

UKHMF TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPT – HARRY FLEMING

[Testimony: 1hr 30 mins. Artefacts: 1 min 17 secs]

A129_L001_0418GR - A130_L001_041866

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

This transcript contains copyrighted material owned by third parties. Any unauthorised use of this content is prohibited without the express permission of the respective copyright holders. All Rights Reserved.

10:00:00:00

Harry Fleming

My name is Harry Fleming. I was born in Vienna on the 24th August 1923. I came to this country by the Kindertransport – the children’s transport – on the 20th of December 1938.

10:00:25:24

Interviewer

So, Harry, we're gonna start with the general questions. The first one is whether or not you've ever told your testimony before in an official capacity like this?

10:00:36:07

Harry Fleming

No. I have not.

10:00:37:22

Interviewer

Why is that?

10:00:39:13

Harry Fleming

Because nobody's ever asked.

10:00:43:11

Interviewer

Isn't that terrible that you've been through so much and nobody's ever asked you to record your testimony? Before. How do you feel about that?

10:00:51:11

Harry Fleming

My story is one of a very ordinary person, er, in fact, a 15-year-old boy, um, who has been, um, made to change his line very rapidly.

10:01:21:17

Interviewer

We'll go through all of those details in a moment's time. But can I ask for your honest views about how you feel taking part in this project? Whether you feel it's valid to take the testimony of survivors like yourself and why you think it's important or not?

10:01:42:13

Harry Fleming

The answer to that is very simple. May it never happen again. Er, a story of each individual can be put into a perspective, meet one or meet the other. A lot of people who have really suffered which, I must admit, I'm not one of them. I have not been to a camp, a concentration camp and, um, the little suffering that I had to endure was, more or less, for everyday life that has changed in Vienna where I lived.

10:02:40:16

Interviewer

How do you think the experiences that you had as a young child impacted on the

way that you have lived the rest of your life?

10:02:51:06

Harry Fleming

Er, as I say, er, I was 15-years old. It made me grow up very quickly. You become self-sufficient. I left my parents at the age of 15 to a country who, which language I did not comprehend at the time, and, um, it j, just made me harder and, um, I grew up very quickly. I didn't have the, um, advantage of the, shall we say, teenage years that would be normal, or that I would have had the annexation of Austria by Hitler not happened.

10:04:06:01

Interviewer

So, in many ways, you lost a large chunk of your childhood?

10:04:13:02

Harry Fleming

Um, not a childhood, perhaps, but a youth, which is the next stage of childhood.

10:04:20:23

Interviewer

Absolutely. With that in mind, and looking back at the Nazis and knowing what they did to many millions of people and the impact that they had on a whole generation, do, how do you feel towards the Nazis?

10:04:40:15

Harry Fleming

[Sighs] How does one feel towards anybody that persecutes you? Persecution and, particularly, in those days by all-knowing people who you knew throughout your young life, um, it's just incomprehensible that people have become animals from, well, almost overnight.

10:05:27:02

Interviewer

So, when you reflect on what the Nazis did, do you feel forgiveness is possible?

10:05:36:01

Harry Fleming

Never forgive, never forget. I go back to Austria, usually twice a year. I still have a cousin living in Vienna or living in Vienna again after having been through many concentration camps. Um, you can't forget but let's be very honest, the country has remained the same. It doesn't change. The people in the country are a different generation. You cannot blame the son for what the father did or the grandfather. And that is my attitude. I, when I go back, behave normally, I've not, I must admit, had any problems in the last fifty years that I went back. Maybe, on occasions I get the odd excuse, if you like, what people did then. You can't trust, obviously, anybody who gives you a sob story. What he did but, maybe it's been true, not everybody in the world is bad.

10:07:28:03

Interviewer

And how much of your story have you shared with your children? You have a son and a daughter, both grown up. How much of your experiences did you share with them as they were growing up?

10:07:43:03

Harry Fleming

Er, my daughter particularly, er, has a lot of things to tell when I have told her my story, not always continually but little bits and pieces of the story. Um, actually it's important that she, um, keeps the story going for oncoming generations.

10:08:30:00

Interviewer

And that is what this project is about, isn't it? Sharing your testimony, allowing your great, great, great grandchildren to be able to access your story and understand the experiences that people like you went through?

10:08:49:13

Harry Fleming

Nobody can measure somebody else's pain. The story as it goes, er, stays within the mind and nobody can possibly feel for anybody who has been persecuted. Nobody feels your pain but yourself.

10:09:29:10

Interviewer

That's a very interesting comment to make, that you feel that no matter how much you explain your experiences, it's only until you've been persecuted yourself that you can fully understand the impact. Is that what you're saying?

10:09:43:23

Harry Fleming

That is exactly what I mean. Nobody else can put themselves into your place. No matter, um, sympathetic they are to the project or the facts that happened, er, nobody's been to a concentration camp unless they have been there.

10:10:13:11

Interviewer

You've answered this question kind of already, but, but again, how much of your experiences shaped your life as an adult?

10:10:26:06

Harry Fleming

I think it's made me harder. Um, I don't think it shaped my life, er, to some extent I've, what happened to me when I came to this country, yes, because that is a normal thing, from my own point of view.

10:10:55:04

Interviewer

How often do you think about that period of your life? Does it still stay with you on a day-to-day basis, or do you blank it and that's your way of coping with what you experienced?

10:11:08:13

Harry Fleming

That's exactly right. I do. I do not dwell on it. I'm not one of those people who keep telling everybody my story and ask for sympathy. That is not the way. If somebody in the course of conversation happens to, er, come across with anything that is appertaining to my past, um, like people ask, "Where were you born?". And I say "Vienna.". "Oh, why? That's a lovely city.". Certainly, it is a lovely city but, it's like everything else, it's a lovely world, it's the people in it that make it bad.

10:12:13:21

Interviewer

Would you describe yourself as an optimist then, or a pessimist?

10:12:21:09

Harry Fleming

Well, I'd rather be an optimist than a pessimist.

10:12:25:24

Interviewer

But you've experienced some pretty dark, um,

10:12:30:16

Harry Fleming

Moments in my life?

10:12:31:06

Interviewer [*talking over*]

Moments in your life, you have.

10:12:32:07

Harry Fleming

I have.

10:12:33:14

Interviewer

And I just wonder how you've dealt with that in terms of the approach that you've had to your life?

10:12:37:10 [*Interrupting Interviewer*]

Harry Fleming

You can push these things to the back of your mind and say to yourself, "It's water under the bridge.". A spoken word can never be made unspoken. Happenings in my life, certainly, we all have but, I am very lucky. I saw my parents again after a year alone in a new country. My parents left Austria by the last train and my father being who he was and what he was, talked his into this country without a visa, without anything; just a suitcase, his, my mother - his wife and - myself. That's all there is to

it. He, he was that sort of person. He made a new life for himself and for me, incidentally, at the same time. I was more than 16, and we carried on, one has to.

10:14:13:07

Interviewer

I'm looking forward to hearing a lot more about your father because he was clearly an extraordinary man and played a very important role, didn't he, in, in saving a lot of lives? So, we'll come on to him in a moment. Can I ask you again, about why you think it's important that people like you share your experiences for future generations?

10:14:38:22

Harry Fleming

It may, hopefully, have an impact but, um, it is not the young people that need educating, it's the parents and teachers that need educating.

10:14:58:16

Interviewer

Why do you say that? Why, why do the young people not need educating?

10:15:03:20

Harry Fleming

Unless you have the correct educator – tutor - you cannot teach. A, a tutor that does not, himself, believe what he is teaching is not a good tutor.

10:15:31:09

Interviewer

That's a very important point, thank you very much for that. When you look at the current political situation, and it strikes me that you're, you're very interested in, in what's going around you. When you see the refugees coming in from, from Syria and all the other places in the world that have difficulties, do you feel that we have learned lessons from the period that you experienced or not?

10:16:04:01

Harry Fleming

That's a very, very, ambiguous question, I would almost say. One side of me says, there, "There by the grace of God go I". Er, people are refugees today, what do we do with them? The masses, of course, have a great impact. In the 1938, '39, '40, er, there were not these, I don't know, waves of thousands of people. They were all, more or less, individuals who needed saving but, everyone is an individual. These people also need saving.

10:17:13:10

Interviewer

Does it make you sad?

10:17:16:17

Harry Fleming

No. I, I think I view it all is a matter of fact. They are there and something has to be done to solve the problem.

10:17:34:13

Interviewer

We will come back to this question again right at the end, Harry. But this is a chance with the technology that we're using to record a message for the generations that will watch this and will want to hear from you from a lesson that you might want to share, something that you have learned, some of your wisdom and experience that you could share with us. Do, do you have a message for the people who will listen to you, later on in life?

10:18:05:21

Harry Fleming

"Do unto others as you wish to be done to yourself.". That is the best message. Nobody likes to be hurt, so why hurt them?

10:18:22:12

Interviewer

Thank you, and very succinct and eloquent. So, we'll leave the general questions behind for the time being now, Harry. We'll move through your life, and we'll start with what it was like in your family, growing up, 1923, as a start and before the war. Can you tell me about your family life and, and where you grew up?

10:18:46:19

Harry Fleming

I grew up in Vienna. I had my schooling there and until the, er, Anschluss of Austria, - the Annexation of Austria to the German - um, our life was pretty ordinary.

10:19:15:11

My father had a business, um, which, um, unfortunately, collapsed at one time. He had another business and, um, Austria had civil war in the early '30s. So, guns and machine guns industry were nothing new to me. When I came home from school, to get home I had to pass quite a few, er, gun emplacements in the street. Unfortunately, things do happen, internal political things, that the individual has no jurisdiction over. So, we just carried on and made the most of it. Um, until the annexation when life turned completely, and there is a lesson to be learned.

10:20:44:13

People who, who were your acquaintances, sometimes even, almost friends. People you knew for many, many years, all of a sudden, turned on you like animals. It is incomprehensible that people can do that. But that, unfortunately, is human nature.

10:21:19:05

Interviewer

I think your views on annexation are going to be very interesting. Can we come to that in a moment, and before that, can you tell me a bit more about your family? Did you feel very much part of a Jewish community? Where you very observant as a family? What was your status in the community like? Because your father was quite a prominent businessman, wasn't he? He was a furrier.

10:21:42:12

Harry Fleming

Er, he, and apart from being a furrier, um, he - at one time - was a city councillor in Vienna and he, um, he was generally, the sort of person that stood in public life quite a bit. Um, because of that, er, he was one of five people who were summoned to Eichmann who was put in charge of cleansing Austria of Jews. Um, the five people - if I may dwell on that for a moment - were summoned by him to his office in, um, a very salubrious hotel which they took over. And I must admit that, um, when these five men who had various positions in the Jewish community, um, were summoned there, we had grave doubts whether they would ever come out of that building alive. But luckily Eichmann stood there or sat in by his desk when these people stood in front of him like little boys, um, and he laid down his law. He said he was put in charge to cleanse Austria of Jews and it is up to them to do it.

10:23:54:14

Interviewer

Again, Harry, I'm not, very, very eager to talk about your father in a great deal of detail. Before we get to him and the responsibility he was given and how you were involved in that. Can you tell me a bit more about your school life, the kind of environment it was before Eichmann summoned your father to see him? Did you start to feel the antisemitism? What were your experiences like as a young boy - or rather as a young man?

10:24: 28:10

Harry Fleming

Well, I was thrown out a technical college which I started at, um, I couldn't go there anymore, so I took a job instead.

10:24:45:08

Interviewer

Why couldn't you go there anymore?

10:24:48:01

Harry Fleming

Because I was Jewish.

10:24:51:01

Interviewer

So, can you tell me that experience? So, you were at a technical college and then what happened? What, what made it so that you couldn't go there anymore?

10:24:59:03

Harry Fleming

They just told me not to attend. And, unfortunately, I had to abide by what I was being told. Um, Jews in those days, after the annexation of Austria, became second grade citizens. Er, things happened, er, once my parents and I were in a restaurant and, er, a couple of storm troopers came in, "You, you and you. We want you to cleanse the toilet at, er, a meeting place tomorrow." So, they took the women, my mother amongst them but, I wanted to go with her. I don't know whether it was sheer bravado or whether it was in the hope that I may protect her in some way, not that that would be the case. And then they turned to the men, and the men were put

outside to cleanse and scrub the street. The general entertainment to passers-by.

10:26:32:07

Interviewer

How were you identified as being Jewish? How did they pick you out in that restaurant?

10:26:39:17

Harry Fleming

Um, I'm trying to reflect the restaurant was, generally, frequented by Jewish people, it wasn't necessarily a Jewish restaurant. Um, I think when people are around, you can pick a Jew. Not difficult.

10:27:14:11

Interviewer

How do you feel towards organised religion? You've got some quite strong views, haven't you?

10:27:20:12

Harry Fleming

Organised religion, er, unfortunately, I'm perhaps, one of those people who don't believe that brainwashing which, to my mind, any religion is, er, is a good thing. I do my thing. I believe in the Almighty. Er, I've never met him, maybe, one day I will.

10:58:25:03

Interviewer

So, did you fighting being, I mean did, was that something that you always felt? Did you fight being part of the Jewish community when you were younger, or did you feel proud to be part of it?

10:28:12:24

Harry Fleming

Oh no! I'm a proud Jew. I belonged to a youth organisation which, um, made me, er, fostered, er, but that particular organisation had bases in Israel but, they were the people that Israel wanted at the time, during the British Mandate, which was not a happy time anyway.

10:28:57:13

Interviewer

Okay. Can you tell me again, about Anschluss and the, um, your experiences of that annexation of Austria?

10:29:11:01

Harry Fleming

If you can imagine, and that a rather difficult task, if you can imagine people standing on the street corner, shouting that they believe in Austria while strong, and then the next day turn round and don't want to know anymore. I presume it was, more or less, self-preservation. People do things under duress which goes against their grain and when they do it, they become so, er, engrossed in it that they actually believe they are doing the right thing. They don't look back and say, "I didn't say that the day

before.". No. Today is the day, and they get onto the bandwagon. That is why, today, people can, er, st, plunder, murder a Jew, er, a normal Jew won't say anything against it. The police have no power anyway.

10:30:55:14

Interviewer

Can you describe what it felt like when that happened? To be on the wrong side of that - as it were - to suddenly feel that you are being persecuted and that something had happened overnight that made you unwelcome in your home?

10:31:10:01

Harry Fleming

Yes. That, huh, you didn't know what to expect anymore. So, you started leading your life in a different way. And this is where, um, after the, um, little episode that Eichmann told these people, these five men what to do and how to do it, my father became sort of, a councillor, if you like, at the office, the Palestine office, which it was called at the time. Um, and, um, he had to deal with people who were desperate to get out of Austria.

10:32:25:10

May I dwell on in, er, certain cases. A woman came to my father, and said, "Please, my husband has been taken to Dachau and I want to get him out, somehow.". My father said, "Well, let's see what we can do.". My father had, at the time, been given an honorary passport - a visa if you like - to go to Palestine. He said, "Alright, you have a husband in Dachau and a son, also, there.". The son was, almost, exactly my age at the time. And he said, "If I give you my visa to Palestine that will get your husband out.". She said, "Yes, we've got to leave within two weeks. And what about my son?". "Well, just a moment. I'll talk to my son.". That was me. He came to me and said, "This is the, er, situation. You have a place to, on the Kinder transport to go to England.". I said, "Yes?". Now, we've got the father and the wife out but, the son? So I said, "Well, let him take my place. I'll get by." And I did.

10:34:36:18

Interviewer

That's quite an astonishing gift. And for somebody so young to have made that decision. Did you realise how high the stakes were when you made that decision?

10:34:49:09

Harry Fleming

Indeed, I did, because, huh, I know it sounds ridiculous, a 15-year-old boy to become a steward at the Palestine office and be given an ID which many times, probably, saved me, um, one does, in situations like this, things that, perhaps, don't seem normal. I could have easily have said, "ah, ah, I am going on that transport.". What the point? I had sufficient ego, if you like, to know that I would get another place. In this life, it isn't always who you know, it's what you know and how to handle it.

10:36:02:20

Interviewer

Nevertheless, it is still an astonishing gift to have given your place on the Kindertransport, at the age of 15, to save another life. Have you been in touch with

that young man? You never, ever kept contact?

10:36:17:20

Harry Fleming

Unfortunately, people get lost. I don't even know the name but, um, there are stories like that. And I could mention another story. How does one get people out? During Kristallnacht we went to stay with friends of ours in a different district because we thought that we're in the second district of Vienna - which was a predominantly Jewish district - um, might not be such a good idea. So, my parents and I went to stay with some friends in, in another district. However, when the storm troopers started loading up the lorries with Jewish people they also came to the apartment of our friends, and they took my father, and they took my father's friend. Er, they didn't take me because my mother started making me out about 12-years-old and "You don't want to take a young boy like that.". I was 15, mind you, anyway there you are. My father was in there, in that, um, what used to be, um, army barracks and, um, he - with his ID - which I understood always was Gestapo-permitted, um, it came out the following morning and the coincidence was that my father happened to meet or see the storm trooper that took him and his friend away in Kristallnacht and he charged him cheek but, my father, audacity if you like, and said to him, "Did they take him to Dachau?". And my father said, "Yes.". So he said, "Can you get him out?". Well, he was only a storm trooper but, he had an ego as well. And he said, "Possibly. Why?". "How would you like an apartment?". "What do you mean?". "Well, you know, we live in the second district. We have a nice apartment. How would you like it?". So he said, "Well, give me the address, I'll get my wife to have a look." So, he and his wife came to have a look and liked it. So he said, "Alright. Take him out and you can have the apartment.". He said, "Okay." How many days? Two, three, something like that, days afterwards, my father's friend came out and the storm trooper got got the flat. But that is a story that happened after I left Vienna.

10:40:53:18

Interviewer

So your father swapped a life for an apartment?

10:40:58:00

Harry Fleming

Yeah.

10:40:59:00

Interviewer

Your father was responsible for saving many, many lives. It was a, a huge responsibility really, for him, and it must have been desperate, at times, who he chose to give visas to and who he didn't. Were you aware of the decisions that he was making on a day-to-day basis?

10:41:20:00

Harry Fleming

Huh, that was the thing to do. He was that type of man.

10:41:27:09

Interviewer

Do you know how many visas he issued?

10:41:31:00

Harry Fleming

Well, he didn't, oh, I think, um, there is an error there. He was given the honorary visa for himself and his wife. So, he only had one to give.

10:41:47:24

Interviewer

Okay. But, his job, nevertheless, was to help others leave, wasn't it?

10:41:53:05

Harry Fleming

Yes.

10:41:54:06

Interviewer

So, do you know,

10:41:55:02

Harry Fleming [*interrupts Interviewer*]

Advice.

10:41:56:07

Interviewer

Yeah, so what was he able to do to save other Jews?

10:42:00:06

Harry Fleming

Advice.

10:42:01:20

Interviewer

What kind of advice could he give?

10:42:04:03

Harry Fleming

How to go about to get a visa, a passport because there were a lot of things that were attached - in those days - to a passport. You had to pay money for taxes you didn't owe, they always wanted something to make it more difficult. There was a queue outside - to the office - and it was my unfortunate, um, situation to have an orderly queue, and if any lorries passed by that picked up Jewish men and women to shush them away or let them in and close the door. Because we were an office that was, er, Eichmann-sponsored, if you like. I know it's a ridiculous thing to say but, basically, Eichmann said he wanted Jews out, the office was there to do that job.

10:43:28:22

Interviewer

So there are a number of, of issues that come up with that. One, why your father stayed? Why didn't he immediately leave? He, he showed great courage, didn't he,

to stay and help others before helping himself?

10:43:43:09

Harry Fleming

That was Moritz Fleischmann.

10:43:52:19

Interviewer

And not just that. He enlisted your help. Apart from issuing and helping people in that queue, you also did a lot of the running around - didn't you - of the town and getting documents and, and helping? Can you tell me about that role that you had?

10:44:08:13

Harry Fleming

The Jewish Community Office, er, was not, er, burnt down. It was in the same building as the synagogue, the central synagogue, and they didn't burn it down because it was close on to non-Jewish tenancies and they would have been affected had it been burnt. Um, the office was about two to three hundred yards away from the, er, what we here have Somerset House, right? Documents: and it was my job, if I had any, um, papers to get or take, to go there from the office to the synagogue where they kept all the legal papers. The Office of Marriage, Divorce, Deaths.

[cut for card change]

10:45:31:04

Interviewer

it's emotional isn't it, it's hard?

10:45:34:05

Harry Fleming

It is hard, yes, er, but, um, I, at least, try to push it under the carpet. It's been water under the bridge. Forget it.

10:45:53:00

Interviewer

Do you think that's the best way of dealing with things?

10:45:58:06

Harry Fleming

For yourself, yes. Not necessarily for future generations, because future generations should be told what happened, how it happened but, they're not being told why it happened because there is no why. Basically, Kristallnacht is a revenge or was to be a revenge for the shooting of a minor diplomat vom Rath, I think in Paris, I'm not sure.

10:46:44:19

Interviewer

You had a doctor friend who said something quite extraordinary about Kristallnacht,

didn't he? About the blood, that he saw more blood Kristallnacht that he'd ever seen in an operating theatre. Can you tell me that story?

10:46:57:10

Harry Fleming

Well, when my father came out from the barracks where he was kept overnight when they picked him up, er, a friend of his, a surgeon, just said, "I've seen some blood in my time, but I saw more more this night in the barracks."

10:47:25:20

Interviewer

Did you father ever share with you his experiences of that night? Did he tell you what actually happened when he was rounded up?

10:47:36:09

Harry Fleming

He didn't but I think there's only one way to describe it. They were treated like cattle on a market. We saw many times, trainloads of people being herded onto, into, er, wagons to go to the concentration camp. We've seen films like that many times. The way they treated Jews, at the time, I'm saying treated Jews – mostly Jews - they treated others like that as well but, just like cattle. That's why many people died on the transport.

10:48:38:18

Interviewer

Going back to emotion. Emotion comes in lots of different forms, doesn't it? It comes in grief and happiness and all the rest of it but, it also comes in pride. And when you look back at your father and the commitment that he made to helping others and the sacrifice that he made and that you made with him, you must feel great emotion towards him?

10:49:04:15

Harry Fleming

He was, er, a very strange mixture of a person. Er, I was, perhaps, too young to understand, um, but, um, well, he was an extraordinary man. As I said, he was 4 ft 11 in but to many people he seemed a lot taller than that.

10:49:44:24

Interviewer

And you and he were a formidable team in terms of helping other people. You were a formidable team, you and your father?

10:49:53:21

Harry Fleming

No. he didn't regard me as that. Um, he certainly helped me in ways but, um, he was not very emotional towards me.

10:50:12:23

Interviewer

But he enlisted your help in helping others escape, didn't he?

10:50:18:07

Harry Fleming

Yes. That was one instance.

10:50:22:02

Interviewer

Did you feel the weight of responsibility at that point in your life?

10:50:26:23

Harry Fleming

No. No, I didn't, particularly, um, have responsibility. I took it. So be it. I, I think, I am in a situation that is far easier to, um, than a young man, same age, um, in Dachau. He cannot do anything for himself, so I've got to do it for him. And the easiest way is, get him out.

10:51:17:05

Interviewer

Can you remember the emotion of people in the queues because the queues went on didn't they, and the frustration must have been enormous for people who are desperate to get loved ones out and to get out themselves? Can you remember much of how those queues operated?

10:51:36:00

Harry Fleming

The queue, well, it didn't operate it was just there. Came in the morning and people stood there. They wanted to get in to speak to somebody. Some of them didn't know what they wanted themselves. They, um, needed something to help them help themselves.

10:52:10:13

Interviewer

By May 1939, you and your father's work had helped nearly half of the Jewish population in Austria emigrate. How does that make you feel?

10:52:25:06

Harry Fleming

May '39, I wasn't there anymore. I left on the second children's transport - Kinder transport I should say - um, on the 17th of December 1938.

10:52:44:14

Interviewer

Nevertheless, we'll talk about that now but, nevertheless, you and your father helped a lot of people escape what was, ultimately and most likely certain death. And that, when you reflect on that, how does that make you feel?

10:53:03:04

Harry Fleming

Do you know, I've never thought it about it that way. At the time I did what I did. I, as far as I was concerned, I gave my place to a young boy I didn't even know, so that

the family could stay together. But they didn't anyway because the parents got a visa to go to Palestine, the boy got a place to go to England. Whether they ever met again, I do not know.

10:53:42:02

Interviewer

But it is a fact, that what you did, not just then, but with the work supporting your father, you and he were responsible for helping save many hundreds of lives and you haven't thought about that?

10:53:59:14

Harry Fleming

Well, personally, I'm not one, it, it's difficult. I, no I haven't thought about it at any time because I don't look at myself that way. My father, yes, but that's his story. I'm only here to tell it.

10:54:29:14

Interviewer

But your father couldn't have been as successful in helping other people if you didn't do the work to support that?

10:54:43:24

Harry Fleming

I did what I did and then in the final analysis I left my parents behind. And now, being a parent myself I can appreciate what it means for parents to send a child into the world not knowing whether they're going to see each other again. And that is only for emotional.

10:55:23:02

Interviewer

Absolutely. To have loved you so much that they had to send you on a train not knowing where you were going, who you were going to and whether they would ever see you again.

10:55:36:14

Harry Fleming

That is very true.

10:55:41:07

Interviewer

And maybe it is only when you are a parent that you can fully understand how hard that must have been?

10:55:49:02

Harry Fleming

I didn't feel it hard at the time. To me, my emigration was I either go to England that way by the train because I made a vow to myself at the time: if by the 31st of December 1938 I do not get out of Austria legally, I would pack my skis and go across a mountain.

10:56:38:19

Interviewer

And as it was, on the 17th December, you did go. So you didn't have to try and ski out which probably would have been very difficult.

10:56:48:11

Harry Fleming

Well, some people got shot doing it.

10:56:50:18

Interviewer

Exactly. So, Harry, as it was, you were 16 at that point and that was the upper end, wasn't it, of the children who were on the train. So how did it be that, ultimately, you got a ticket? How did you get onto the Kindertransport for the second time, although, you hadn't taken your first ticket?

10:57:09:00

Harry Fleming

The office in, what I call the Palestine office, yes? Had a sub-office organising the children's transport.

10:57:26:00

Interviewer

And?

10:57:27:13

Harry Fleming

And I had to push them to get my name on it.

10:57:40:08

Interviewer

And once you had got it, a place on it, you actually organised it yourself did you, rather than your parents?

10:57:47:24

Harry Fleming

Sorry?

10:57:48:10

Interviewer

Did you organise your ticket yourself on the Kindertransport, or your parents?

10:57:53:24

Harry Fleming

Well, I think that one I did myself, yes.

10:57:58:01

Interviewer

You needed a sponsor didn't you, to be on the Kindertransport? Who was your

sponsor?

10:58:03:08

Harry Fleming

Er, I don't actually know who my sponsor was but, um, I went to Dovercourt camp to start with, which was an almost holiday camp and, um, well I was only there about [pause] um, a couple of weeks, maybe, and I was then sent to, er, a couple in, er, Wallasey on the Mersey, across the Mersey from Liverpool.

10:59:02:01

Interviewer

Let's talk about them now and then let's go back and talk about leaving. Because there was an interesting dynamic with them, wasn't it? Tell me about them.

10:59:14:18

Harry Fleming

Their object was purely, they were missionaries, and they tried to convert me. I don't know but, I think I must have played a hand in converting them.

10:59:32:17

Interviewer

It's a very interesting story. isn't it that, that they were promised £80 if they could convert you to Christianity?

10:59:39;16

Harry Fleming

Er, missionaries at the time - I understand - got money for every conversion.

10:59:49:03

Interviewer

But they didn't get paid.

10:59:50:08

Harry Fleming

Not me. Not for me anyway.

10:59:53:06

Interviewer

[Laughs] Right. Harry let's talk about, let's just go back a little bit. You got yourself on the Kindertransport. It was tight for time because you'd made yourself a commitment by the 31st December. Tensions and emotions must have been extremely high at this point. What was it like leaving? Do you remember actually packing your bags? Do you remember how your family were? Do you remember who took you to the station?

11:00:22:00

Harry Fleming

To be honest. No I don't. I do not remember the actual journey to England. I know, I do remember one thing and that is, on the Dutch border there were a couple of ladies pouring out some orangeade for the children. But, then you see, having done

what I did - handling the queues - when you're dealing with people like that that are desperate, you've got to have a certain know-how to deal with them. I may have been 15 but, maybe I had it, I don't know. Um, I don't want to assume that I did because I think it would be impertinent of me. But I went to Dovercourt Bay and Harwich er, for a school in Dovercourt. They were very interested and they, the pupils of that school did, um, a retake, so to speak, of the Kinder transport. Very interesting and very nice. We went there and the, the children interviewed us. There was only five of us, and, er, that was it. I went through the door from which I came to England.

11:02:26:20

Interviewer

It must have been quite hard?

11:02:30:01

Harry Fleming

Well, it wasn't hard it was a bit choky.

11:02:39:11

Interviewer

Of course. Back again Harry, you clear, said it was impertinent to assume that you had it but, you clearly had a level of maturity way above your years with responsibilities that you had been given, back in Vienna. Do you find it interesting - because your memory is so clear - do you find it interesting that you don't remember your departure and that you don't remember the journey?

11:03:10:15

Harry Fleming

May, maybe there are things that the mind automatically shuts out. Maybe you don't want to remember. I don't know.

11:03:27:07

Interviewer

Do you remember anything of who took you to the station? Do you remember your parents taking you to the train station?

11:03:33:14

Harry Fleming

Yes.

11:03:34:12

Interviewer

Okay. So can you tell me about that?

11:03:37:33

Harry Fleming

Well, we took a taxi, and all went to the station and onto the train. Oh yes, I do remember my parents waving me goodbye; but then, while they were waving goodbye, I already had something else that I had to do on the train.

11:04:11:19

Interviewer

And what was that? Looking after other children?

11:04:14:22

Harry Fleming

There were a lot of young ones. Some of them three-years-old.

11:04:30:09

Interviewer

There must have been a lot of tears then?

11:04:34:02

Harry Fleming

Not by me. That I know. I might get choked up but, crying is not my scene.

11:04:56:18

Interviewer

Do you remember what your parents said to you, because at that point you were well aware that you may not ever see them again.

11:05:07:06

Harry Fleming

Yeah. There was a lot of communication between my parents and myself. My father had a lot of foresight in letters that he sent me.

11:05:29:17

Interviewer

Do you still have those letters?

11:05:31:09

Harry Fleming

No.

11:05:32:06

Interviewer

What did they say?

11:05:36:06

Harry Fleming

They were, well, repetitive, everything was alright, and you know. They were not at the, um, address any more that, um, I left. They were at a different address.

11:05:58:16

Interviewer

When the train drew away from the station, did you think that you might not see your parents again?

11:06:07:09

Harry Fleming

Oh yes. But, then in those days - very similar to today - life was very cheap. I looked at some point of view that, "please God. I will see them again.". And they left on the very last train that left Vienna, within two or three hours. My father heard - through the grapevine - that that train was going and he and mother they left.

11:07:01:07

Interviewer

And it was absolutely right that they did have a chance to escape, having helped so many other people to escape. But your father was a real hero that he stayed until the last, almost the last minute?

11:07:15:11

Harry Fleming

Yes. That I can, he was a hero. Er, didn't get any thanks for it. It just happened.

11:07:40:07

Interviewer

How long were you separated before they arrived in England?

11:07:46:02

Interviewer

Um, they arrive, it must have been nine months because they arrived two days before the war; and I got here, er, I think the 20th of December, '38.

11:08:06:18

Interviewer

So by the time war broke out, you were working as an apprentice tailor, weren't you, in the West End? Is that right? When the war broke out that you got a job?

11:08:17:24

Harry Fleming

No.

11:08:18:05

Interviewer

No, that's wrong.

11:08:19:06

Harry Fleming *[interrupting Interviewer]*

No, no, no. um, when war broke out I was staying in a hostel in Ramsgate. And my parents arrived in London two days before, and came to Ramsgate and, in fact, we listened to the declaration of war standing outside the Kitchener camp in Sandwich, where we had a cousin staying.

11:08:57:19

Interviewer

Okay. Thank you for clarifying that. And that again, was another period of, of great turmoil but, before we talk about that, what was it like adapting to life in England?

Presumably you didn't speak the language? You didn't know anybody?

11:09:14:14

Harry Fleming [*interrupting Interviewer*]

I did by then.

11:09:16:00

Interviewer

By then. But when you first arrived how hard was it accepting the new culture that you were in?

11:09:24:03

Harry Fleming

Er, I, I was one of the boys in the hostel that spoke English better than the others. Um, I had lessons in English before and, um, that was the object of the hostel, to teach us English.

11:10:01:15

Interviewer

But the whole culture around you must have been very, very different to Viennese culture?

11:10:08:11

Harry Fleming

Yes, but I don't think that impacted on me. I just took it as it, um, was.

11:10:22:03

Interviewer

You just got on with it?

11:10:23:22

Harry Fleming

Yes.

11:10:25:19

Interviewer

Um, so do you remember when your parents arrived. How did you reunite?

11:10:32:02

Harry Fleming

Joyfully. When they came, I mean, the first inclination that I had that they arrived was a phone call from London. And I said - but I suppose anybody would have said - "Where are you? London?...Oh, gosh. Thank God!". Right, I knew they were safe. I mean we all knew, you probably don't, you're too young but, the situation at the time was pretty bleak. And, um, we all knew that war was imminent. However, that is just a personal thing. How do parents meet their son when they didn't know that they were going to be able to meet? Very difficult and you can't resurrect emotions.

11:12:07:12

Interviewer

In our discussions we focused on all the people that were saved but, there were a lot of people who weren't, and you must have known many of them?

11:12:18:10

Harry Fleming

I may have known of them but, I didn't know them. I didn't move in those circles did I, as a 15-year-old boy. My parents probably knew quite a few.

11:12:42:19

Interviewer

In your community, where you grew up, that had changed. the community where you grew up had changed enormously. It was dispersed around the world and then it was decimated that that what was left?

11:12:57:14

Harry Fleming

Yes, I shouldn't say this but, so what? Water under the bridge. There are many happy times for people who were saved. People can do things in many different ways.

11:13:29:12

Interviewer

You say that. You say, "So what?" but doesn't it make you angry?

11:13:34:06

Harry Fleming

No.

11:13:35:11

Interviewer

Really?

11:13:37:03

Harry Fleming

Anger doesn't s, solve anything. I try and, er, yes, I've had some instance, for instance when I went to Austria and I was given a story by an hotel owner who told me he saved three families during the war, three families by keeping them up in the room. Do I know whether that's the truth or not? I'll give him the benefit of the doubt.

11:14:20:18

Interviewer

I understand. Can we talk about the Eichmann trial? Can you tell me about that? What happened? What was your father's role in the Eichmann trial?

11:14:31:18

Harry Fleming

Yeah. My father at the time was in America with my mother, visited relations and, um, I had a phone call by the Israel embassy wanting to speak to him. And I told them who I was and that he was in New York at the time and gave them the address where he was to be reached. They in turned informed the embassy in America and

they got in contact with him, that er a forthcoming trial of Adolf Eichmann, and, um, they wanted an affidavit from him. And when he passed the affidavit to them, er, they said, "Right. That is enough. We want you to come to Israel.". And he said, "right. Tell me when.". And he went. I, in the meantime, got some nice phone calls threatening my life because my father went to the Eichmann trial. We've got Nazis here, in this country.

11:16:24:17

Interviewer

You were getting police protection for a while, though, weren't you because of those phone calls?

11:16:28:19

Harry Fleming

My father did.

11:16:30:19

Interviewer

And were you shadowed at all, by the police, just to give you some security? No?

11:16:37:07

Harry Fleming

I didn't, er, no.

11:16:41:03

Interviewer

Okay.

11:16:43:00

Harry Fleming

I didn't want it. Mind you, I don't know if he didn't want it either but, it was done surreptitiously.

11:16:54:19

Interviewer

Did you attend to the trials as well?

11:16:57:04

Harry Fleming

Me?

11:16:57:17

Interviewer

No.

11:16:58:01

Harry Fleming

No, I didn't.

11:16:59:20

Interviewer

But you clearly followed them, didn't you?

11:17:03:00

Harry Fleming

No. I didn't follow it at the time. But, I have at home, transcripts. My father was, er, in the witness stand for the best part of one day. Um, he said, er, basically that he met Eichmann and what Eichmann said the task, he was tasked to do, and that was it. I mean, court procedure takes a longer time than just saying it like this.

11:17:54:20

Interviewer

The reporters who commented on the trial were very complimentary of your father, weren't they?

11:18:04:22

Harry Fleming

Yes. They were.

11:18:07:00

Interviewer

What did they say? What did they say?

11:18:08:11

Harry Fleming

[Sighs] One reporter said, 'Moritz Fleischmann, 4 ft 11 in but, when he was in the witness stand he seemed 9 ft tall'. The papers say a lot of things be they're true or not.

11:18:37:20

Interviewer

He deserved that accolade, surely?

11:18:39:22

Harry Fleming

Yes, he only said what he knew to be the truth. The strange part about it all is that these people kill and turn around and are a family man in the evening. He came home from business and his business was killing. But, having said this again and again and again, it is people. Can you ever trust anybody? No.

11:19:42:13

Interviewer

Have you never learned to trust anybody because your life moved on after that, you had a family and a wife, and you've had a long marriage?

11:19:51:17

Harry Fleming

Yes. So. I trust my wife with money, but do I know what goes on her head? No. So how can you ever trust anybody? You treat people as you want them to be, but

never, 99 per cent, 99.9 if you like.

11:20:32:17

Interviewer

So, Harry we have been through most of your story now and we still have time just to reflect a little bit on your experiences,

11:20:46:09

Harry Fleming [*interrupting Interviewer*]

On the past.

11:20:47:19

Interviewer

On the past. But, but now, because I know that you were feeling a little bit ambivalent about talking to me but, now that you have recorded your testimony, how do you feel?

11:20:59:07

Harry Fleming

No different than when I came. It's only words. How can you expect me to blow my own trumpet, so to speak? What is it for? I can tell you little stories from somebody else's life who has been in the concentration camp.

11:21:48:12

Interviewer

And do you feel that their stories would be more valid than yours?

11:21:52:15

Harry Fleming

Indeed.

11:21:53:18

Interviewer

Why?

11:21:55:05

Harry Fleming

Because he experienced it.

11:21:56:23

Interviewer

You experienced something different.

11:21:59:11

Harry Fleming

But I didn't experience as much, by any means, than somebody like him.

11:22:13:10

Interviewer

But you helped to save people's lives. You had the chance to help, and you took it. You had the chance to escape earlier, and you didn't take it. You risked your own life to help others.

11:22:26:03

Harry Fleming

Well, that's, You see I don't feel that way.

11:22:33:11

Interviewer

But it's the truth.

11:22:37:06

Harry Fleming

It may be the truth. That's for others to say, not me. It would only, er, substantiate what you want me to say: blow your own trumpet.

11:22:52:19

Interviewer

No, I don't want you to do that. I'm just reflecting what you have said to me. I understand that you don't want to do that. I'm not trying to make you say anything that you don't feel comfortable with. I am just reflecting what you have achieved in your life. You and your father.

11:23:12:01

Harry Fleming

So be it. Maybe somebody will thank me for it some time, I don't know. I'm not looking for it. *[Sighs]* It's a hard life. We all have to live it. Be it good, be it bad, you have your moments.

11:23:45:09

Interviewer

Have you had happy moments in your life after all of this?

11:23:49:05

Harry Fleming

Of course. Many. When my children were born. When I got married - before they were born. Don't look at it that way anymore.

11:24:11:09

Interviewer

So, I said at the beginning that we would return to some general questions at the end. And I, again, you don't have to answer them again, at all. But, it was just, as I said to you in the break, you speak so eloquently, whether there is a message that you could send, that you could record now to the generation to come about the experiences of humanity, the experiences of what we are all capable of and the warnings that you might want to issue to your great, great, great grandchildren of humanity?

11:24:47:21

Harry Fleming

Treat people as you wish to be treated. If we do that you don't need religion, you don't need anybody to, er, tell you what to do. Be a good person and treat people as you wish to be treated. That's all. And I think that that should be a guide for anybody. But the question is do people listen? No.

11:25:35:03

Interviewer

And in preparation for this conversation, were there any stories that you were thinking that you would tell me that you haven't had a chance to mention? Was there anything that you wanted to talk about that I haven't given you a chance to say?

11:25:54:07

Harry Fleming

Not really. Do you want to hear stories that have been told to me?

11:26:04:12

Interviewer

Yes.

11:26:09:16

Harry Fleming

My cousin is two years younger than myself. He was in several concentration camps. The last time he saw his mother, she was stark naked, shorn head in the queue to the gas chamber.

11:26:44:12

Interviewer

Was that your father's family or your mother's family?

12:26:50:02

Harry Fleming

It was neither. It's a boy, his mother and my mother were best friends.

11:27:05:03

Interviewer

I see

11:27:06:19

Harry Fleming

and that was the son. So, we were brought up,

11:27:10:24

Interviewer

Together,

11:27:12:20

Harry Fleming

Basically. And then he went to America afterwards and, um, he, made a life for himself, got married, had children.

11:27:32:17

Interviewer

But it's images like that that are very difficult to shake from your mind?

11:27:39:12

Harry Fleming

Yes. That's right. I mean, as he said to me once, he was in one of the camps and they've got the bunks and his was the top one, and there was like, two in a bunk. He woke up one morning and to find the man he slept with was dead. And what was the first thing he did? Take his shoes, because without shoes, he couldn't do the work that he was asked to do and, therefore, they'd kill him. So, he had shoes to wear and do the work that the people wanted them to do. It's stories like that that may reach - I won't even say the hearts - but, more or less, the brains of the people that like to think like Eichmann. But, you know, I read an article in, um, the paper, I forget where it was, Göring the Field Marshal had a brother who got himself into trouble for saving Jews. saving Jews. The brother of Field Marshal Göring. That's one brother does the killing, the other does the same here. What can you do? And then the Field Marshal had to get his brother out because he was in trouble.

11:29:50:04

Interviewer

Do you fear that we will experience, as a world, something like the Holocaust again?

11:30:03:02

Harry Fleming

Are you talking about concentration camps?

11:30:06:23

Interviewer

I'm talking about, yes, I guess, or more about the levels

11:30:09:23

Harry Fleming *[interrupts Interviewer]*

There are concentration camps in North Korea, up in the mountains.
[pause] Nobody wants to know.

11:30:23:08

Interviewer

And there have been very many, sadly, recent genocides, haven't there?

11:30:28:02

Harry Fleming

Indeed.

11:30:28:22

Interviewer

So we didn't learn any lessons?

11:30:32:11

Harry Fleming

That's the world. People are people. Nobody knows what they're going to do next.

END OF INTERVIEW

ARTEFACTS

ARTEFACT 1: scan of an identity card issued to him by the Gestapo.

I have in my hand an ID issued by permission of the Gestapo in Vienna that you are working for the Emigration of Persons – in other words you are helping to cleanse Austria of Jews. The significance of those documents, er, they, I had to bring papers from the Palestine Office to the Jewish Community Office several times a day maybe erm and there was a machine gun outside and in order to stop the stormtrooper behind the machine gun one had to showed him this and he knew what he meant reciprocity.