



**UKHMF TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPT
– GEORGE BLACHMAN**

[Testimony: 1hr 14 mins. Artefacts 1' 50"]

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10:00:00:00

George Blachman

My name is George Blachman, I've born in 1937, 2nd of September and, er, on the 1st of October 1943 we had to flee and had to be smuggled to Sweden in a rowing boat.

[fade to black and back up]

10:00:29:21

Interviewer

Okay. Um can you start by telling me a little bit about your life in Denmark before the war? You were very young, weren't, you, but what can you remember?

10:00:37:04

George Blachman

Yeah. I, I, when the German came I was about five and a half years.

10:00:46:10

Interviewer

Do you remember, do you remember much at that time?

10:00:49:20

George Blachman

Er I can remember a little bit, but in, I, the summer of '43 I remember best, when I go back. I can remember some of the clothes I wore – wear - wore, and um yeah, what I was doing, I went, and how we went around.

10:01:23:17

I started kindergarten that year, because in Denmark you first start school when you're seven. And then my first real memory - or what's been told to me at that time - was when suddenly we got a phone call and my mother said come, take that coat on; and so I said it's not cold, why should I take a coat on? But er we should just take the tram in er and meet my father. That is my first memory. I can remember he had been behind my three-wheel bike, er yes, bike, and um yeah, that's,

10:02:36:17

Interviewer

That was your first memory that you can tell,

10:02:38:09

George Blachman

Yeah.

10:02:38:22

Interviewer

Okay, thank you, George. Before we move on to your story and about your family and your parents, can you tell me have, have you ever recorded your testimony before?



10:02:51:21

George Blachman

No.

10:02:52:12

Interviewer

Why?

10:02:54:16

George Blachman

Nobody been interested.

10:02:57:07

Interviewer

Do you feel that no-one's been interested, or has nobody asked you?

10:03:01:03

George Blachman

The, nobody asked me so I have, um, but then I suddenly realised I got older and I needed to er record my, my, what I could remember. So I started in Danish, and my daughter helped me to translate it to English, and I wrote the first manuscript down and er one of my friends, er - I can't remember his name, he's unfortunately dead - gave me the secretary. We write the whole thing so that's what the, I, I used to tell in schools.

10:04:05:21

Interviewer

Why do you feel it's important?

10:04:08:07

George Blachman

I feel that it's, it's not fair enough to say all Germans. For example I was saved - and my family - by the German army and, and I think there also have to be fair. But er split it up and call it Germans and Nazis.

10:04:43:02

Interviewer

I understand that, but to answer the question again George, why do you feel it's important at this point in your life to record your testimony. You haven't done it before - you haven't been asked - but why do you think um agreed to it this, this time?

10:04:58:22

George Blachman

Because I think um what Mr. Cameron is doing with this project is very important, and at least I can, We were liberated by the English army – Montgomery - so we need to thank you.



10:05:26:16

Interviewer

Why do you think it's important? You say that Mr., what Mr. Cameron is doing is very important. Why do you think it is?

10:05:32:09

George Blachman

I think, um, so people will understand that there is, there is two things to all people's life. There is, and that they also for the Germans. You cannot put everything together er and say everybody is similar. Everybody doesn't wear grey shoes and so on. So there is a difference in their attitude.

10:06:18:21

Interviewer

Okay, we'll come back to this at the end, George, so thank you very much for saying that now. Um, let's talk about your family. You were the only child, weren't you? Can you tell me about your parents? What were they like? What did they do? Did you feel loved as a child? What was your family atmosphere like?

10:06:36:02

George Blachman

It was good. My father worked. He had a factory, er before we moved to Sweden, er making menswear, hand, what do you call it, I haven't found what it's called in English, but menswear suits, handmade. And er his factory was in what you would call theatre land and, and he had all the, the known actors and so on as, as customer because his factory was near their workplace. So,

10:07:37:07

Interviewer

Did you enjoy quite an affluent life? Where did you live? What was your accommodation like?

10:07:43:00

George Blachman

It, I lived in, in [*Danish word*] area in, in northwest of er Copenhagen. It, it wasn't that nice. We had a three rooms flat and er I had the room, my parents had and we had a, a living room.

10:08:13:32

Interviewer

Were you a religious family?

10:08:16:08

George Blachman

No, not at all. I, that came many years after when I met my wife, and then you start thinking what they're all thinking about, but if you start to do something, according to my rules, if you find it you do something which is not a hundred percent correct then you start to relate to it, and and try to, When you say A, B comes after C and so on, so if you first start and saying A, then the next lot you can say is B.



10:09:06:19

Interviewer

I understand. George, let's talk about, um, that night, your first memory, and I guess that was the moment when your life changed as a family, when your mother told you to get a coat. What happened after that?

10:09:18:24

George Blachman

So we went down on the street, took the tram into my father's factory because there was a code they had arranged. If he called, I don't know what they said, but they had a code. Then she would take me immediately. Don't take anything, money or whatever there could be with just get in here as quickly as possible.

10:09:55:08

Interviewer

And this was response to the rumours that were circling around?

10:09:58:20

George Blachman [*talking over each other*]

Yes, yes.

10:10:00:00

Interviewer

Copenhagen at the time.

10:10:01:07

George Blachman

Yeah. There, the German marine attaché, er, had been got of course. He knew what came out of ships and there came two ships to take the Danish Jews. And he told the, the chief of the Labour Party - Danish Labour Party – [*Danish name?*] er, and so told and um er he told him to get warning out to the Danish Jews. They had a year before had Russia on er their, their offices, like the Board of Deputies here and similar thing there, and where all the memberships list was taken by the, by the Nazis. So they had all our addresses, where we lived and so on and, er, yeah, so to send warning out, it was before Rosh Hashanah. They were, they started in the evening, so the rabbi, which was not the chief rabbi was taking in, into a security um where

the Chief of Justice and so on because there was a, a dispute with the, with the Germans. And why was there a dispute? - because there, there was making an agreement when the Danish gave up their sovereignty that, er, all police work against Danes should be done by Danish police. And here there was a young group of students who went into a restaurant and because the German soldier hang their revolvers in their leather holster outside where they were dancing.

10:12:59:06

Interviewer

Yes.



10:13:00:23

George Blachman

And, er, so they took the guns.

10:13:05:12

Interviewer

Okay, George we'll go through all of that again in a moment's time, but I just want to talk about this, this moment. So your father, there were lots of rumours circulating and your father managed to get a message to your mother with a code to get you out of the flat because the Germans, the Nazis had your address, and where did you go then?

10:13:24:01

George Blachman

We went in the, so we was in there. That was first time when I saw my father without head dress. He didn't know what to do. I've never seen him not managing like that before.

10:13:48:00

Interviewer

That must have made you very scared?

10:13:50:07

George Blachman

No, not me.

10:13:50:22

Interviewer

No?

10:13:52:01

George Blachman

I, I was still too young to,

10:13:54:05

Interviewer

So you were, how old were you now?

10:13:56:11

George Blachman

I am seventy-eight.

10:13:58:22

Interviewer

No, sorry, at this point in the story you were about five years old, is that right?

10:14:02:19

George Blachman

Um, I was six years old.



10:14:07:11

Interviewer

Okay, you were six years old.

10:14:08:08

George Blachman [*interrupting Interviewer*]

I was, I just turned six years old.

10:14:12:17

Interviewer

Okay, so you witnessed your father in a panic, not sure what to do to protect his family?

10:14:18:00

George Blachman

Yes. So, one of his workers said you can move with home, home to us. They had, er, a corner shop with two, two rooms flat connected to it. And so he, he was, he went, we went in there. And my father had also called his best friend to give him papers he has signed that he has bought the flat. If the Germans should come and do something, he would, he could say it was not Mr. Blachman's but it's my flat, my factory. And, er, so at least he could secure [?] he thought. When we came home from Sweden afterward, and my father went up to, I was visiting I remember that, um up to give them something, chocolate, coffee because that they couldn't get in Denmark for the whole five years, er he, he gave, he gave that first and then they said how much do I owe you for what you done? So he said you don't owe me anything. You cannot er have, have, use your time without getting paid. We have, I bought it, and showed him the, the papers, the contract and everything and it held legal water.

10:16:36:20

Interviewer

So your father had thought that he was securing your future by giving, um, permission to one of your family friends to look after,

10:16:45:15

George Blachman

Yeah.

10:16:46:09

Interviewer

the factory, and then he reneged on that agreement and didn't give it back? Yeah. So again, let's talk about that in a moment's time, George, because that must have been terrible for your family.

10:16:58:20

George Blachman

It, not so much for me,



10:17:01:18

Interviewer

For your father, particularly, though, because that was his living, wasn't it?

10:17:05:04

George Blachman

That was his living.

10:17:06:21

Interviewer

Yeah. But let's talk about when you were hiding in the shop. It was a Danish family who'd given your refuge, wasn't it?

10:17:13:02

George Blachman

Yes.

10:17:13:23

Interviewer

They, they presumably were putting themselves in danger by hiding you?

10:17;17:17

George Blachman

They were the main supplier to the German garrison.

10:17:22:19

Interviewer

Wow!

10:17:24:09

George Blachman

So I run around out in, in, in, um, the shop and then the, one of the German officers said to the lady I think you should take him inside, because I had blue-black hair. I, you could see ten miles away I am Jewish. So he said let him stay indoors and nothing will happen to me and tomorrow I tell you but tomorrow you have to get out from here. Then the next thing, my father started to come back to his self, and the next day he said we, we go up. We used to live; you got the map?

10:18:37:05

Interviewer

Yes.

10:18:42:02

George Blachman

Okay. And we go to Espergaerde, where we used to rent every summer, and go oou to the people and ask them to help us.

10:18:57:00

Interviewer



Were you aware of the danger you were in,

10:19:00:00

George Blachman

Yes.

10:19:00:02

Interviewer

as a family?

10:19:02:06

George Blachman

It beg, began to dawn on me.

10:19:06:12

Interviewer

Can you remember what that felt like to be kind of on the run?

10:19:10:17

George Blachman

Er no, I can only remember that I was tired after the train trip. It took, it took, it stopped by all small stations and everything, and I, to this day I never understood why it should stop because it was going to continue that train to Norway, through Sweden.

10:19:50:14

Interviewer

Where were you going on the train?

10:19:52:14

George Blachman

We were going, we were going up to Espergaerde.

10:19:55:20

Interviewer

Which was where you'd been many times before, but this time you were going for a different reason.

10:20:00:24

George Blachman

Yeah. Um but, er, we couldn't go from this central station because there were Russia, there eas, the German soldiers or whatever there was kicked, you have to pass through that, they put barriers up, and you had to pass through so you could um, er, be inspected. So the, the, the family we stayed by in Copenhagen checked out ten minutes further away there was no German inspection. There was only the main station er – like in Euston - to see it was the centre. And er yeah, they, they, the other station we could go into without any danger.

10:21:29;12



Interviewer

Once you'd got to Espergaerde, did you feel safe?

10:21:34:19

George Blachman

I, it is a bit wake for me. I, it was like a, you know, it happens your,

10:21:52:11

Interviewer

Well, you were such a young boy, you weren't really aware of it. So it must have felt a little bit exciting to be constantly seeing new things and, and being together with your parents?

10:22:03:16

George Blachman

Yes. Then this man who said I got tickets, the train was leaving in ten minutes, so we were sitting in the taxi and waiting to, to get on to the train. So we went in. My father went in front, my mother and me in the back. It was a long train that I remember - because I couldn't understand why my father had to go and, and not stay together with us.

10:22:48:15

Interviewer

Do you remember what they told you that you were running away from at the time? Do you remember how they prepared you for this journey?

10:22:56:00

George Blachman

No. This was, and so when we came in it was a German troop transport train, with 1,300 soldiers and so this I remember. And, um, one of the soldiers had his rucksack on the floor, and he said to my mother you can sit on this, but when we come to the station and stop please don't pull the curtain aside. You can pull the curtain aside when we're driving, but when we stops, don't pull the curtain away. And, er, that was the second time I was helped by a German soldier. It was not the SS it was the, the German soldiers, which,

10:24:14:06

Interviewer

So you were experiencing ambivalence with the German soldiers that, although they were there to try and make your life very difficult, actually they were conflicted and they were trying, some of them at least were trying to help you?

10:24:25:08

George Blachman

Yes. The - as I said - the German, normal German people, I don't think was, They had three years of bombing the country. They was perhaps a little bit fed up, their families and so on, and er so and also when we, Then we came up and my father went to the place we used to rent in the summer. It was like that the fishermen moved down in the basement and let out their flats, where we stayed for three



months every year. And, um, so when we came out up there, this young man who had guided us, he had his bike with him on the train. It was a, a journey of about 43 or 33kms - I cannot remember. I think it is 33km, because road goes out to Elsinore, which was 43. And so we went down to the, the family where we used to stay. My father want to ask him if he could help us, but he was scared. He didn't dare put himself and his family - understandably - in, in harm's way. So my father said there is a bed and breakfast something, a pension will you call it, and, um, he should, was going to knock on the door to see if - the season had closed some days before - if they still would like to rent the room above. Before he knocked, one of the fisherman's sons came and said don't knock there, move into us. So we moved in their house. They were Danish Nazis, so he didn't er want us to go to them because they would, We had a few Nazis in Denmark, but the, when the eviction of, of, um, to the Danish parliament was, has been there, you know, not one MP from the Nazis was elected.

10:28:05:14

Interviewer

So soon after that you got on a boat, didn't you, after you'd been shielded by that family? Can you tell us about the boat and where it went and how much you'd paid for it? Where were you going?

10:28:16:16

George Blachman [*interrupting Interviewer*]

I can do that. Um, my father paid 5,000 kroners for an eight persons rowing boat. We were going to be rowed over by the two fisherman's sons. I, I, understandable they needed money if something should happen to them, they had wives and, and kid. At that time 5,000 kroners was about, I would say similar to 100,000 kroner er in, in pounds it would have been, um in pounds it would have been ,um, £20,000 or something.

10:29:29:20

Interviewer

It was a lot of money. But nevertheless they were risking their lives.

10:29:34:03

George Blachman

Yeah. And so my father said what will, would they do if we drowned? So it's better if [*both of them youths?*] and he gave, he had a gold cigarette er box he gave. My mother gave her hat and she said it's not made for water. And so but, and then we had to waited to be told when we can cross over.

[cut for card change]

10:30:25:23

Interviewer

[...] what did it feel like to be on the boat? Was is scary?

10:30:29:03

George Blachman



No. It was er, like er, as a child you should explore some new things.

10:30:39:11

Interviewer

So it was quite exciting for you?

10:30:42:15

George Blachman

Yeah. It was exciting. I have got something to sleep on. But, erm, I was quiet, but I didn't sleep. I, so, my father carried me, it was in the words of wisdom, and we we we, my father was being told, move into the side of the road, because, then the, a car came through. It was a German car.

10:31:15:06

Interviewer

So you were basically, It was dark and it was,

10:31:18:00

George Blachman

It was about two o'clock at night.

10:31:21:09

Interviewer

OK. And you were in great danger because if anybody had seen you that would not have been great.

10:31:28:10

George Blachman

No, it was great enough because the Danish sea police has taken the security of us on. So we, er, we had to cross a road to come to the beach where the rowing boat was.

10:31:52:01

Interviewer

How many people were on the boat?

10:31:54:01

George Blachman

Eight, with the two rowers.

10:31:57:11

Interviewer

Erm, I I heard somewhere George, that someone, a doctor had come to give you an injection.

10:32:02:10

George Blachman

Yes.



10:32:03:18

Interviewer

Can you tell me about that?

10:32:05:09

George Blachman

No, I have not er, er, er, it was a short sharp prick. But er, er, it didn't work.

10:32:15:16

Interviewer

Can you tell me ab, ab, about that from the start, about the injection, because at the moment it's er, I'm telling story, and I want you to tell me.

10:32:23:16

George Blachman

OK. Er, er, er, It started on the afternoon. I run around and played outside and then the Danish policeman came and said, "Where do you live here? Come, we go in, say hello to your mother." So he said, "I don't think it's a good idea him running around outside." I was difficult to keep in one space. Now, the, then the next thing I remember is at the the er, er, about eight, nine o'clock, a doctor came to give me an injection so I should sleep and not, er, scream or anything. They didn't how I would react. So I got an injection. I didn't fall asleep, but I was quiet. And my parents must have been very happy that I was quiet, because I was known as a, a wild, a wild man. Now I, w, w, w, There was a new [?] on the street and we started moving to cross the the road. On it, it was the road that led to Copenhagen, from Elsinore. So it, er, in normal circumstances would be rather busy. But there was er, er, a rush going on because they had, that was the night when the, the Germans, erm, decided to take the Jews. And the Danish sea police, why they cover for an, an and security for us who should cross the road.

10:35:03:17

Interviewer

The Danes saved your lives in many ways, didn't they? They were very, very kind people to you?

10:35:11:03

George Blachman

They were, they, they were enormous kind. I kind of, that's the reason I don't change my passport, because I I'm loyal. They helped me so I, if I can make up on the numbers, I do it.

10:35:36:00

Interviewer

Because you're entitled to a British passport now, aren't you, cause you've lived here for so long. But you choose to keep your Danish passport, both you and your wife.

10:35:43:08

George Blachman

Yeah.



10:35:44:03

Interviewer

Mm. Erm, I understand why because they have been such a kind, erm, refuge to you as as a country, Denmark. Erm, let's talk about being on the boat. You'd been given an injection but you were quiet anyway. There were eight of you on the boat. How long did it take to go on your crossing, and where were you going?

10:36:07:08

George Blachman

We were going, There's an island, if you see on the map, between north of Copenhagen and Sweden, there's an Island called Hven, H V E N - E E N, I can't remember it, how it's spelt. Erm, and, er, there were aiming for. It took one and half hour. The water was like a mirror. It was such a lovely night. And erm, you had, erm, no, nobody sailed there. Occasionally, erm, er, er, flare guard. And er, it was, So they stopped rowing and we should be quiet.

10:37:24:00

Interviewer

This was a searchlight, are you referring to?

10:37:26:09

George Blachman

Yeah, yes it's a searchlight.

10:37:28:00

Interviewer

So you were very lucky, for lots of reasons, one, because the water was so flat, but also because you dodged the searchlight whenever it came. Were you the only child on board, George?

10:37:38:00

George Blachman [*interrupting Interviewer*]

Yes. I, there was two Austrian deserters, or Austrian soldiers, who had, run away from the German army and was helped across.

10:37:57:04

Interviewer

What would have happened to you if you had been caught?

10:38:01:10

George Blachman

Some were, were taken into the er, school in Copenhagen, or we would, were rounded up. There was se, .about seven to eight thousand Jews in Denmark at that time, mainly in Copenhagen. They only got 480, and of those the 400 came back. They were sent to Theresienstadt in the Czech Republic. And, er, there were the Danish, er, civil servant who run the country because the government and the MP's they all resigned. And er, so, they arranged with the Danish Red Cross that they could come down and inspect the camp. In that group, of course, was Danish Nazis,



so so, er, nobody said anything about what was going on.

10:39:34:07

Interviewer

OK. Erm, George, let's just talk about when your boat arrived on the island. It was an hour and a half the crossing, what happened when you got there?

10:39:41:24

George Blachman

There, then we got er, we saw a soldier with a lifted handgun, er, or, machine gun or whatever they call I, erm, and erm, my mother screamed, "Oh no, the Germans! The Germans!" So they said, "No, we are not Germans, we are Swedish soldiers. And then we were taken into the police station, which was only Danish policeman, because they have themselves had to flee because they started sabotage, and then other unfriendly things to the Germans. And one was on the hit list.

10:40:43:00

Interviewer

Did you feel safe when you'd got to the island?

10:40:46:05

George Blachman

Yeah, I, I didn't feel unsafe at er, er, er any point. I, I was, I would assume I'd been too young to understand it, what was going on.

10:41:00:15

Interviewer

But you could see that your parents were very anxious.

10:41:04:00

George Blachman

Yes, they were anxious. And I remember one thing. We got hotels to stay, and my father wants to pay. Er, he wants to have some coffee, we haven't had coffee in Denmark since 9th of April 1940. But the, the, the, the, er, er, hotel owner or whatever it was, said, "No, I don't want you to pay the money. It's not worth what's printed on it." So, it was all the Danish government, or those who handled their cases, who paid everything. And they, they Swedes, waited and kept their money til after the war.

10:41:59:22

Interviewer

That was another example of the Danish government being extraordinarily kind. So they had written all debts off with the Swedes, is that right?

10:42:09:09

George Blachman

Yeah.

10:42:10:00



Interviewer

Yep.

10:42:10:15

George Blachman

So er, the Swedes got their money, and er, the Danes felt, perhaps, they couldn't forsake all their inheritance.

10:42:29:08

Interviewer

At this point were you aware of what was going on back at home and what was going on in the Holocaust at all? When did you become aware of that?

10:42:38:08

George Blachman

Er, in, 1945, in April when the Jews came back from Theresienstadt. Because I had got a [?]. My mother's, sister- in- law's parents, was old people, and they were working their money, so they said, "Why should we flee? They're not interested in us." And then I I, started to to wake up in me what has been going on. I've learned a little bit, but er, generally speaking, I was protected by my parents from the worst stories. So, yeah, yeah, I got, I, I, I, I learnt to understand what was going on when I began school, which started in December, September. First I started Kindergarten - because Danish schools first start when you are seven - and er then after Kindergarten I started in first class in in, the Danish refugee school in Gothenburg so, er,

10:44:43:11

Interviewer

OK. That's when you started becoming aware of what had happened. But by this stage you had already returned to Denmark, hadn't you?

10:44:51:00

George Blachman

No.

10:44:51:12

Interviewer

No, this was still in Sweden?

10:44:53:14

George Blachman

Was still, we, we left Sweden, the 30th of September.

10:45:00:07

Interviewer

OK. Tell me what it was like when you did return to Denmark, and when you did start school again?

10:45:05:15



George Blachman

Er, we came, we got a message the 4th of September, the 4th of May, that Denmark was liberated by General Montgomery. Next morning at eight o'clock it was announced that German soldiers would stay in the schools they had occupied. And they, they, lift the little place they should have Red Cross armbands on. And er, I I still don't blame the Germans. I, I'm blaming the Germans, er, Nazi, and the Danish Nazis.

10:46:16:00

Interviewer

And I think that's a very important distinction to make and we can talk about that in a moment, cause we're coming to the end of your story and then I'm going to ask for some reflections from you, George. Erm, can I ask you about what it was like to be welcomed back as a refugee in Denmark? How would, how did that feel?

10:46:32:22

George Blachman

Feel, er at first I couldn't understand. We haven't done anything to get the erm, at every station is making me still emotional, when I think back on that. They er, er, all of that town was at the train line, to welcome us back home and ,er, we threw chocolate and sweets out. We hadn't had them for years. So, all on that train had sweets, er, and it was thrown out, and chocolate, and coffee. So, er, it was, it was great, fun to see like that, to throw things out to people outside.

10:47:43:07

Interviewer

You had been shown - as a family - tremendous kindness and humanity from the Danish people.

10:47:50:24

George Blachman

Yeah, absolutely. The students had been sent to concentration camps, wherever. All the Danish teachers had more or less fled to Sweden. There came, besides the Jews, about another 20 to 30 thousand people. They've done assistance. They have helped us. I have read how the nurses in one of our main hospital, moved out of their, er, places they stayed, so the Jews could fit in with their babies and so on.

10:48:54:23

Interviewer

OK. Erm, when you eventually got back home to your apartment, what was it like? Do you remember that? How old were you?

10:49:04:03

George Blachman

I was, I, I was er, seven years.

10:49:12:18

Interviewer

Do you remember what it was like going back to your flat?



10:49:15:07

George Blachman

Yes, it was, erm, very nice. It was, all my playthings were still there. Everything was er, There was only missing two things: my father's Leica camera, because and with note from the resistance movement, they apologised but they have to take it, they needed it.. And, er, let me think, one silver fork.

10:49:47:00

Interviewer

But apart from that the flat was intact, and all of your things had been there, and nobody had occupied the flat while you'd been away?

10:49:53:00

George Blachman

Yes, it's been used out or, several people stayed there two days, three days, one day. Er, er, er, they make safe in their way to, to Sweden.

10:50:09:07

Interviewer

OK, but they'd shown enormous respect for all of your possessions, so it was lovely to be home. Erm, can you describe the atmosphere of what it was like to come back after all the hardship that so many people had endured?

10:50:23:19

George Blachman

Yes. It wi, it was lovely. We were, my father was so gr-grateful to his friend. Er er and, er, it was first a day or two after when he went up and say, "How much do I owe you?" well the the, the friend said, "Owe you for what?" "You have been running my factory while I was away." "No, it's mine. I have bought it."

10:51:00:00

Interviewer

So you father had given permission to his friend to safeguard the factory so that the Germans didn't take it?

10:51:08:03

George Blachman

Yes, instead he took it.

10:51:09:22

Interviewer

That's right. Instead your father's friend took it. That must have been very hard for your father?

10:51:16:15

George Blachman

It was very hard for my father. I saw it. And erm, that's, er, it made a big impression on me because I, in that moment, didn't trust er, a non-Jew Jew. Because it, it, it



was a non-Jewish friend.

10:51:53:01

Interviewer

Yes, that was a very hard lesson for everybody to, to,

10:51:55:21

George Blachman

Yeah.

10:51:56:16

Interviewer

to learn. Erm, George, let's just, thank you very much for going over the details of your story, I won't keep you very long because I know it's very difficult, isn't it, to, to keep talking, it's very tiring. Erm, can I just ask you, for some general reflections of that period of history. Erm, you experienced the best of humanity and the worst of humanity. Where did that leave you in terms of the lessons that you learnt?

10:52:27:06

George Blachman

Er, what did I learn? I learned one thing, don't trust, that was my father's lesson. He said, "Don't trust a non-Jew. You can only rely on the Jewish." My father started to work in Sweden as a ha, hand cutter, to suits, but he got, er, er in-in-infection so he couldn't, have no more, could use his hands. So he became, there was a Danish club and he became the secretary.

10:53:17:00

Interviewer

OK. Do you still feel that to this day, that you don't trust anybody who's not Jewish?

10:53:21:21

George Blachman

No, I do, I, I trust them, but it is a thing you, er, perhaps a little bit, on guard.

10:53:32:17

Interviewer

I'm not surprised that's how you feel with the experience that you've had. George, can I ask you, at the moment we're seeing lots of refugees and some very, very, erm, difficult images of refugees trying to escape their country on boats, similar to the one that you were on. What does that make you feel?

10:53:53:03

George Blachman

Sad. Always still is the same old story. It's repeating itself. Why is it necessary? You you, nobody can answer it, but it, it, it's in you, and you er,

10:54:23:12

Interviewer

Erm, I, I'm going to keep asking you about this. I'll tell you why George, because



erm, I think you have a very unique perspective on what that must feel like to be on a boat. And, as I've said, because we're seeing so many refugees fleeing their countries now by this method, and, and so many people are drowning, I I just want to ask you again about how, how it feels like, to be so fearful of where you are, that you risk your life on the water, overnight, in the darkness?

10:54:55:23

George Blachman

Er, terrible, for one thing. And we had a - two days after - they came back home - the fisherman -they took back a a new lot of er, four people, er, or six, they they took themselves. And they all drowned because the sea was so choppy that er, they didn't, couldn't survive it. And er, so then, and I am sure there must be some right, people, who can see that this is wrong. this is wrong and they they haven't learned their lesson from, erm, Second World War.

10:56:10:22

Interviewer

To talk again about the boat that came after the boat that rescued you and your family. Everybody drowned, and that could've been you?

10:56:20:17

George Blachman

Yeah. My parents saw that in their eyes, when erm, er, they w, they went on board. That's the reason they took, gave everything away which was of value, because it's better for people to use.

10:56:46:19

Interviewer

Like so many people, you haven't spoken before, and you, erm, have the opportunity now to give a message to generations to come, to your great-great-great-grandchildren who you might never meet. What might that lesson be? What lessons have you learnt? What reflections have you had in your life?

10:57:09:00

George Blachman

Er, the reflection I have had is treat your neighbour as yourself. Do the proper thing. Help others while you can. You cannot save the world, but you can do a little bit. So, that's what what we're doing.

10:57:47:09

Interviewer

Do you feel that by giving your testimony today you are helping people understand that that is what they must do with their lives?

10:57:58:00

George Blachman

I hope, but I have very little faith in that. There's too many self-interest around. There's too many people who only have interest for themselves, and and you can't fight it. The the world is too big, and, and I, I, I, feel, I can, I am not [?] where I can tell other



people what to do. But er, in the, in the little way, if this can get one or two people to wake up, so why not? That's the only I I I can manage that.

10:59:08:22

Interviewer

You were very young when you went through this experience. There were many Danish people who helped you and saved your life. If you had the chance to talk to them, what would you say?

10:59:22:19

George Blachman

Er, I would first of all, thank you. I have spoken to two, er er, a professor in a University, I think he was medical, Professor Keeler, I think. I would just say thank you. What more can I,

11:00:01:05

Interviewer

How much of your story have you shared with your wider family? You have a lovely, large, very blessed family.

11:00:08:20

George Blachman

I have, I have, erm, not discussed it with them. I have, not talked about it as such. Because I felt in the beginning, also by my, my children, and my grandchildren, that er, it, it's more personal, er, view. And, but, er, it has become a view which I feel, we have to tell our, we have to tell [clears throat] we have to ensure that, not every German was a Nazi. They also lost their family in bombing. And and, er, what could they do?

11:01:12:15

Interviewer

What lessons do you hope that your family will learn from you experiences?

11:01:20:20

George Blachman

Er, er, Treat other people as you want them to treat you. That that's er, is my conclusion [Clears throat] on my life, and and and and, I think that's, It will bring a little bit better things without making a big revolution or anything. But give a little bit of hope. That's, that's what I feel.

[cut for card change]

11:02:04:14

Interviewer

Um, so George we're just going to recap a little bit about what it was like in Sweden. Er, did you feel welcome when you moved to Sweden?

11:02:11:04

George Blachman



Yes. Er, I had a great time, especially when, first I went, I don't remember that much [*clears throat*] from the kindergarten but I remember the school journey. We, we first moor moved to one place, um, near a place called Alingsås. It was north of h, Helsingborg in Sweden, and when my father couldn't work more we moved to Gothenburg, when he became s, er, secretary in the Danish club. There I., we started a Danish school, and there was a cousin and my good friend.

11:03:18:24

Interviewer

Did you experience any antisemitism in Sweden?

11:03:22:04

George Blachman

No.

11:03:22:24

Interviewer

Nothing. You didn't experience anti, any antisemitism when you were in Sweden?

11:03:27:04

George Blachman

Er, maybe my parents did, but not me.

11:03:30:00

Interviewer

Okay, and they shielded it from you if, if they did. Um, were there other refugees in the school that you went to?

11:03:36:04

George Blachman

Yes. It was a Danish refugee school. There was both Jews and not Jews. Er, I think there's a picture

11:03:50:22

Interviewer

Okay. I'll look at that later. And, and at that time, obviously, um, what was happening in the rest of Europe was horrendous, were you aware of, of what the Nazis were doing?

11:04:03:19

George Blachman

No. I, not before, er, April '45.

11:04:11:07

Interviewer

And what, what did you discover then? Do you remember the moment that you found out what had happened?

11:04:15:22



George Blachman

Er, yes. We went to a football match with Swedes and the Danish, and, um, there was a lot of Danish flags and Swedish flags and, er, we had a great time, and... and there you, when you saw people coming, there was not only Danish Jews, there was Norwegians, there was five Norwegians. They had taken 1,800 and five came back.

11:05:08:04

Interviewer

But do you remember when the details of what was actually happening, er, sank in?

11:05:12:11

George Blachman [*interrupting Interviewer*]

I, it begin, began to sink here gradually.

11:05:22:11

Interviewer

Thank you. Um, can I now fast forward, um, about when you came, er, to England. Um, when did you leave Denmark and why?

11:05:32:10

George Blachman

We left Denmark the 18th August 1980.

11:05:38:04

Interviewer

Why did you decide to leave?

11:05:40:05

George Blachman

Because I felt the Danish school system w, If anybody has said, er, Tony Benn was a right wing, that will be in Denmark, that would have shown him as the Danish saw him. He was up, left wing, and the school system was horrible. I have been, er, travelling in England for about ten years, and for me the most important thing was to get the children to have an education they could rely on. So I said, er, we're moving to my wife. We had discussed it many times, so now we do it because if the children are to have a chance it's now.

11:06:49:16

Interviewer

And how did you find integration into the UK?

11:06:52:21

George Blachman

Pardon?

11:06:53:06

Interviewer

How did you find integrating?



11:06:55:10

George Blachman

Very easy because my wife had a few, er, cousins who moved to Golders Green where there's a big Jewish, er, orga, um, group of people, and they, they all let us feel at home: both Jews and non-Jews.

11:07:20:03

Interviewer

And you've lived here since then?

11:07:22:06

George Blachman

Yeah.

11:07:22:23

Interviewer

But you've still got a Danish passport, why's that?

11:07:28:18

George Blachman

Because the Danes saved our lives, and, and, first of all you don't change passports as you change shirts. Secondly, I, I, I feel loyal to the Danish population. I, I, I feel like I'm not grateful. I have to be grateful, and I feel it's okay, and anyhow in the EU it doesn't matter what passport you have.

11:08:11:06

Interviewer

You, um, occasionally talk at schools don't you, George? Why do you do that?

[cut for sound]

11:08:17:07

George Blachman

I speak at schools because they don't know or learn anything about our history. Our, I mean English, European. They don't know anything and they're not told. They, they, how should they be able to bring for the next generation what's going on, or what has been going on, if you don't tell them? And, and that's why the reason.

11:08:54:20

Interviewer

There will be a time where there won't be people like you around to share the history. That must worry you?

11:09:05:03

George Blachman

Yes. But by then if you go 3 - 400 years back there's no people from that period of time, but if, if, I think the government of, have a great responsibility in teaching, um, the next generation what has been near, and what has been far away. You cannot ignore - you have to face to up it - and you have to, er, The young people ask



questions. Tell them, and though, and then that they can move forward [pause] Um, I've been through some periods where, which no, no, no children should have been through. But it is, has taught me that I have to bring in for, I have to take care that the next generations, er, [pause] um, [pause] We, we, we all, you and I and them, have a responsibility to bring forward and tell them what happened, not only the Second World War, also what happened today, in the [?], that everybody is a human being, and need a bit of respect, and so they think I'm,

11:11:45:23

Interviewer

Do you find it hard to remember?

11:11:49:14

George Blachman

Yeah, now. It's hard now, like I'm, I'm., I'm losing my memory.

11:11:56:06

Interviewer

I didn't mean that. I don't think you are losing your memory at all. I mean, is it hard to remember that period of your life? It was a bit of an adventure, wasn't it? Cause you were so young, but there was a very serious story that was happening behind.

11:12:09:00

George Blachman

Yeah. Er, it is, it is hard and, and the hardest thing is to see in, in revenge, let it go out great great, great German population. They couldn't help it. They have run into a Nazi [?] and they didn't have a chance themselves. And, and that I feel was wrong.

11:12:59:24

Interviewer

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me George about your memories of the time or how you feel? It's, it's a big decision to have taken part in this project for you, is there anything that you would like to say now?

11:13:15:02

George Blachman

I hope that what I have used my time on, been going through, will learn you - especially my family - that we're all human beings, and we all have to treat each other as human beings. That is what I would see come out of it.

11:13:54:03

Interviewer

And that's very well put, and it's a, a very, very important lesson for all of us. Thank you very much George.



ARTEFACTS

ARTEFACT 1: scan of a photograph of George with his parents

11:14:01:19

George Blachman

That is a picture of me, I am about, between two and three years with my parents in the local train station [...] Mm, I can still smell his pipe. I was a great pipe smoker myself.

ARTEFACT 2: scan of photograph of George on his fifth birthday

11:14:29:23

That was my five years old birthday [...] in North of Copenhagen [...] I was a happy five years old boy [...] was first time I had braces on.

ARTEFACT 3: scan of photograph

11:14:46:13

this is from the Swedish kindergarten in '43/'44 in, near Gothenburg. This is me. This is the teachers or whatever you will call them, and this is the head of the staff. [...] it is just before May Day. There were Swedes and Danes.

ARTEFACT 4: scan of photograph children sitting on grass

No comm

ARTEFACT 5: scan of photograph of children in a classroom

No commentary

ARTEFACT 6: scan of photograph of children standing with prams

No commentary

ARTEFACT 7: Reference details from Dansk Jødisk Museum

No commentary