touch with? You stayed in- you were in contact with them...

Me?

You were in contact with them, after the war?

Not with Sigi, because I'd never heard of him.

No, but the others...

But the others, yes, I went. And of course, and then when I went to live in - in Australia, you know I- I was in Sydney but they were in Melbourne. They come this – what's today? The 7th. On the 14th next week, one of- Herb's youngest son is coming to London with his two children- his wife and two daughters. And I had somebody else – a grandson – here, last week. So, I'm in-and we Skype too.

That's lovely. So, let's go back to you, and your story and your arrival in England. Let's go back to England when you came. And you said it was a shock when you – your first domestic job.

Yeah, when I was first here. Yeah.

And what was the most shocking thing for you?

Mn?

What was the most shocking thing when you arrived and you found yourself...

[0:57:50]

That I was so alone, and that I was, you know. The maids were supposed to- that was something that you didn't- that didn't exist in most British households. I had one job before the war broke out, and they talked of each other as 'the Master' and 'the Mistress'. And they had another girl there, an Austrian. And it was- I can't tell you what, they were horrible. That woman was really horrible. And- and I couldn't stand it anymore. And I remember when war broke out, I was there. They lived in Surrey, but they went to somewhere near Chichester. Selsey on the Sea. And this is when the war broke out. And my- the other maid, she... And she, she- I was the- she was the cook something, and I was the house parlour maid. And but she helped me, although she wasn't a professional Austrian maid, she helped me wherever she could. She was very kind, very nice. And then when war…they called us into the parlour... to listen to the broadcast, you know. Britain is at war on the 3rd of September... 1939. And - and I thought it was, it was quite- you know, stupidly I thought it was quite a good thing. I thought it would all be over; the Allies would win, you know. I never thought that it would last... six years. And so, so anyway- but I don't know what happened, but somehow the police got involved, and the police came. Because she, I don't remember whether I called the police or I can't remember. But I remember that the police- the other girl stood up for me, and, and that the police sided with me, and found me some lodgings with an – with an elder... Well then, she seemed old to me. I suppose now she would seem young to me.

What did they accuse you of? What did they accuse you of? Why were the police...?

I can't remember; I can't remember. But I couldn't stand it anymore. I don't know who called the police, whether they did or I did. And, and, and they found me something. And it was wonderful. I went- I just stayed there until my money lasted, then I had to look for another job. And I think I went to Exeter.

And did you have any contact with Bloomsbury House? With the refugees?

Mn?

Did you have any contact with other refugees or with Bloomsbury House?

No. Not at all at that time. Not at all, but later I met some people, but I didn't know anybody. But it was later, much later I made some refugee friends. Don't know actually when it started. Because- because when I was in- yes, when I was in Maidenhead, there were some friends from Vienna. And in the end, I shared a flat with them until I went to - to Germany.

[1:01:25]

But in the... you had those many domestic jobs. Was there any one particularly bad one, or what stands out in your memory of your experiences as a domestic?

In London? In Maidenhead?

In general, yes, all your domestic jobs. Was there one particularly bad one, or...?

You mean, did I want to stay?

No, was there a particular job – a domestic situation – which was worse than all the others? Or were they all- You were not happy in any of it?

No, well some- I remember I was working for a Welsh doctor, and he was very nice. He and his family were very nice. But... I just wasn't a domestic servant. [laughs]

Yeah... But did you think anyone understood where you came from? Did people understand the situation or did they have no understanding for it at all?

Did they ask me or what?

Yes, did they ask you questions?

Well, that doctor in - in Exeter. I think, he said, wasn't it- "Isn't it strange? In the First World War your father and I would have been on different sides ..." I told him in the end, at least he talked to me as if I were a human being.

And the other people didn't talk?

No. Well, the one where I told you- Only the one where I was a... a mother's help. Sadie her name was, Sadie Minsky. Yeah, and every Sunday- every Saturday, for the Friday night we went to...to the East End, Cable Street, where her parents had a shop. And, and, and, and, and lived above the shop. A grocery shop. And I can't remember anything about the service, but I must have- because they were very religious. I can't remember anything about the service. But I can remember that I went and I got into trouble because I used a red, red towel... What do call the things that you dry things with. Towel?

[1:01:25]

A towel?

Yes... No, you don't call it towel...

Tea towel. Tea towel!

That's right.

Yes, you used the wrong tea towel.

The wrong- I put... I put... I used the wrong tea towel for- I don't know, the red one for milk or something like that and I was supposed to use the blue one. Oh! That was terrible.

But they took you, and speaking of Jewish...

I think I'm going to get myself some water. [slight pause]

We were talking about your- the different domestic jobs. So, what I was going to ask you is, was there a difference in the Jewish and the non-Jewish families?

Not much. Well, there was when I was mother's help because there, you know- and also these people I told you I was there, it was already my third job in November. And you know she was crying with me after Kristallnacht. And she found me somebody. But I can't have been there long because [pauses to laugh] you know, then I left London altogether.

But it didn't make a difference...

I can't remember whether- unfortunately you know I had so many of these alien registrations. But they took them- as soon as they were full, the police took them away. So, I've only got the last ones.

When did you …Did you have to go to a- to a tribunal? Did you have to go to a tribunal?

Did I...?

Did you have to go to a tribunal?

In what...?

A tribunal where you were- where they registered you as enemy alien?

Yes, there is one- there is the book, here. But that was only at the end, you know.

Which category did you get?

[1:05:23]

But every- and once the police, I had to go to the police every time I changed. And one said to me, "Can't you try to settle down?" They were so nice and patient, you know. I can't- the, the British police were absolutely wonderful as far as I am concerned.

What about the food? Did you get...?

I thought it was awful!

Tell us about it.

When I first came to England I thought, “God!” You know, that - that awful vinegar. I’d never had that. You know, always in Vienna that malt vinegar didn’t exist; it was always wine vinegar. And it was totally tasteless... and dreadful. Didn’t like it at all.

Did you get enough food in your various domestic positions?

Yes, I -I never was hungry. Certainly not...neither before the war, nor – nor during the war.

And do you feel- were you maltreated? Or were you treated as a...? Do you feel that you were maltreated or they just treated you like a domestic servant? Do you see what I mean?

Well, most of them treated me like a domestic servant apart from that- well, you know that, that Welsh doctor in Exeter sort of treated me like a human being.

What was his name?

I haven’t got- I can’t- look, with so many jobs... I can’t remember. But he was, he was in Exeter. And extremely nice, and intelligent and... you know. And he treated me like a, like a co-human being.

And at what point could you take another job? At what point did you have to- until when did you have to stay a domestic?

What...?

When could you change jobs, at what point?

What do you mean? I could change jobs at any time.

But you- at some point you then were not a domestic anymore. You became a secretary.

[1:07:33]

Oh that! Somebody told me that- about that job in Maiden-...in Exeter. And at the Bap- you know when I worked for the Baptists at twenty-five shillings a week. And that was even then, that was very little. Cause they deducted one and six probably for income tax and national insurance. So, I had twenty-three pounds and sixpence- twenty-three shillings and sixpence.

Where did you live?

In a- in a boarding house run by a German – German, German. And I shared a room with my aunt. You know, my aunt Ida, my, my mother's sister. And we paid one pound a week. So, I had three and six for everything else.

But was it better, because first of all you were together with your aunt...?

Oh, I was so happy, because I was free. I was a human being. I could go...you don't know what it's like when you never have any time to sleep late. It, it didn't- you know, even on a Sunday, you only got the afternoon off. So, you had six and a half days from morning, from about seven o'clock in the morning 'til after dinner was served. You know, you wouldn't believe it now, because....

What was the worst thing for you, being a domestic? What was the worst?

The- the worst... I think the worst job was the one I told you about. That terrible woman who hated me and I hated her. In…Who was in Surrey. And- and, you know, 'the Master' and 'the Mistress'. I think I- you know, I don't think we could stand the sight of each other. And she was really- you know, people always felt they could say anything because, you know… domestic servants didn't count. They weren't human beings. They were just something...

So, when you became a secretary, it was a relief. It was...

Even if it was typing, it was fine, because they were so kind to me those Baptists. They took me- they invited me to tea and took me out to you know to- Devon is lovely. And... And… and everything was fine. I was free. You know, that feeling of being free. Being able to sleep

late at the weekend. I don't know if one still worked on Saturday mornings, I think probably yes. But anyway, on Sunday- You had, you had Saturday afternoon and Sunday. You were free. And you could go home. I mean wherever you were, you could go... go home and have a meal. And it, it was that sense of freedom was absolutely wonderful. After something like slavery. Well, it wasn't like slavery, because you could leave at any time. But...But you know that being- that working for six and a half days...from, from seven in the morning till about ten at night.

[1:11:00]

Something I didn't ask you, just to go back slightly, what were your- if you remember, what were your first impressions of England? Do you remember that?

I remember being on a train...[laughs] and the people there were workmen and they were talking to me and that I couldn't understand what they were saying. So, I only could understand a couple of words. And then I had to ask you know, again, and it was difficult. But- And then I saw, when I saw London, I was disappointed, because I had fallen in love with Paris. And I thought that London didn't have the charm and the...you know, the allure of Paris. So, I was a bit disappointed. I thought it didn't have the- I wasn't as...as enamoured of London as of Paris. But then it grew on me of course, and now I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

Mn-hnn. So where, what happened from Exeter? So, you stayed in this Baptist job, with the Baptists... You were in the job as a secretary...

In Maidenhead?

In Exeter first...

In Exeter.

Yes.

That was the first one. And then, my boss fought against it. I thought you know, he went to the police and he said, “Why should she be...”, you know, “it’s ridiculous, she’s a refugee.” But of course, there was nothing that he could do. I was a dangerous- I was a - an enemy alien.

Yes.

And, and- but after that it was because I was with people even at that Rowton House. I was with all, all Jewish women, you know, refugee. Because the men were mostly interned, as you know.

So, you went from Exeter to Maidenhead.

From … in Taunton.

Oh, first to Taunton?

Yeah. And I can’t remember how long I stayed there. I wish I had all those books, you know, the... ‘cause I changed addresses so much. And I’ve been here for fifty-three years.

So, from Taunton. Where did you go from Taunton?

In this flat.

Where did you go from Taunton?

To London, for the Blitz.

[1:13:35]

So, tell us a little bit about that.

That's- the Blitz started almost immediately after we got there. Because after…before that it was a phony war. You know there were air raids and you had to have the black out and all that but nothing ever happened. So, we couldn't believe it when there were real alarms!

So where did you come- Where did you move?

I lived in Sutherland Avenue, very near to- very close to here, with my aunt. I shared a room with my aunt.

So, you stayed together, you and your aunt?

Yes, yes, we were- We were together at – at, at Exeter when I had that job, and then in Taunton. And then when we came to London, we had a room in Sutherland Avenue.

And was it, what, a...?

And my aunt, I went- I had a job in Roehampton. So, I went to Roehampton every morning.

What were you doing in Roehampton?

Bookkeeping. Books.

Did you do any war work? Did you have to do any war work? No...

Well... in Maidenhead I was suppose I... officially helped with the war effort because it was an engineering firm who produced things for... for the war.

What was your aunt doing here in London? What was she doing? What was her work?

It was called in Maidenhead but I don't know what they produced. It was called Mator Engineering or something like that. I think that's again probably in the last - last alien registration book.

But here in London, what was she working? You said you lived on Sutherland Avenue?

[1:15:12]

I, I went to Roehampton every day.

And she? What did she do?

Oh, my aunt, she did finishing. She first of all, she was- she, she did finishing work, you know. And mainly in the West End somewhere.

And you managed to live on your earnings?

Yes.

And at that point did you have any contact with Bloomsbury House or other refugees, when you were in London?

Oh, yes. And then- then there were, there were some refugees in- living in that house. There were three or four living in that- in that house. I don't know if it was somebody let rooms there. And... I remember there was one girl who had an Indian boyfriend. And there was…there were two English sisters- spinster sisters. And he was 'coloured', so they wouldn't talk to him, you know they ignored him when he was there. I mean, we were Jewish, OK, it wasn't good but we were foreigners. But we had, but at least we had the grace to be white. But these people- but this young man, lovely young man, educated. But he was 'coloured'.

It was a bad thing in those days. Yeah. And did you stay in Sutherland Avenue until the end of the war? Did you stay in that... room?

In, in, in, after Sutherland- yes, that was it. You see, when we went down to the air raid shelter. This was when we met the people.

Aha. And where was the air raid shelter?

In the basement.

Of the building?

Once or twice, we went to Warwick Avenue Station, which was the closest. But we didn't like it very much. So sometimes we just went to bed and...and thought that, "Either we'll be alive tomorrow, or not." I didn't mind The Blitz.

You didn't- you were not scared?

[1:17:20]

No. And every morning I admired- this is when I learned to admire the British, you know. That spirit was wonderful, you know. And, and, and all these boarded up things, business as usual. It- It was really- it was wonderful. This is when I really felt... I was privileged to live here.

Because of the attitude of people?

Their attitude... of stoicism and, and - and their sense of humour. They never lost their sense of humour.

And did you ever experience any hostility, being Austrian German? Did you ever experience anything?

About the refugees?

Yeah. Any hostility in that situation, because you were from Austria?

Yeah. But nobody- what do you mean about the English attitude?

Yeah...

I never, ever, had the slightest… I, I just never felt that I was- you know, people were incredibly kind. And I felt I was one of the people who was, who was going through this Blitz. And I was never ever- I told you the only person was that Indian. That young Indian. But I was never- I was always treated with courtesy, and friendship. I never had any problems with the English.

And where were you when the war ended? Were you in London?

When the war ended?

Yeah.

I was still in Maidenhead.

Aha...

I was secretary to one of the Directors. And- and of course it was unbelievable, you know. I think I went with a friend. I went to - to Trafalgar Square just to- but I don't remember much about it. You know, because one was expecting it all the time. What did I do with my water? Sorry. I must have some water. [pause]

We're at the end of the war now.

Yes.

And... were you in contact with your father? Did you know what had happened to your brother and father?

[1:20:02]

I knew that they were in France. We were in contact because you see the liber- after the liberation in '44, I, I could correspond with them. And I can't imagine how I knew that- you know all this I think now. How did I ever get in touch with them? I don't know. But... But I must have done because I knew. And when I joined the American Army, we went to a place

called Poissy, near Paris, for a sort of... training session, you know, a week's preparation for Germany. And my father came from the south of France to see me. And, and the American Army was wonderful to him, you know; he could stay there, wherever we stayed. And he hadn't had such food... for you know, for a certain, because... the rations. You know in, during the war they had hardly anything to eat. And there was this lavish food!

What made you want to join the American Army?

I think my main reason was because I was hoping to see my – my relatives, my family again. I thought that if I went to the continent, there might be a way of getting together. And there was of course; my father first came to Poissy. And then, the Army organised a - a holiday to the... South of France. And this is where my- Where they all were, in Nice. So of course, I put myself- I was secretary to the personnel officer. And I have to confess that I put myself- I was first on the list to - to go on that holiday. And Stella was second, my friend Stella.

Was she also in the Army?

[1:22:00]

Yes- this is how we met.

OK.

And then we were both sent to Munich. So, and then our friendship was, you know, solid.

You both started working for the Americans?

Yeah.

And you were called- you had a name for it. 'Civilian...'?

Mn?

What were you called? You had- you gave me a name for it. 'American...'

Stella Mitchell. Well, she was called Stella... you know.

Don't worry about Stella...

No, it's so terrible that sometimes I can't think of, of names of my...

Don't worry about Stella... I meant what were you called? The American- you were civilians working for the American Army.

For the American Army...

Yes, you were civilians, so you, you...

Yes. 'Civilian employee', but I had a uniform.

Yeah.

Yeah, but I was a civilian... Wait! Stella...

Don't worry about it.

I've got it written somewhere.

Don't worry about it. So, when you- how long before you started going to the Continent? When did you go with the Americans to the Continent?

Where did I go?

When? When?

When. In July 1945.

And where were you stationed?

And, and I went to, to- actually I went to...it was used to be somebody's headquarters, you know, just outside Munich where we... where we were. We were billeted there. But most people had to go, because it was the censorship- CCD: Civilian Censorship Department. And, and so we were billeted there, and we - we had our meals there. But most of the people had to go into Munich, to censor letters, whereas I was secretary to the personnel officer.

I understand...

So, I was lucky. I was in Pullach; that's what it was called.

So, what was it like? What was Germany in 1945?

[1:24:16]

Well, I was- I had nightmares before I went because you know, I thought to meet the Germans again...would be absolutely terrible. But when- and then when I was there it was so totally different, because they were so, you know those Germans they, they had no, they had no soap. They had- and you know all my hatred went, because when you see a hungry child, you want to give it food. I gave him all my sweet rations or her- and they were so eager to please. Because we were the ones who had soap, who had food... And you could get anything for, for cigarettes. You know, I, I never smoked. And we had a PX version of cigarettes, so I could get anything. Stella and I went to Austria one day. She didn't smoke either. And we wanted to take a taxi there, and we offered him so many cartons for- to take us into Austria. And he said, no, that wasn't enough. So, we just- Stella said, "Just let's walk on." So, we walked on. And there he was, came after us and said, you know, he would take us for so and so many cartons of cigarettes. You could get anything. I had beautiful dresses made. I got the- We got some silk in Italy- on our trip to Italy. And you could get the most expensive dressmaker, you know, to make dresses for you, for cigarettes. They didn't want any Marks.

And did you manage to get to Vienna? Did you go to Vienna?

Just at the very end. And- and I thought it was horrible. I thought it was horrible. You know, by that time they still at that time, they still wanted to pretend that they were the first victims.

And people were there and very sorry for themselves. And I felt that...the soul had gone out of Vienna. There, there used to be a book called "*Die Stadt ohne Juden*" by [Hugo] Bettauer, I think it was, and it was and it was published I think in '23, or something like that. And this is what it was like. It felt like a- like a town without soul. And I think it's never recovered what it had while the Jews were there.

And did you go to your flat? What did you do when you were in Vienna?

I stayed with a- my cousin, you know, who had married a non-Jew, who had been in Australia, went back to Vienna. And... And because he could only find- you know, he was a labourer there. And in Vienna he got- his, his father was, became Vice-Mayor. And he, he was put in charge of adult education, her husband. And, and so they had a very nice flat in...in Vienna and I stayed. But I was glad to be out again. I didn't like it at all.

[1:27:42]

How long did you stay?

Only a couple of days. Two or three days. And that was my- well, I was already at the end of my work for the Americans.

You didn't think of going - going to Vienna? To go back?

I didn't go for a long, long time. When I went the first time again, with my husband, and as he wasn't Viennese, so I went as a tourist, you know, which was easier.

Yeah. Yeah. So, what were- when you finished with the Americans where did you want to live? What was your idea?

After the Americans? Well, then I had a choice. Either to go back to England, or go to France. And because my family lived in Paris, I went to Paris and got a job with The Joint.

And what were you doing for 'The Joint'?

And I was a secretary of one of the departmental managers.

But 'The Joint' also at that point, must have been very busy rebuilding...

That's right they helped refugees and displaced persons.

Yes.

Yes. And, and I made lots of friends there. And for the first time I met people who were Auschwitz survivors. And that was a revelation, you know, to - to see these people who had been through Auschwitz.

Why? ...What did they- What struck you?

[1:29:21]

Well, they, you know, they never talked about the real horrors of it. But, for instance, one of the Czechs. They were all Czechs those three people. And she told me how she'd had a terrible cold. And she, she, she was a slave labourer, you know, in, in, in some factory. And she begged the women to give her a tissue or a handkerchief, and nobody would. And there she was with that with that streaming cold. And the other one, the two men were friends, because they- one had given the other one- shared a crust of bread with him. You know, it's just unimaginable; you can't imagine it. So, I- it was just things, they didn't talk about the real horror, about the gassing, but just things like that.

Yeah...

And how people just said, "Oh, he was flogged..." so and so... And it was just an occur- something that happened all the time.

Yeah...

Yeah, and- and then I was, I was there for - for about two years... with 'The Joint'. And then as I said Stella persuaded me to go to join her in Sydney. And I did. And that's where I met

my husband. He worked for a travel- for the Lloyd Triestino you know, then. And all I wanted after a year was to get back to Europe.

You didn't like it there?

No, I hated it. At that time. Mind you, when I went back in 1993 it was completely different. But I hated it. There was no- I'd come from Paris, the height of civilisation, into a country where they didn't have a proper theatre. Where they didn't have any... art galleries. But they were just- They had started then building the opera house. And the food was unspeakable. You know we- Where we- Where we worked Stella and I, we had lunch time and we used to go to a restaurant. And the choice was between lamb's fry, and lamb's fry. And that was it. And since then, I've never touched lamb.

Yeah....

[1:31:58]

So, I longed for Europe. So, I went to Lloyd Triestino where my husband worked. And when he knew that I spoke French, you know, he was delighted, and we only spoke French. And he kept saying- I said, please, find me a first-class cabin. Because I came back; there were eight of us on the- I don't know what you call that class. Not cabin class. Whatever it was, but I wanted…I wanted to have a cabin, you know, I wanted to travel first class.

Yeah...

And he kept saying, "I can't get you anything but *venez demain, venez demain*." "Come tomorrow, come tomorrow." And I went tomorrow, and I went tomorrow. And then he said, "I've got you something for the second of May." And so, I said, "Oh, that's wonderful." And I, and I told my family and you know, it was absolutely wonderful. And then he said, "But would you do me a favour? Could we meet just for, for that Sunday? I'd like to have a day with you." And I thought, well, it wasn't convenient because I wanted to do my packing and- But I thought, I can't be so churlish; he worked so hard for me. Anyway. So, we had a day together. And I got back at eleven; he came back to me. I lived on the North Shore and he in... totally on the East. East of Sydney. And he said, "Would you stay for another month?

And... And I promise you that if you still want to leave, I'll get you a first-class passage." And I went back to Stella, still- I always remember that I went back and I said- She said, 'It's eleven o'clock at night! I was getting so worried! After all, you don't know that man." So, I said, "My head. My head. I don't know what to do!" And we were married two and a half months later. I had somebody in Italy that I had become very fond of but...anyway. And that was it.

And then you stayed a bit longer, and...?

And then we were married, but we stayed for another year. And- But my husband knew that I didn't have- Stella always said, if I hadn't been, he would have been prepared to stay. He would have stayed, and it's probably true. But I wanted Europe. And as I said, then we tried to get to – to find a job in Paris for him but then we settled in and that was it.

Because he couldn't work in Paris...

Yes. And, and we had various furnished rooms. He got himself a job in a French bank. And...and I had no problem finding a job. I never had a problem finding a job.

[1:35:11]

And did he have still family in Egypt? His family was still in Egypt?

And his family- his, his parents had died, both of them, but his brother and sister came to England. And we- eventually found them a flat in this on the second floor, in Rodney Court. And they were the best brother and sister-in-law that you can imagine. They were wonderful.

So, you settled here in Rodney Court?

Yes. They lived here and she- she did all the sewing. I hate sewing. I hate anything connected with it. So, I'd say- we, we only spoke French, you know. Do you speak French?

Yeah...

Yes. So, I'd just go and say, "*Angéle, un bouton*?" You know, there was a - a button to be sewed. And, and, and she would shorten dresses for me and ...

Because they were also refugees. They came as refugees?

Yes.

So, you...

Well, they had- they had British passports.

Right. But they had to leave Egypt.

Yeah. But of course, they had to start from the beginning.

Yeah...

And she did something that was sewing, you know, something in Selfridges; she had a job. And, and her brother had, he worked for a bank. Fernand got him a job in a bank.

So, you married in a way you were two refugees...

Yeah...

... in some way. Different ways. You were earlier.

Yeah...

This was a later immigration.

Yes.

And was it a- was it a problem? You came from very different cultural backgrounds. How did you manage?

[1:36:50]

Well, it was- you see... Fernand was everything I didn't want. Because I had made up my mind, I wanted somebody of my own age. I wanted somebody with a- with a background similar to mine. You know, European background. And I wanted somebody- an intellectual. Somebody I could discuss books with and... What do I get? Somebody eleven years- yes, and taller! And he was only a few inches taller than me. There I've got somebody not tall... not sharing my background, and as I said, eleven years older than me. Everything I didn't want- and certainly not, and he was bright, but not an intellectual. And what - that's what I married. [laughs] I can't believe it, but anyway, it worked. We were married for forty years... until he died of cancer.

Here in London.

Yeah, here in London, yes. This is Cancer Research is my favourite charity. Because so many people- My niece died at forty-four of cancer. Another friend died of sixty- you know that so many people that died of cancer.

That is your brother's daughter? Your brother's daughter? Your niece is your brother's daughter in France?

Yes. Suzy, yes.

Yes.

She died at - at forty-four.

But she had many children... She had five children?

And she had five children. She had three children, and then the eldest was ten years, I think it was a mistake. Twins came.

Yeah...

And one of them it was on that photo I showed you. Marianne, she is one of Suzy's children.

And are you in touch with them? Are you in touch with them?

Mn?

Are you in contact with them?

[1:38:53]

Very much, yes. All the time, they come at least- now I used to go to Paris but now I don't travel very- Well I still- I've been going to Vienna every year, because I've got friends there. But now that…since I've had this weakness, and you know that I feel my feet- I was a great- really a good walker even at ninety-six. But now it's such an effort to walk. Now I'm going to see a doctor again; I'm fed up.

And what does it feel like today to go to Austria? What do think about Austria today?

Today?

What do you think about Austria?

About you?

About Austria, when you go?

Oh, I see. Well, I quite like it, but I always think it's a bit provincial. Whereas when I lived there, I thought it was the centre of the world. You know, now I think it's a bit provincial. Not like London.

What is the most important...for you what is the most important...?

Mn?

What is the most important... aspect or part of your Austrian heritage – today? Do you feel in any way connected to something ...?

Well, look, Vienna will always be part of me... because I spent my formative years there, so it will always be. But quite frankly I haven't got much feeling for it now. It's London I love... and, and, and London has become my home. And I don't mind. I know I'll never be English. It doesn't worry me. But I still love London, and, and I have found my own experience has been that there were, you know, I've made so many friends. And, and this Anna who's on this photo on the calendar, you know, she is a, she comes from a British working family. She had a terrible childhood. She never had any love; she never…her mother walked out. Anyway, she had a terrible childhood, and is - is only semi-literate I have to say, 'cause she didn't go to proper you know, to... But... She's a wonderful friend. She considers me her best friend and she's- they're all my friends now are... The oldest are in their seventies. And, and the youngest- the youngest one is in her fifties. I haven't got any contemporary friends left.

[1:41:39]

And how would you define yourself today in terms of your identity?

My identity? I'm a guest in England. And, and I'm- but I feel I've always been made to feel welcome. I have no identity. I'm- I'm a citizen of the world. I was born in, in- I happened to have been born in Austria. Austria didn't want me, so- but England is my home. England is where I want to be, especially London. When I was in Maidenhead I thought, "Oh, God, London!" I got a headache every time I went to London and came back. I thought it was too much for me. And now there is only London. And I love it that it's multilingual. You know that you see every colour, every...I shouldn't look at you should I. [laughs] Sorry. Oh, God is all this coming out? Are you going to edit?

I'll tell you later. I'll tell you later. I was going to ask you what impact do you think did it have on your life, that you were forced to leave Austria?

Mn?

Did it have an impact on your later life?

What?

Your experiences of emigration, of being a domestic. How did it shape your later life?

How can I answer that...? I don't know! ...I, I can't answer that question. I don't know how to...

For example, because you had to be a domestic, maybe you didn't want to do any housework later. Just an example. I don't know...

Well, it was- it was only sixteen months of course. At the most. I can't- as I said, I haven't got the- all these books here. But I... I... You know that it all because after the domestic work I had such a happy time in - in Maidenhead, the last three years of the war. And, and, and everybody was so lovely and kind. And, and I forgot about the domestic time. I mean I'll never forget that first job, when I was so unhappy that I didn't want to live. But after that, well there were... it hasn't sort of affected my life.

Yeah. It wasn't something you...

It was just something that I got through...

Yes, but for example...

And after that I was very happy.

But you talked about for example the fact that you couldn't get Claire out. That's something which stayed with you.

What?

You talked about the fact that you couldn't get Claire, your mother - your stepmother - out of Austria. Is that something which stayed with you?

[1:44:50]

Yeah...

The feeling that you couldn't- that you - you tried to get her out...

That has stayed with me for my life, for, you know. Because she was really- She was the one who brought me up. She was the one who made sacrifices. She would have, you know, one egg instead of two, so that I could have fruit. She did everything for me. And then, I let her down, you know, at the last- I know. My common sense tells me that I was nineteen years old. I'd only been in England for two months. I couldn't do any more than- I go to Bloomsbury House. I - I pleaded with them. And, and they said, "The Home Office won't budge." Yet other people did get over- I told you - my aunt and her husband. And Tony told me, I think, that his aunt got and she was older than that. So if you had the right connections, I think you could get people over. But I didn't have them.

Yeah...

So, I mean, I did all I could... but it wasn't enough. And this is what I feel. And she died a terrible, terrible death. And I can't get over it. It took me fifty years to find- I didn't want to know, I think, to find out- Actually only recently did I go on the website you know, to- because this Vera, who lives in Vienna, wanted to find out about her grandparents. And she sent me the website and, and all that and then I went to Google to find out more about this – what's it called? That UCN [USHMM] That was a *"Fehlleistung"*[slip of the tongue]? That place where she was... Claire – where she was...

Izbica. It said Izbica.

Yeah...Izbica. That's right.

And did you find the information?

Yeah...Izbica. And I also- I learned through Google about that death camp. But it- apparently it was the first death camp in – in, in- that the Nazis… had. You know I had never heard of it! And apparently it only operated for about a year and not quite, and about half a million Jews were killed there.

But you didn't want to learn about it before, so it took...

Yeah. And I only found that out very recently. I think it was a Freudian slip, you know. I didn't want to know.

It's painful.

Yeah. I, I sort of felt I wanted to protect myself from it. So, she really didn't deserve that. And all her, her Lederers- I went to the- have you ever been to the old synagogue in Prague?

Yeah.

I went to the old synagogue, and, and, and there was an - an exhibition about… Theresienstadt, about children- about Theresienstadt and about children in- and you know you saw these little suitcases and then you saw, "Died at Auschwitz". And, and on the walls, there were all names of the people who, you know, who had been deported.

Yeah...

And all the Lederers, her family were all- not one survived. She had two brothers and a number of nephews and her sister. Her mother had already died. Everybody was deported. You can't- I still can't come to terms with it. Even now, that this existed. So...

[1:48:40]

Yeah... And... after the war your father lived in - in France and you were here...

After the war?

Yeah.

Well then, I went to the, you know, the Army, then Paris and then Sydney. But I never, I didn't go back to Vienna... until I went with Fernand, I think about 1958 or something like that.

And did you stay close to your father? What was your...?

And I was- you know, that reluctance was there. But as I was with him, as I said, we did all the touristic things. You know. We went on a trip on the Donaukanal, to Krems, to- you know, that sort of thing. And, and we went to all- we saw the horses, and, you know... all the sights. And that was the easier.

Because you were a tourist.

Yeah. So- so we had quite a good time and I went to see some people that I had known in… that were still there, and that I knew hadn't been Nazis. So... So, we actually had a good time then. Since then, I've been- I was invited once. And, and had - had a week there. And they were- of course did everything they could. And Leo happened to be there, my brother, at the same time, so - so they invited him too. And it was very…he was almost 100 – no, 99, I think.

And did you stay close to Leo, to your brother, and to your father, despite that you were in a different country?

Did...?

Did you stay close to them? To your father and to your brother?

Yeah...what?

Did you stay close to them?

Well, I was never very close to - to my brother actually, because of the age difference. But you know it was always me who tried to- when I knew he had a bridge tournament I'd go there with Fernand, while he was still alive, and... and to be with him. And- but with my father, that always stayed close to my father. And I'm so glad that I brought him over. You know and I'll never- I'll always be grateful to the AJR for taking him in to that Leo Baeck House. So- and he died at 94. And Leo, as I told you, he was almost 102.

And how did your father adapt himself in France? Was he happy to be in France?

To London?

In France.

[1:51:33]

Oh, in France.

In France, and then to London?

Oh, he- he was alright. He worked for my brother. And yes, he was alright. He liked- He liked, but he loved to go to Vienna. Whenever he could he went to Vienna on holiday. And of course, he had been- he could only write in...in German, and so he still wrote poems. And there's one which I've still got that's called, "*Mein weißer Stock*" when he became *blind* you know, 'My White Stick'.

Can you- Do you know it by heart?

Yeah, I've got it somewhere. Yes, I kept it. And... But yes, he loved- he, he was happy and he was so happy to come to London because to be with me was his, you know, he came every year to London. While we were here. And, and, and stayed with us. And, and all he wanted really was to be with me. And, and, and as I said, I could bring him over, thank goodness. But of course, being blind, that, that for me would be- I wouldn't want to live if I were blind if I couldn't read.

Difficult.

But anyway...

Mnn. And what do you think, I know you recently have been interviewed and we're interviewing now. What- what do you feel about the...let's say the future of the - the German-Jewish, Austrian-Jewish refugees here in England?

What do you mean, the future?

I mean, in terms of the AJR, how do you think it should develop?

The AJR?

Yeah, how should it, you know, we're talking now about memory and... commemorations, and... Do you have any views of what you think would be good?

Of the AJR?

Not for the AJR. In terms of the legacy of German, Austrian refugees...

Living here as a refugee?

Yeah, the legacy. How should it... live on?

You mean for the...

For the next generations...

Again, I...

For example, I tell you what- Is it a good thing to be interviewed? Do you think it's important...

Yeah...

... to capture the story?

So, what would I, what would I tell, you mean?

No. Is it good to do interviews, or you know, they're now talking about doing a memorial... Do you think that's a good thing? Is it a good thing?

[1:54:30]

You mean this? What we are doing?

Yes, for example. Yes.

Yes, I think because the next generation should know... what, what it was... You know- yes, I think it is a good thing; that's why I'm doing it. Because they asked me the same- you know, the Memorial Fund, asked me the same thing. They hoped that it was worthwhile. I said yes, of course it was worthwhile. Because it it's good. It will be good for next generations. But what I feel, that, that people have not learned from history, that the same things are happening all over again. And the attitude to refugees is exactly the same as it was... then, in the '30s. So, it's- it's very sad really, very, very- I wish I could be more positive. But I…what's going on now is so terrible. But I hope that this will help, you know, that- that there won't be anything like the Holocaust anymore.

Yeah. And what lessons do you think should be learned...from Britain taking you in or from the policy from the 30s? Do you think we can learn a lesson for today?

...If, if the Hitler...

If there's a lesson to be learned from the 30s in Britain, that Britain took some refugees in... Obviously, Britain took about 70,000 refugees in at that time from Germany and Austria.

But how I feel- I'm sorry I don't get the point...

Should we learn a lesson from that, for today? Do you think we should...?

Most definitely, I think it should be, but it hasn't- It is not. Yes. And also, somebody asked me- you know I was asked- and then Natasha asked me... what I thought about Germans today. No, first of all she asked me if I could forgive what happened. I said, "No, never. I can't ever forgive." And then she asked me what I thought about Germans- how I felt about Germans today, you know, so I said, "Perfectly alright." Because I don't think that you can blame somebody whose grandparents might have done terrible things. But I've met perfectly nice Germans, who were horrified when they found out that, what their grandfathers had done. So, I'm- I'm perfectly alright about Germany today and about Germans today.

And... Do you have a message for somebody who might watch this interview in the future?

A message?

Have you got a message? Yes. ...A message... for somebody...

My message?

Your message, yes.
I'm not good at messages. Well, all I- all, I can ask people to learn from history and, and show more humanity. Because what's going on now that those desperate children dying every day. Trying to - to escape... and nobody wants them. And this what we- We were unwanted by the whole world. An it's happening again. And, and I wish they had learned something from history, but they haven't.

[1:57:53]

Mrs Argy, is there anything else we haven't discussed, you'd like to add? Something I haven't asked you?

Mn?

Is there anything else you want to add, which I haven't discussed, which I haven't asked you? Is there anything else...you need to...?

What?

I don't know. Anything I haven't asked you. Is there anything else which is important which you'd like to mention?

I don't think so. I think I've said everything.

Everything. You've said everything there is to say.

Don't you want some...?

In that case, I would like to thank you... for sharing your story with us, and we are going to look at some of your photographs now. Thank you very much.

Thank you. And I now hope people will get something from it.

I'm sure they will.

[1:58:50]
[End of interview]

[Start of photographs]
[1:59:03]

Who is in the picture please?

Tell us who it is...

Oh. So, I'm taking it now?

No, you just have to tell us who it is.

[Photo 1]

Oh, I see. It- it's my mother as a young girl.

And where was it taken?

I have no idea.

OK. Yes please. Who is on that picture?

Which one?

On this picture. There. It's your parents...

[Photo 2]

They are my parents, yes. Oh... Rosa and Gustav Tintner.

[1:59:44]

Thank you. Yes, please Edith, who is on that picture?

[Photo 3]

That picture it's- it's Claire as a young woman. ...In Prague.

Thank you.

[Photo 4]

Yes, this is my father and I, when I was about six years old. And it was taken in Vienna.

[Photo 5]

This is Claire with me in Prague. Well, I might have been about... eight or nine years old...possibly ten. I don't know.

So '29, 1929.

Something like that, yes...

[Photo 6]

This is my father... with me when I was in the American Army. Probably taken in Poissy, in in France, in 1945.

[Photo 7]

This is me with my friend Stella in the middle. And- And another friend. Another Edith – Edith Fuchs, when we were all in the American Army. It must have been about 1946 or something like that.

[Photo 8]

This is my husband Fernand and I, in Sydney, in 1950.

[Photo 9]

This is my brother Leo...with my friend Stella, and me, in Vienna. About... what did we say? 1999, something like that.

[Document 1]

What do we see here?

Oh, that's it's my last certificate of registration as an alien.

And what did you have to do with this?

I had to report to the police... every time I moved.

Thank you.

[Pause]

When did you become British?

When I married Fernand, I became a British subject.

[Pause]

[2:03:26]

[Document 2]

Oh. And this is my British Travel Document, which I used when I was a stateless person.

[Document 3]

And this is your Australian Visa? I can see Australian Visa.

Oh, yeah. The first time I went, in 1949.

Mrs Argy, thank you very much for sharing your life story, and letting us... see your pictures.

It was a pleasure.

I hope it wasn't too exhausting.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2:04:05]

[End of photographs and documents]