IMPORTANT

The Association of Jewish Refugees
2 Dollis Park, London N3 1HF
Tel. 020 8385 3070

ajrrefugeevoices.org.uk

Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Archive
Ref. no:	RV267
Interviewee Surname:	Sherman
Forename:	Carry
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	1st June 1939
Interviewee POB:	Amsterdam, Netherlands

Date of Interview:	24 May 2022
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	1 hour 12 minutes

REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV267

NAME: Carry Sherman

DATE: 24th May 2022

LOCATION: London

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00] *Today is the 24th of May 2022. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we're conducting the interview with Mrs Carry Sherman and we're in London. What is your name please?*

My name is Carry Sherman.

And when and where were you born?

I was born in Amsterdam.

When?

On the 1st of June 1939.

Mrs Sherman, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for AJR Refugee Voices.

It's a pleasure.

Tell us a little bit about your family background please.

My parents owned a tobacconist in Amsterdam south where the majority of people living were Jewish at that time. My father worked in a diamond factory doing diamond cutting, and we had our living accommodation behind the shop, and because my mother was working, we had a maid who looked after my sister Selma, and myself.

And what was your parent's background? Where had they – they were born in Amsterdam? Where had their families come from?

Both my parents were born in Amsterdam. My mother's family – I did a little bit of research, they'd been in Amsterdam 16th century, even earlier. My father came to Holland at about that time, but his family came from Westphalia which is part of Germany. And they had quite a German name I believe at that time, and when he came to Holland, or when his ancestors came to Holland, they immediately changed it to a typical Dutch name. **[00:02:06]**

Which was?

Knop. In Dutch it's Knoop which is button, translated into English.

So maybe he was even called Knopf in German or something.

Knoop.

Yes, but I'm saying maybe he changed it from – who knows?

No, it wasn't.

What was the German? Do you know what it originally was?

I can't remember what it was, but – so.

Okay. Do you know how did your parents meet?

They were both interested in a game which isn't played here but it is sometimes, called *korfball. Korfball*. It's a kind of netball, but I believe it's peculiar to Holland. I don't know if it's still played there. They met there. My mum was five years older than my dad, and his parents were not keen on the relationship. So I understand they were engaged for ten years.

And the tobacco shop, did that come from your mother's side of the family?

I think it's probably something that they did between them after they got married. I don't know what my mum did before she got married.

And tell us a little bit about that area. You said it was a Jewish area.

It was just – I mean, it was mainly a Jewish area, lots of apartments, all apartments, and as was the – what happened in Holland during that time and I believe a lot now, a lot of the places are still rented. It isn't like in England where it's usual in our society to buy.

And what was the address where you lived, do you remember that, or do you know it?
[00:04:00]

No, I think it was Waalstraat, but the number I don't know. Waalstraat, Amsterdam Zuid.

And Carry, do you have any memories at all of Holland?

None at all because I was only a year when we left there.

So where do your memories start? What is your earliest memory?

My memories start when – not in the first few years that we were here because we first of all lived in Wigan. We were requisitioned to a family there. Then my father being as he was a diamond cutter, was requisitioned to a diamond factory in Bangor in Wales. And I've looked it up and it was there 'cos I couldn't believe – who would have a diamond factory in Wales? But there was in fact one there. From there he transferred with the same company to their

factory in High Wycombe, which was when we moved to Ruislip, which is in fact the same borough as I'm now living in which is a whole way round the clock and back again. So that's how we came down south really.

And what are your first memories? Which places?

My first memories?

Hmm.

I remember going to nursery school when we were in Ruislip. And I remember neighbours having chickens which they would kill because – to eat, which was alien to me [laughs]. **[00:06:02]** But apart from that- I think it was a great thing in our street, one person had a car, 'cos nobody had a car.

And when you grew up, did you speak Dutch to your parents or what was the language?

Yes, I was bought up bilingually, and in fact my mother reminds me or reminded me that I would say, 'Mummy, what am I talking, Dutch or English?'

And when you grew up did you feel different?

When I was at school- I didn't know I was Jewish at that time, and I thought I was different because I wasn't born here. In the junior school that was. Where I got to senior school, I felt different. I did feel different then, and then it was – as I said before, I didn't know we were Jewish, and it wasn't until I was about fourteen or fifteen that I knew that I was Jewish. But I wasn't at all religious at that time, but a neighbour of ours was going on a Hasmonean holiday and asked if I would go as well, which I did. And when I was there and we did *bentching* at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, I felt so comfortable and at home, it was just like a revelation for me. And that's when I came back, and I started going to synagogue and participating more in the Jewish religion. **[00:08:02]**

And what had your parents told you? What did you know about how they had come to England or the circumstances?

Not a lot. Not a lot at all. Perhaps they just wouldn't tell us, I don't know, but all I know is that we were here. They didn't discuss it at all. The first time I knew about my journey here, was when I went to an evening, it must have been about Holocaust, I don't remember what the theme of the evening was, but I happened to say to somebody, 'Oh, I'm a refugee. I came on the last boat out of Holland,' and he said, 'Oh, I've just read that story.' And it was from a book by Bertha Leverton called *I Came Alone,* where lots of refugees had written their own little story of how they came here. And it was after that that I got quite excited, knowing that I came on the Bodegraven and it was by that time when I was able to look things up on the internet and I did a whole load of research which, you know, taught me an awful lot about our journey here. And I was quite excited about it.

So what did you find out about the journey and the circumstances how you came?

I found out for a start, my sister and I always wondered how we got to Ijmuiden, the port, and I found out that there were three – there's either three or five bus coaches from Amsterdam that went to IJmuiden, and it was all arranged by Truus Wijsmuller who was a friend of the children of the orphanage there. **[00:10:17]** All I know how we got these buses is, my uncle coming to my parents' shop and saying he could get my sister Selma and me away. They were coming back in an hour's time for a decision. When he came back he said, 'There's room for you as well.' Now, as I said, the Jews then lived in a little enclave really, so we were able to manage to get about half-a-dozen of my family and we all went to the bus. Another little aside to this, one of the people who was on the bus could see her parents outside and she didn't know whether she should go and say hello to them and tell them to come onboard or stay on the bus looking after her sister. But she decided to stay onboard, and really at that point there was an air-raid siren and they said, 'Get on the bus quickly.' And one of the ladies who got on the bus quickly was an *au pair* who had come to say hello to someone who was waiting for the bus, and she was pushed on to the bus and that is how she came to England with her raincoat and a handbag. That's how she came. And the people that

she was an *au pair* with, never knew what happened to her because obviously she was on the bus. **[00:12:05]** That's another interesting aside.

You said half-a-dozen, so on your family who came on the bus from your family?

My family- was my parents, my grandfather on my mother's side, my grandmother on my father's side, my Uncle Eddie who was the one who came to tell us that we could get away, and my Auntie Jeanette who was my mother's sister. I think there was seven of us. I think that's how many it was. 'Cos my mother was one of six children.

And do you know how your uncle found out about it?

No.

Because I wonder, was he connected to the orphanage somehow?

I don't know. No, I don't think so. I have no idea. No idea, and stupidly enough none of us ever asked.

Because I guess, it must have been a very quick decision to make because there were just a few hours to prepare.

You know, I mean, obviously he came to England as well and all those years obviously that I knew him, we just didn't ask. I don't know why.

So you came in quite a large group.

Yes, yes.

And do you remember what you could take? I mean, obviously you can't remember it, but did they manage to take anything?

My mother always says, 'All we had was nappies for you.' That's what my mother said. So as far as I know, we didn't come with anything.

And you said they didn't talk about the journey, so they didn't describe it, or what happened or –?

No, never talked about it at all. As far as I'm aware, one minute we were in Amsterdam, and then the next minute my parents just got on with their lives over here. **[00:14:04]** That's how I envisage it.

And is your sister older or younger?

She's older.

So does she have some memories of the –?

She remembers landing at Liverpool, and we arrived on the night of the 19th, and we didn't disembark until the 20th. And she remembers being greeted by lots of bunting, a brass band, and the adults were given sweets or cigarettes, and the children were given sweets. That's how she remembers it.

So she can remember the – and the journey, does she remember that?

No, she doesn't remember that, but she remembers the sweets I think [laughs].

But you don't know, so when did the boat – when did you actually – when did the Bodegraven leave Holland?

Leave. It left on the 14th of May 1940, and that is another interesting thing because the harbour master contacted the captain of the ship to say he was capitulating to the Germans at eight o'clock. We left at ten to eight. We were strafed by German bombers on the way out, and there was very little damage, and the captain ordered everybody to go into the hold

because it was in fact a cargo ship we were on. So there was no – very little room for going to sleep in cabins or anything like that.

And then it took five days to get to Liverpool.

Five days it took to get to – as I understand it, we wanted to dock in – I don't know whether it was Harwich or wherever, but we were apprehended by a boat with British sailors on and because there were Jews onboard, they wouldn't let us dock. **[00:16:22]** So we went round the coast and there was a wealthy antique dealer onboard, and he had an unfortunate accident. He fell down into the hold and died, and we stopped off at – I can't remember the name of the port – along the English coast and his body was taken off. And I believe his wife and maybe a couple of other people were allowed to disembark, but the rest of us were not. I think we took on water and maybe some food, I don't know. And then we carried on our journey, and we arrived at Liverpool late on the 14th of June, and we disembarked on the 15th of June – no, of May rather, of May 1940.

And then from there, after arriving in Liverpool?

After we arrived in Liverpool, I've learnt since that we were all interviewed by, I presume the British government, to see whether we were allowed to stay, and anybody who was on our boat who was not Dutch but was German, was taken to prison. And they were interviewed there, and this lady with the handbag that I told you about earlier, she was just eighteen, and she was imprisoned and then she was I believe sent to the Isle of Man. **[00:18:15]** I don't know how long she was there.

But you were Dutch nationals, so the Dutch were not considered enemy aliens.

The Dutch were not considered enemies, that's right, so we were allowed to – we were then requisitioned to a family in Wigan, and then -I think I mentioned before- because Dad was in the diamond trade he was then transferred to Bangor in Wales, and then we moved down south.

What do you mean by requisitioned? So, you were told to go, or somebody volunteered?

Well, I don't know whether the families offered their services, or whether the government said, 'You've got room, you've got to take.' I don't know how that worked then, but they took us in as a family, the four of us.

And how long did you stay there?

I'm not sure. I don't know. I don't know how long we were there before we went to Bangor in Wales. My sister went to school, to nursery school in Bangor in Wales, so it couldn't have been that long after we were there, when I think about it now.

And what happened to the other family members?

My Auntie Jeanette and my grandfather, they – I don't know how they managed. I don't think that they worked. They had a flat in St John's Wood. After the War, my granddad went back to Holland, and my aunt, she became a housekeeper in a big house. **[00:20:10]** My uncle, he got married here and had two children. Eventually, they came to live with us when we were living in Wembley and then they went to Canada, because I think her mum was there.

So who –

And they've both passed away now, but I am in contact with my cousins in Canada.

So only your grandfather went back to Holland.

Yes, yes, yes.

And your parents, I know they were in Wales, there were other refugees. Did they mix with other refugees, or do you know anything? Did they –?

My parents were very insular in that way, in fact, they really didn't mix with other people other than Dutch people actually. Later on perhaps they did, but certainly for a long, long time they didn't.

And were there some Dutch people? Did they find some?

Yes, because they belonged to the Dutch organisation called Neerlandia which a lot of the things took place in the Dutch Embassy, and they had parties for children every St Nicholas which is a great, big thing in Holland, whatever religion you are. We went to that; my sister and I went to that for years. We always looked forward to that.

So your parents felt very Dutch.

Yes, yes.

And continued to feel very Dutch.

I think so, yes. Yes. **[00:22:03]** In fact, my mother when she was eighty she did go back to Holland. She lived in a Dutch old people's home and let me tell you, the Dutch Jewish old people's home, anybody would want to live there. It was like a hotel. It was amazing. First of all, she was in a place called Osdorp, then they moved to this place which was like a hotel. Absolutely amazing.

But she wanted to be in Holland, or it was easier for her, or –?

I think circumstances helped her to go, yes, and a friend of hers managed to get this, and it was really lovely for her. She was very happy there.

And you said your parents were sort of not affiliated before the War with anything Jewish.

Well, they really joined the shul I think probably when my sister got married 'cos they had to prove when my sister got married that they were Jewish you see. So, I think they had

[inaudible] from the synagogue in Holland, so they were able to prove – or it was able to be proved – I don't think they had the copy of it then, but it was proved so that's why she was able to get married in Wembley Synagogue.

And your parents joined Wembley Synagogue as well?

Yes, yes, yes. My mum didn't ever go. My dad went occasionally.

And tell us a little bit about yourself then, about your schooling and your memories of growing up. **[00:24:04]**

My memories of school. Not really very many memories of my school. A couple of strange things were, as I said, it was in the middle of Victoria and the girls' playground was on the roof which I think was probably unique. And when there was a royal occasion, we were told, 'It's two o'clock now, you can go and see the procession at Buckingham Palace, but we want you to be all back by three o'clock.' So, I can't imagine that happening today.

What school was that?

It was called Buckingham Gate.

And why were you sent there or why –?

Well, because it was in our area. We lived in Earl's Court at the time, and when we moved to Wembley I continued to go there. But, as I said, because we had our playground on the roof, whenever there was a fly past, we were able to watch it from the roof. There was once a full eclipse, and we were all allowed to go on to the roof to see that. So, it was really quite interesting when I look back.

But you said at secondary school you felt more different to the other children, to the other pupils than before.

Yes, because I felt different, more different then because I either by that time knew that I was Jewish and perhaps realised that the difference wasn't because I wasn't born here, but because I was Jewish. **[00:26:00]** I mean, whether that's true or not, I don't know. That was my own feeling.

And did you know any other Jewish people at that point or pupils?

No. Not at the beginning, no.

So what did it mean at that point for you to be Jewish? Do you see what I mean?

At that point I think it meant that I was different 'cos I hadn't really embraced the religion at that time.

And did you ever experience any discrimination towards you as a –?

Never. Never, ever had any discrimination at all. I mean, I know maybe some people did have, but – or maybe I just didn't notice because I was *blasé*, I don't know. I never, ever had anything like that at all.

And what were your plans finishing school? What did you think you were going to do?

When I finished school I really didn't know what direction I wanted to go in, so I went as a trainee at Marks & Spencer and after a while I went to a department which was probably the beginning of computers. It was called Hollerith and they did it with cards and things like that, and we had to punch holes in the card which meant numbers and letters. And then from there I went into the accounts department, and I was at Marks & Spencer's head office for ten years, and I left when I was expecting a baby.

And how did you meet your future husband?

At the West Central Club. **[00:28:00]**

What was that? Tell us a little bit about it.

Pardon?

Tell us about that club? What was that?

Well, West Central Club, it was kind of with the Evening Institute at that time. You had to belong to a group, and it was affiliated to, I presume the LCC who ran Evening Institutes so you could join a mass group, a drama group, or whatever other subject you wanted to. It started off – when I first went it was in Charlotte Street. Then they moved to Hand Court in Holborn. When I think about that place now, it may have been an old pub or something because there was quite a lot of room there. Played a lot of table-tennis there. I loved table-tennis. Still do. Still play table-tennis every week.

Fantastic.

Hmm.

So that was a Jewish organisation.

Yes.

I mean, it was at the Liberal Synagogue in West London.

No, it wasn't in the Liberal Synagogue. It was in a place called Hand Court which was in a little alleyway near Holborn Station. So that's where I met my future husband.

And what was his background?

His father was a cabinet-maker and his mum, she didn't work for a while, and then she wanted to do some work, so she worked in a tobacconist's for a while. And my ex, he didn't

really have a brilliant job to be quite honest. **[00:30:02]** He worked for a company in Hanover Street I think it was, I can't remember. And then my father introduced him to Hatton Garden, and he did quite well while he was there.

So also became a diamond dealer or –?

Yes, yes. My dad dealt in industrial diamonds, but Michael dealt with polished diamonds.

So your dad stayed in the diamond industry.

Yes, yes.

Tell us a little bit, because you mentioned before that he worked – the industry, the factory, they were producing something –

Yes, when we came to London he decided to do that, and at the beginning it wasn't so – you know, he had to get into the business, so he was a silver service waiter. My dad must have had so much energy because he would maybe work all day in Hatton Garden – I don't know how hard he worked, but he was there all day, and then in the evening he would be a silver service waiter.

What is that?

Maybe at The Savoy or something there, doing wine, you know, and that kind of thing. So, he worked so hard and if you think we came here in 1940, and in 1951 he bought – on a mortgage of course – a three-bedroom bungalow in Wembley, so that was pretty good going. Really admire him. Very hard worker.

But did they manage financially, your parents? I mean, they managed.

Yes, yes. So that's really my life story. **[00:32:04]**

And where did you then settle after you married? Where did you settle?

After I married, I first of all lived in Eastcote, then we had moved from there to a big house in Northwood, and then I got divorced and I moved here.

So you had two daughters.

Two daughters.

Yeah, so when you became divorced did you raise them yourself or were you – how old were they when you got divorced?

Probably fifteen and seventeen, something like that.

And did you go back to work after you had your children?

I didn't go back to work until something happened that I needed money for certain things, and so I went back to work at that point.

And how did you want to raise your children? What sort of identity at that point did you want to give them, your daughters?

I wanted them to embrace the Jewish religion and I just wanted them to be people of the world and find their niche and be happy.

And you were married, so did you practice Judaism? Was that part of your lives?

Yes, yes, yes.

And you joined the synagogue then as well.

Yes, yes, yes. There wasn't a Northwood synagogue then, there was a Pinner synagogue, and there was always a children's service because there were a lot of children at that point there. And I think they enjoyed it and embraced it.

That's interesting because for so many years you said you didn't know that you were Jewish. Did your parents ever convert? Did they –? **[00:34:01]**

My dad would occasionally come to the synagogue with me, but my mother never did. But I think they were happy that I did take part in the religion.

That's what I was going to ask you, what did they think about your journey?

I don't think that – I think if my father had lived longer, I think that he would have been very proud of what I've done, what my sister and I have done, and what our children have achieved, and grandchildren.

So tell us about your sister. What was her journey? What did she do?

Well, similar to mine. She got married two years before me in Wembley Synagogue, and they moved around a little bit. She had three boys, the oldest is Peter, and then Phillip, and then Raymond, and they have all done so well. Peter is head of education in Enfield, Phillip has not got one PhD, but he's got two PhDs as one does, and Raymond was very involved with the government when they were doing the new pensions plans and he's quite high up in the pensions field. They've really done extremely well.

And where did your sister settle? In London as well?

No. **[00:36:00]** They were in London, they then went to Reading, they were there for quite a while, and when she was on her own eventually she moved down to Devon because her youngest son was there, and she's very happy there. She lives in sheltered accommodation, and she's very happy.

And tell us a little bit about your children and grandchildren.

My grandchildren. My daughter's children, Amy, and Josie. Amy is a lawyer and Josie is in PR. And my daughter Rosalind children, Oliver is very religious and lives in Safad, and Archie, the younger one, he's just seventeen, he's still at school in JFS and he's very interested in drama. So I'm not sure what he will do when he leaves school.

And did you speak to your children and grandchildren about your past? Was that something you talked about? Do you find they're interested?

Oh yes, they know all about it. Yes. I mean, they've read the book and obviously they've talked about it.

And since that time when you met Jonathan Romain and found out about the book, did you start going more to events or to meet other survivors, or –?

Not really. I met Rabbi Jacobi and I met this lady with the handbag that I told you about, but apart from that – I was quite involved when Northwood Synagogue did the annual Holocaust Day because we invited all the local schools to it, so that was quite interesting. **[00:38:17]**

Did you ever speak to school children yourself?

Only when my grandchildren were in class. That's the only time I've ever done it. I've never thought that my story was as interesting as people who really went through very hard times in camp and everything.

I mean, do you see yourself as a survivor or refugee, or –?

I see myself as a refugee, and a survivor, of course. If you're a refugee you're a survivor.

Yeah, and how would you define yourself in terms of your identity today?

My identity today, [pause] I'm very happy with my life. It's lovely to see my children and grandchildren being such lovely members of the community, and my wish is that it carries on like that and I can maybe see my grandchildren married. That would be nice, but we'll see. And I'm quite content with the life that I've got now.

And home? I mean, do you ever go back to Holland?

No. I mean, I used to go at least twice a year when my mother was alive. Then I had an aunt who had been in camp, who survived her 100th birthday. **[00:40:02]** She was in Auschwitz and then she went to Theresienstadt, and she did the walk, and she lived to 101.

In Holland?

Yes, yes, yes.

And what do you feel when you go back to Holland? Do you feel Dutch at all?

No, no. I don't think I would go back now. I mean, I speak to my cousin probably once a week, once every few weeks, but I wouldn't go back now. I've done it, I've been there, done that, I've got the t-shirt.

But are you still bilingual?

Yes, but not so much now, since mum died. If I was in Holland again for a week, I would be fine, but if I'm listening to the news, I'm not sure if I could do it, but colloquially I'd be fine.

And do you feel attached to the language?

No, no.

Do you read books in Dutch?

No, no. I sometimes speak Dutch to my sister, that's the only two, the two of us. And my cousin, we usually start off in Dutch but then English is easier for me.

And your children? Did you speak Dutch to your children?

No, no, no. My older daughter is more receptive to it than my younger one. Maybe she had more to do with my mother, I don't know. But then neither of them speak Dutch. Now, if it was French [laughs] it would be a more useful language.

Have your daughters been to Holland as well? **[00:42:03]**

Oh, yes, they've both been. They've both been. I'm not sure if they've been with me. [Pause] Oh, I've been with my two granddaughters. We did a three-day tour of Holland. When I say – it wasn't a booked tour, it was where I took them.

Yes, and what did you want to show them?

Well, obviously we went to the Holocaust Museum. We didn't go to the Rijksmuseum because I love it, but they're not so interested in art. We went to see all the windmills in the special town, and then we went to the coast where they wear all the traditional costumes, and that kind of thing. Canal trips.

But did you go to the house where you lived?

No, we didn't go there. We didn't go there. I can't remember whether my aunt was still alive then.

What happened to the flat, or where you lived before the War?

What, the –?

The shop.

The shop. Well, I don't know what it is now, but you saw a picture. It's a cycle shop now. How long it was a tobacconist's, I don't know, I've no idea what happened, but I do know that it's a cycle shop now.

But you didn't go and see it on your trip with your –?

No, no. My sister must have done it because we've got a photograph of it. Maybe she did it. I can't remember. I have never been back there, no. I don't know why.

Maybe another trip.

No.

No.

I don't think so. **[00:44:02]**

And do you wish your parents had spoken more about their past, or how do you see it today? Do you understand their situation in a way that –?

I can understand that when they came here they wanted to embrace Britishness, and that was their past life and they wanted to start anew, even though my mum was forty when she came here. Half a life in Holland, and half a life here. They just wanted to just carry on with their lives. As I said before, it was as though one week we were in Holland, and then the next week we were here, and we were just carrying on as though – that's how I perceived it. My mum might have cried herself to sleep every night, I don't know, but that's how I perceived it.

And how do you think did this impact your life? The emigration and maybe the –?

Always grateful that I'm here because I wouldn't have been. I had an aunt and uncle – that's something that I didn't mention, but it's not a very nice thing to say. My aunt and uncle, my

uncle was a banker, my mother's brother, and they had been told that there was a plane waiting for them to take them to America. But because all the roads were strewn with debris from the bombs and things, they couldn't get out. **[00:46:09]** So unfortunately, the three of them, my aunt, uncle, and cousin, committed suicide right at the first few days of the War.

So, they didn't come on the Bodegraven because they thought they had another way to leave?

As far as I know, he was a banker and he dealt with a lot of the American banks, and there was a plane waiting to take him to America, but they couldn't get there. Because he had been allegedly transferring people's money over to American banks and things, he thinks he would have been one of the first to have been taken.

What was his name?

Can't remember. [Pause] I can't remember. It's just gone.

So your mother lost relatives.

My mother lost her brother.

Yeah.

Hmm.

And did she talk about him at all?

Well, she talked about him, yes. Louis. Louis.

Louis? And surname?

Louis Gans, 'cos that was my mother's maiden name.

Louis Gans, hmm-mm.

[Pause] So, that's my story really.

Is there anything I haven't asked you which is important?

I don't think so. I think I've added a few bits, but I don't think there's anything to add to it really.

Maybe tell me a little bit about – you said you organised – after you retired you organised some things here. ***[00:48:03]***

Oh, in Pinner Synagogue we had something that was called a Friendship Club. And I was very involved with that, and I used to try to get 100 people to the synagogue by car or whatever every week. So that was quite an ordeal. And I loved doing the Brownies. I was a Brown Owl. I ran a Brownie pack for a few years, but when I started working full-time, I couldn't keep that up. And also, by that time I'd done it a few years and I found that the children were having toys that I'd never heard of [laughs]. In the new era really, so that's when I decided somebody younger would be better to take over from me.

But it was through Pinner Synagogue?

Yes, yes, yes. 'Cos Northwood Synagogue didn't exist then.

So you've been here for many years in this area, Northwood.

Yes, yes.

Is this your home? Do you feel attached to this part of London?

Yes, I think so. I mean, if you think about it I've come full circle haven't I, because we lived in Ruislip and now I'm in the Borough of Ruislip and Northwood.

Yeah, so quite close to where –

And I like living here because I love nature and I can either take a bus into Ruislip where the lido is and walk round there in the woods, or else I can take the car to Rickmansworth Aquadrome which is just beautiful. And I do do quite a lot of walking.

Okay, is there anything else? You're not a member of the Holocaust Survivors Centre?
[00:50:06]

No, I'm not. No. I just found it too far to go to Hendon.

But you have visitors from there or volunteers who come and see you.

Oh, yes, yes, yes, and I do telephone some members of AJR.

As a volunteer?

Yes.

Okay.

Yes.

That's nice. When did you start doing that?

Oh, I've been doing it for quite a while. And I think somebody that I was doing, she passed away, so I've got somebody else.

And how do you find that?

It does me good. I'm somebody who likes volunteering.

When did you join the AJR? For how long have you been a member?

I don't know. A long time ago. Long time ago. Can't remember how long ago.

So the volunteering was always telephone support, or what else have you done, or –?

No, not really anything else. Not really anything else. I mean, because things have changed at AJR since the untimely death- I haven't been in contact with them. I don't really know who I've got to contact to get some more people to phone. Because I find that they're so appreciative.

Yeah. Yeah, it's important isn't it, the phone calls. For people it's very important.

Oh, they are just so appreciative. I mean, the gentleman that I phone I think has got a live-in carer, but he still loves it when I phone.

And how often do you call him?

When I think of it. Every couple of weeks. **[00:52:00]** I never, ever say when I'm going to phone again because that happened once and they phoned AJR to say why hadn't I phoned them, so I would never say exactly when I'm going to phone them [laughs].

And what do you talk about when you phone?

Whatever, whatever. The weather, television, you know, the news on the moment, whatever. Nothing special.

Yeah, speaking of news, has it affected you the situation in Ukraine, watching the television and seeing –?

When I watched it at first and I saw all the cars leaving, I cried 'cos that was us. [Pause] [Inaudible]. Those poor people. [Pause] I watched the television, those cars leaving. It was terrible.

And do you feel Britain is doing enough to help the Ukrainian refugees?

Well, from what one hears on the news they don't seem to be issuing the visas quickly enough, but I don't know why that is. I'm hoping that it's being speeded up now. But those poor people have got nothing.

Have some refugees arrived in Pinner, or here in this area, Northwood?

I think they have, yes. I think they have. 'Cos I belong to, on the phone, a site called Next Door and one or two people have said that they've got maybe a mother and a daughter and has anyone got a daughter of a similar age. So that they can make friends with. **[00:54:10]**

Okay Carry, have you got any message for anyone who might watch this interview in the future?

It's quite daunting, but I think it's got to be done. For prostority [sic] we can let the world know that it did happen, and it has happened, and unfortunately the world hasn't learnt. But I'm hoping that just a few more people will learn from my experience and from everybody else who has also agreed to what you're trying to do. And thank you very much for perpetuating it.

Thank you, Carry. Thank you. Have you actually – you collected the information. Have you ever written something about your own story? Is that something you're –?

Only in that book, only in – that's as far as it's got. I mean, I think in pictures and from those pictures and everything in there, I think it makes it very clear.

Okay. Okay Carry, anything else you'd like to say?

I don't think so.

Okay, well I'd like to thank you so much for sharing your story with us, Refugee Voices, and we're going to look at some of your photographs and documents now.

Okay, okay, that's lovely.

Thank you so much.

I really appreciate it and I hope that we never go through that kind of thing again, and that things like my talk and everyone who's done it, it will help. Thank you very much.

Let's hope so [long pause] ***[00:56:00]****. Carry, just to ask you a few more detailed questions about Truus Wijsmuller. You mentioned her. Can you tell us a little bit more about her because she was such an important person?*

Well, as I said in the previous interview, it was because of Truus Wijsmuller that we arrived here. She befriended the children of the Burgerweeshuis which was originally an orphanage, but it was housing at that time children from Germany who had come to Holland for safety. Their parents had sent them. She was an absolutely amazing lady. She previously had a meeting with – what's his name [laughs] – I've forgotten – stop it for a minute.

Eichmann, Eichmann.

Yeah, she had previously had a meeting with Eichmann who had promised that she would save 10,000 children, and she came away from that and she then – all during the War she helped Jewish people. **[00:58:01]** Her husband was I think a banker, but she wasn't working I don't think at that time. And after the War, she worked for the government and in her hometown of Haarlem, there is the most beautiful statue. I've got a picture of that. And it was going to be dedicated to her, but unfortunately because of the pandemic that meeting never happened. And we were actually booked to go to the unveiling. There's also a film been

made of her life which I have seen on a video screen, but we were meant to be going to the premier of that and been given special seats and everything. So that was something that because of the pandemic we missed out on. But she was an absolutely amazing lady.

Did your parents talk about her? Did they –?

No. Never heard the name.

Right.

I'm not sure if they knew that she was involved with it.

Because she didn't come on to the – she didn't sail.

No, I believe she came with on the buses and she – they wouldn't let them on, but she had a *faire-laisser*. That's why we were allowed on to the harbour. I forgot to mention that bit during the interview. It was because of her. They stopped us at the port, weren't allowed to go on, but she had this *faire-laisser* and a special card, a special letter, which allowed her to go on to the pier. **[01:00:07]**

Issued by whom?

By whoever was guarding the port. I don't know who that would have been. I never knew that. And she did come on to the ship to- and then she left it. They wanted her to go on the ship, but she said, 'No, I've still got lots of work to do here,' and that was the last that we knew of her at that time.

And she brought sixty-six children on to the board.

Sixty-six children, yes, but she saved a lot of other children as well apart from those.

And Harry Jacobi was one of them.

Harry Jacobi was one, yes.

In fact, I didn't ask you, so maybe just to ask you, you said the au pair girl, what was her name?

I don't know. I don't know.

But she was a Jewish girl.

Yes, yes, yes. I mean – I can't remember, no, I don't think I knew her name.

There must be a list of passengers probably somewhere.

Somewhere probably.

Yeah.

I did ask. I knew somebody who lived up north, and I asked them if they could get from the Bodegraven a list of passengers, but I don't know whether they did, but I've lost contact with them. So, I was never able to find out. And the little hut where we all allegedly interviewed and processed was bombed, so there was nothing left of that little hut.

Well, we interviewed another family who like your family came on the SS Bodegraven as a family.

Sorry?

We interviewed somebody called Ralph Kohn who came –

Oh, yes, yes.

With his family.

Yes, that's right.

Who was also a passenger on the boat, as a boy? **[01:02:00]**

Yes, that's right. I was at a meeting where I met his wife.

Zahava.

Yes.

Yeah.

And I told her, and she was so pleased to meet someone who had been on the same boat.

Yes, we interviewed her as well. She's in our archive as well.

Where was she from? From Germany?

Yeah.

Hmm.

Yeah.

Yes, I can't remember. She must have given the talk, and I went up to her and I – oh, no. I heard it. Was she interviewed on radio?

Possibly.

On the radio, where you choose your records. *Desert Island Discs.* Yes. She was interviewed on *Desert Island Discs*, and I was listening, and 'the Bodegraven,' and my ears pricked up obviously [laughs]. That's when I first heard of her, and then I went to a meeting where she was, and she was so pleased to meet somebody who'd been on the boat.

Okay, so you think Truus Wijsmuller needs more recognition?

Sorry?

Truus Wijsmuller needs more recognition do you think, more recognition? More people should know about her story.

I think so. She was just an angel. As I said, there's the – there's also in – I don't know which park in Holland, the Noorderpark in Amsterdam? I don't know which – there's a statue of her there as well. That is just a facial one, but the one in Haarlem is quite an interesting one because I think it's all children huddled together. And I think lots of people have been there and put their flags on, or messages on, so it's really there for pertuity [sic].

And do you think that that boat wouldn't have sailed without her, without her efforts? The SS Bodegraven? **[01:04:00]**

I think it would have sailed. I don't know where it would have gone. Maybe it wouldn't have sailed, I don't know. That's not anything that I've ever thought of. Whether it was going to sail anyhow, I don't know. It's a good question that [laughs].

I have actually one last question for you which I didn't ask before. How do you think your life would have been if you hadn't been forced to emigrate? If you'd stayed in Holland. If your family had stayed. I mean, without Hitler.

Without Hitler?

Yeah.

I think it would have been completely different. Because of the way my life went, I was able to embrace Judaism and that's been quite an important part of my life, and I don't think I would have done had I been there. But I would have been nurtured and loved by lots and lots of family, which obviously for reasons, I wasn't. 'Cos we were a very close family. My mother's family were very, very close in Holland. My dad was an only child so, you know, he loved my mother's family.

So you would have been part of a much bigger family –

Yes, yes, yes.

Than being here.

Which I kind of miss. When people talk about cousins. 'I'm going to my cousin today,' or whatever, I do miss that.

Yeah, like so many other refugees who didn't have big families.

Well, some of them came on their own. They had nobody. So I'm lucky to have had what I have got.

Okay Carry.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.

Thank you again. **[01:06:01]**

Thank you, and I hope that all that we've talked about will be remembered for a long, long time, because it's important that people know of the hardships we went through and how our loss has affected our lives.

Yeah.

Thank you.

Thank you [pause]. Yes please.

Right. This picture is of my grandfather on my mother's side. He lived to a ripe old age. He was about ninety-eight when he died. He did come to England with us on our journey in 1940. The other picture is –

Hold on. Not yet. What's his name?

Hartog. Which probably translates as Harold, and the surname is Gans.

And he went back to Amsterdam after the War.

He went back to Amsterdam after the War and lived in a Jewish home. This is a picture of my grandma, Caroline. She died in 1918 and my mother always said she died of a broken heart because her daughter had died of the flu epidemic which was going around at that time.

Yes, please. Who's in this photo? **[01:08:01]**

This is a picture taken – the only picture I've got of my parents with me as a baby in the pram, and my sister in front of my dad.

And when was it taken roughly?

[Pause] I would have thought probably at the end of 1939/beginning of 1940.

In Amsterdam?

In Amsterdam.

Thank you. Yes, please.

This is a picture taken in the ‘30s and in the middle of the picture is my father who has got a boater on, and my mother is standing next to him on his right.

This is a picture of my children.

No, it’s you.

No.

It’s you and your sister.

Oh, sorry. Oh, yes. Sorry. This is a picture of my sister Selma and myself, and I think I must have been about four years of age at that point.

And where would it be? In England?

We would have been in London at that time, yes.

Thank you.

This is a lovely photograph of my mother Rosette, my father Abraham, my sister Selma, and myself Carry, and I think I was probably about eight years old at that time.

And where?

In London. This is one of my favourite photographs of my two girls. Rosalind's wedding and Suzanne being a bridesmaid. Two very happy young ladies. This is a picture of my parents, Rosette, and Abraham Knop. **[01:10:06]** It would have been taken at the Imperial Hotel in Torquay at a Christmas because they booked to go there every year. They absolutely loved going there, and you had to book it from one year to the next because it was so select. But they loved it.

Thank you.

Right, this is a picture taken at Josie's bat mitzvah and from left to right it's Oliver, David, Carry, that's me, Amy, Graham, Archie, Josie, Suzanne, and Rosalind.

And where was it taken?

It was taken at Josie's bat mitzvah.

2011.

2011.

Where? In London?

Her bat mitzvah would have been at Pinner Synagogue.

Okay. Yes, please.

This is a picture taken in Amsterdam of my parent's shop which was a tobacconist. It was probably taken in the 1930s. It was Amsterdam South. It was called Waalstraat. On the corner of the Waalstraat and the Oetewalerstraat.

Yes please.

This is a picture of SS Bodegraven which is the boat which we left Holland on the 14th of May 1940. Arriving in England in Liverpool on the 20th of May 1940. So we travelled all round the British coast. **[01:12:00]**

Thank you.

This is a picture of the children who were in the Burgerweeshuis orphanage, waiting to come to England, and it was given to me by Harry Jacobi.

Thank you.

This is a picture, again given to me by Harry Jacobi, of the children waving and being happy as we arrive in England.

This is a picture of my parent's shop which you saw a picture of taken in the late 1930s. This is a modern-day picture and as you can see, it's no longer a tobacconist, but it's now a cycle shop.

And the address?

It's on the corner of Oetewalerstraat and – I can't remember, sorry. Have to stop that for a minute. I'll just say on the corner of Oetewalerstraat because I can't remember that one.

Carry, thank you so much for showing us the photographs and telling us your story.

It's been a pleasure, and I hope that we never have go anything through that again, and I hope people will enjoy hearing my story even though it's got sadness, but there's lots of happiness there as well. Thank you very much.

Thank you.

[End of transcript]