

UKHMF TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPT – WILLIE NAGEL

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10:00:00:00

Willie Nagel

My name is William Nagel. I was born on 17th January 1925 in Czernowitz, Romania and we escaped the war on 17th September 1939 when the Russians invaded Poland. My father decided to leave that night to Palestine.

[fade to black and back up]

10:00:30:24

Interviewer

so I asked you whether or not you brought anybody with you and you said that you've actually,

10:00:35:04

Willie Nagel

I am my own cousin. If you don't know why, my father married his niece, the daughter of his brother. The age, his brother was 23 years older than him, but it was his niece, so when I applied for become British when I studied at Cambridge, the man from Scotland Yard who came to interview me asked me what is the maiden name of your mother, Nagel. He asked me again, and he said what was her maiden name and I explained to him that my father had married his niece, so he said to me you're illegitimate. To which I replied I will prove to you you're wrong, which I did because according to the laws of Austria, Hungary and of the Jewish law that was the nearest agreeable relationship permissible. He apologised and that was my greatest distraction to take him to the Cambridge Union where he, a native of Cambridge, had never had the chance to go.

10:01:45:05

Interviewer

That's a lovely story, fantastic. So, you're not alone 'cause you've brought your cousin and you are your own cousin. Perfect.

10:01:51:22

Willie Nagel

I speak to myself don't I? Don't take it the wrong way,

10:01:56:20

Interviewer

Okay, so we are now going to start the interview, er, with a question that I know the answer to, but we just need to record it about whether or not you've ever recorded officially your testimony, your story before?

10:02:11:14

Willie Nagel

No, No.

10:02:12:13

Interviewer

Why? Why?

10:02:14:11

Willie Nagel

Didn't know, nobody asked me.

10:02:17:24

Interviewer

So now that you have been asked and you are taking part in this project, why do you think it's important to record your testimony and your experiences?

10:02:29:23

Willie Nagel

It's not for me to say why. It's for you, based on the facts that you know to decide whether I am eligible or not.

10:02:38:03

Interviewer

It's not about the eligibility because of course you are, you know, you're very, very important to us.

10:02:42:02

Willie Nagel [*interrupting Interviewer*]

But you asked me a question, I don't know the, I don't know the way you think but in any case I am here.

10:02:51:13

Interviewer

So, I guess the question more is about the principles of the project. Why do you think it's important to record testimony, um, for future generations?

10:03:01:00

Willie Nagel

Because every story of the 93 that you have heard has a story to tell. I'm not a survivor. I'm an escaper and, and it, it, and I was very lucky in my father who had, and here I start to tell you my story, yes?

10:03:22:08

Interviewer

Let's go, let's just answer a few more general questions if you don't mind. So you feel um, that it's important to record all sorts of stories for future generations?

10:03:32:11

Willie Nagel

Yes because must know that such situations can happen again in different shape and form in order if somebody cares to read it and to know that, er, the general, um, the general reaction to certain emergencies are very often diluted or made an exception by some people who've got vision. I'm not claiming the vision, it's my father who had the vision.

10:04:05:09

Interviewer

Do you feel um, that something similar could happen again?

10:04:10:17

Willie Nagel

I do. Unfortunately I do. That is, I do because you look around, you've had many other holocausts following the big one, the Jews, in Africa and other places. Before that, you know, in Armenia, the Turks but that was, it is. The Arabs in my opinion always like to kill one another because they, they did that before. So in answer to your question, I hope it's not going to happen but in economics instability, it always as you can see now happens in Austria. You've got the right-wing coming to power. It can happen in many other places and that means war, that means destruction, that means killing.

10:05:02:05

Interviewer

Do you feel that we've learned any lessons from the experiences that your family went through?

10:5:10:02

Willie Nagel

Well, I can't, it certainly was well to hope, whether it will or not I wouldn't like to gauge, but to have to do everything possible not to forget. To forgive, I understand but not to forget; and that's why I see this memorial, er, the Holocaust memorial and the Holocaust studies are very important.

10:05:43:10

Interviewer

Can you forgive? Can you forgive? Can you forgive?

10:05:49:07

Willie Nagel

I did my best to forgive because (a), I was not a direct victim, number one, as I told you earlier. Number two, um, it's no point carry. I had, I had a cousin who, who was all his family was killed in concentration camp and we used to spend every summer together and he survived it. Then he became, his name will tell you in a moment, became the most er, widely acclaimed poet the German language in Germany. His name was Paul Celan. I don't know if you, in Germany every child knows his name. Paul Celan and what did he write? He wrote about war. He wrote about the Holocaust. He wrote about the gloom and doom, and he became very, very feted. And that fellow had two sides. He was in touch with me constantly. Two sides. He was suffering obviously from the fact he was very close to his family; they were all killed. But in Germany - it's very strange - he became the best poet in the language of his oppressors. He was treated like a king. Then he married a non-Jewish woman who was a terrible witch and, er, he was a bon-viveur. He lived in Paris as well. And they had a child and used to come regularly to London to visit me and another cousin of mine here. Regularly. And then after the first visit to Israel where he met many relations, he went back to Paris and threw himself in the river. After all he had achieved. You can't - please find out - unbelievable fame. Every president I've met, or minister or orderly German knows about this name.

10:08:15:01

And there was another similar fellow like that in Italy, what's his name? Ah, who, similarly survived the Holocaust. He became the biggest writer in the Italian language. When Paul Celan committed suicide, he said how dare he commit suicide? He, who has escaped death and had become so well known in the country of his oppressors. How dare he? But the same Primo Levi committed suicide nine months later.

10:08:58:08

Interviewer

Um, you said a moment ago that you are not a survivor, that you're an escapee?

10:09:04:14

Willie Nagel

Yes, because my father had the vision to leave. I was not in concentration camp, and I was not at the time when they were established. You must, shall I tell you the story about my father? How it came to escape?

10:09:18:23

Interviewer

Yeah, but I'm going to take you through all of that in a minute. Just a couple more general questions. I just wanted to ask essentially, um, do people call you William or Willie?

10:09:28:03

Willie Nagel

Willie.

10:09:28:16

Interviewer

Willie.

10:09:29:10

Willie Nagel

In Germany they call me Wilhelm.

10:09:31:01

Interviewer

Wilhelm.

10:09:32:19

Willie Nagel

Here they call me William but that has become Willie.

10:09:35:05

Interviewer

But I can call you Willie?

10:09:36:12

Willie Nagel

Yes of course, better even Will.

10:09:39:02

Interviewer

Will, okay.

10:09:40:20

Willie Nagel

Nobody every did.

10:09:42:01

Interviewer

I'm going to call you Willie. Um, is whether or not and I was watching you look at your photographs and some of the documents that you brought with you earlier on. How emotional do you find reliving all the experiences and talking about it?

10:09:57:10

Willie Nagel

Very emotional. Yes because it was very difficult times if I look back at it. At, at the time, when I went to school in Chernowitz Romania, that has in itself very harrowing experience. Shall I tell you now?

10:10:19:14

Interviewer

No, again, I'm going to take you through everything so that we've got it all in chronological order. Um, so how, again just a couple more general questions if you don't mind. How much of your experiences - early on - shaped the way that you lived your life. Not where you lived your life but the way you lived your life? How much of it has affected you as a person?

10:10:44:14

Willie Nagel

Well, I lost a lot of relations and friends in the Holocaust and of course I cannot forget it. But young people who've never met them, it's easier for them to forget something they didn't know. Er, I've been always aware of the fact that a crisis can come, and I always have on me money. And I went into -, I was called to the Bar, but I went with diamonds because diamonds at that time and even now it's always an object which you can take with you anywhere when you escape. That's the answer.

10:11:26:16

Interviewer

So did you say you're mean with money did you say? What did you just say?

10:11:31:17

Willie Nagel

I, I always have in my pocket, money.

10:11:34:10

Interviewer

Oh you always have money. I see yes and, and as you said diamonds are a

currency that you can just literally take with you wherever you go.

10:11:41:13

Willie Nagel

That's right. I always have, that's what attracted me. I couldn't make money at the Bar, when I was called here, because there was no legal aid, and I had no relations here. So my father was the pioneer of the diamond industry in Palestine, now Israel. I'll tell you the story, that's why I, in order to have a living I decided to try the diamond business where my father had no connection whatsoever and I made it.

10:12:18:21

Interviewer

I'm very interested to hear all about that later. Thank you. Um, do you think that you've answered this question already Willie, but let me ask it to you again in a different way, whether or not we have learnt any lessons from history? When you look at what's happening around in Europe at the moment. When you look at the refugee crisis coming over from Syria - just to name one place - do you feel like we have learnt any lessons?

10:12:48:00

Willie Nagel

Not really. Not really because all the situations are different and of course I as a Jew should say refugees should be allowed in but there is unfortunately a limit of human endurance.

10:13:06:00

Interviewer

Thank you. And then one final question. You went on to have a beautiful family. You have grandchildren?

10:13:13:08

Willie Nagel

Four. Boys.

10:13:13:23

Interviewer [*talking over each other*]

Four grandchildren, four boys, one of them who loves politics.

10:13:16:12

Willie Nagel

I've got the, I brought the photographs.

10:13:18:06

Interviewer

Amazing. So um, no doubt you have lots of advice to give them as they've been growing up and also for their children and I wondered whether or not you were able to distil anything from your life, any advice that you could pass on to the generations to come what you have learnt and what is the key bit of advice to help us through our lives?

10:13:43:05

Willie Nagel

Well, they're very young still, well one is 17, one's 15, one is 13 and one is 10 but the two older ones, who live in London now, the others lived in New York, now they live in London as well. I, I really think that I think, I've been trying to tell them, and I think they're listening. Especially the one I took to see, Daniel, er, they have very fine feelings, they are very human, humans and this one went to his mother, my daughter to Zambia, er, was a big shortage of water and they spent a week there. And since then he has started to collect money, so much so from various institutions and he collected £150,000 and then the Prime Minister Cameron gave him an award for being very successful in collecting, I think in some ways I've tried to influence him, although credit for that is due to his, um, mother and father.

10:14:59:03

Interviewer

You must be so proud of that, that's a huge amount of money and to have such a social conscience as a young boy, young man, is amazing.

10:15:05:18

Willie Nagel [*interrupting Interviewer*]

Very, very, the other one too, the other, and the two other one are 10, 13 and 10, they were going to help because it's very kind.

10:15:18:01

Interviewer

So Willie, if you imagine another generation. You imagine them being fathers, you imagine them having them having their own children and they will be able to access this interview, your great, great, great, great, great grand children will be able to hear what you have to say today and now.

10:15:32:21

Willie Nagel

I think it's very important, from that point of, vitally important, I'm very privileged that you want to interview me.

10:15:39:02

Interviewer

Absolutely, but do you have one - well we're very privileged that you're here, so thank you - but do you have a piece of advice that you could share with your future generations?

10:15:52:02

Willie Nagel

I think that they, that in my opinion, you always have to look the past, in the [*indistinct*] you have to look at the past to determine the future, that would be, that, I always loved history. That would be my advice.

10:16:07:12

Interviewer

So, putting two answers together - and I think that's a perfect answer - but you've

also said that we haven't learnt any lessons from the past so actually that's quite depressing.

10:16:17:00

Willie Nagel [*interrupting Interviewer*]

No, but that is human nature. It depends on your disposition and depends on other out, outside influences and if there's an economic disaster somewhere and if the economy's absolutely very right, like who was it who said economy is stupid or something? Yes, er, and er, then you never know how people react in such dire circumstances but still, it doesn't prevent you to try and influence your future generations to understand and learn from the past for the mistakes of the past for the future.

10:17:00:17

Interviewer

Thank you.

10:17:01:16

Willie Nagel

I've convinced you; I've convinced you.

10:17:04:04

Interviewer

You have convinced me, I'm completely sold. Um, one final general question, and we can return to these questions later if you want to answer them again, is just about what's just happened. Um, Europe is going through a very tricky period isn't it? There's a tumultuous time. Do you have, um, or rather I'm very interested to hear your perspective on what might be happening, just because of what nationalism really does mean to the Jewish community in general.

10:17:34:22

Willie Nagel

I don't understand the question, would you repeat it.

10:17:37:11

Interviewer

There seems to be a rise in nationalism going on at the moment. Um, Britain has just voted to come out of the EU and that has massive ramifications for the whole of Europe. There's uh, celebrations in terms of the right wing.

10:17:48:11

Willie Nagel [*talking over Interviewer*]

I think it's the wrong, I think it's the wrong decision -and I also think that number two I'm not so sure whether it will not be reversed in practice, Yes? 'Cause you see, and I hope it, if the result is that Europe is prepared to change certain rules it would have been worthwhile, but we have to live and see,

10:18:13:00

Interviewer

We'll have to wait and see. I think more the question – sorry, I'm not framing it very

well - is what are the dangers of Europe breaking up for you?

10:18:22:14

Willie Nagel

War. Simple. War. 'Cause I think the European Union - never mind what Mr Farage thinks - has been a great source of peace, not the NATO, the Europe.

10:18:40:17

Interviewer

And that's a very interesting perspective after everything that you and your family have been through, um, I imagine that you would have quite strong feelings about Europe and um, the European community in general?

10:18:52:13

Willie Nagel

I have. I'm saying so. I have. It's not perfect, that's what I say, if it can improve their rules - which are in any case opposed by many countries within the Union - then of course it will be different. If by the way I was very active in a think tank for the east to stay in Europe 2015, 20 years ago called Europe 21, where I was a big mover in that and er, it didn't help. *[Laughs]*

10:19:35:16

Interviewer

Okay, Willie thank you for all of those answers. We're going to set aside the general questions now and we're going to go through your life and your journey. Um, I will ask you lots of questions if you want, but I think you probably know your story very well. So, um, shall we start and, and see how we get along. Um, if we could start right from the beginning, um, I can't quite believe that you're 91 years old.

10:19:59:24

Willie Nagel

Neither do I.

10:20:00:18

Interviewer

It's amazing!

10:20:02:00

Willie Nagel

Neither do I.

10:20:03:00

Interviewer

I love it. So you were born in 19,

10:20:05:14

Willie Nagel *[interrupts Interviewer]*

I'm not complaining except, you know, I've got this frame and the frame I call it my

Rolls Royce, without a beat.

10:20:13:18

Interviewer

[Laughs] Fantastic. You were born on the 17th of January in 1925. Um, the world has changed a lot since then, hasn't it? Um, but let's just start off with your family. Can you tell me a little bit, You were born in Romania, which is now Ukraine, yeah? Can you tell me a bit about your family, your mother and your father and brothers and sisters and, and the kind of family that you grew up in.

10:20:38:24

Willie Nagel

I must come back to my, my father. He lost his own father I don't know, when he was 20 years or 13 years old or something like that, very young, in a village in Romania where there were quite a number of Jews, even my grandfather, in fact his father-in-law, was a mayor of that village and Jews were all belonging to the Hasidic community of Vizhnitz. There was a very well-known Hasidic rabbi of Vizhnitz. And they all belonged to that, religious, hard working and very, very, very poor. So much poor that when the, my, his mother had about 12, I'd never asked, 12 or 13 children, some of them died of poverty or illness, so there still remained I think four or five brothers and some sisters, okay. But they were poor and somebody, he may have been older, 53, it's after year or two, I don't know when, he never discussed it with me, he went to Czernowitz which was an hour away, the capital of the whole province of Bukovina. And there he started to trade; and my father had never been to any university, had not been not been accepted [*Hebrew word*], you know, of the Rabbi. In Vizhnitz that was for him very determined and, but he had vision. He started trade, I don't know in what, he managed to come back every weekend and to keep his whole family. He became the breadwinner number one. And then he had an idea which I really don't understand this part of the world, which is really most impressive. It's the land very, very, er, what's the word? Abundant land with anything you like to think of: maize and grains and distilleries, everything belonged to the Polish aristocracy. All the lands there. And who enjoyed the *vita dolce*. They neglected it and they, they had difficulties, but they only were interested in *vita dolce*. My father, uneducated, but that's what a real entrepreneur in every respect, had a vision.

He spoke only German and Jewish. He took his cousin, who spoke Polish, he went there, and he suggested something revolutionary to them. You want to enjoy *vita dolce*, please, we, I want to do deed with you. Give me the leasehold of all your lands here, which are all in this part of the world, and how much money do you want a year? I guarantee, they came to terms which in itself was unbelievable. He said you; I give enough money that you think you need to continue with the *dolce* and I'll make a fortune, that's what happened. That is something which I can't understand, that is what I call a real, um, entrepreneur, that's number one.

10:24:28:09

Having done that, he built an empire. I don't know how he got it, he did. I lived in that part of, when I was ten, from that time onward because he did the deal before a life of splendid luxury. Like when we went for holiday to that village, or somebody who had the big house there, we took, in those days there was no cars, this, er, horse and carriages and had about ten Ukrainian as servants, like a prince, went to this

home place. That's where I met and spend the summer holidays with Paul Celan. You remember I mentioned before. That was excellent times. I was very spoiled.

10:25:24:24

Now, what did my father do? Not good enough to, he had to do something, he made all this land very profitable by exporting - that's the point in the 30s - by exporting everything. First of all cattles, hundreds of, of cows and horses. Then he had grain, everything. He had distilleries to do *slivovitz*, a drink. All this he did with the help of his three brothers who worked for him and other people. So that is one thing that was really, I was a young boy, but I, so. When my father, he had a lot of charm. I remember that every evening at home - we had a very beautiful home in Germ-, which is still there, which is now a kindergarten. It's still registered in the name of my later mother. And every night - I'm very similar in that respect - he entertained people. He had a fantastic sense of humour and that must have helped him in the business from all kinds, To give an example how versatile he could be, if you don't know that, but there were no Romanians in Bukovina but Romania, in the First World War, joined the Allies four months before victory when every child knew that they are going to win. They didn't send a single soldier, but when they came to the, defeat, the Allies thought they must give them a *bakshish*, a reward for the effort and they gave them two provinces, Bukovina and Bessarabia where there were not Romanians. The Romanians had a problem with what the Romania, the Bukovina said Czernowitz the capital. A lot of Jews, 40% were Jews. A lot of ethnic Germans. A lot of Ukrainians. Some Poles, but no Romanians. So they had to send some top civil servants to administer that. And one of them was Avron David. How shall I put it? He was a governor of the whole province and my father – uneducated as he was – managed - didn't speak Romanian - managed to make him become his friend and he became, in one of his companies is German. How do you like that? Unbelievable.

10:28:35:04

Interviewer

It sounds like he had a very magnetic personality and an ability to charm everybody and therefore create a lot of luck for himself.

10:28:43:20

Willie Nagel

Yes. So at my Bar-mitzvah, Avron David came, which had never happened before, you understand. And the other non-Jew that he befriended was something unbelievable which is part of my story, that we have in Czernowitz, Bukovina, travel there one day is a beautiful church, the Greek Orthodox church, like a bishop or bishop for the Bukovina was a rapid anti-Semite. I remember he was on the radio saying Hitler is right, the Jews should be burned and killed or whatever. But he had a friend, my father. I never understood to my Bar-mitzvah he came. You know,

10:29:34:09

Interviewer

So your father was a natural diplomat really?

10:29:37:24

Willie Nagel

He knew how to befriend the people who come.

10:29:43:07

Interviewer

And when you talk about him, you become very emotional.

10:29:45:17

Willie Nagel

Very.

10:29:46:19

Interviewer

Why is that?

10:29:47:12

Willie Nagel

Because I would never have believed it now with hindsight that he could manage to have the Avron David, of course that meant having him on your side print money, you understand? And the, to have this archbishop, unbelievable. You know what happened in the story. So, when, two incidents I want to tell you about my, the best school which is world-renowned is [*Romanian name*] Romanian school in Czernowitz. And in order to, to, to be accepted to that school, you had to pass very difficult examinations, but there was another obstacle, they had [*numerous clauses?*]. You know what is [*numerous clauses?*] No. You are too young. That meant that only 10% of the Jews, er 10% of the pupils accepted were Jews. Like in golf clubs, you understated? So I managed to get in there, no money, there was no, the Romania is very corrupt but no money, you had to sit and pass. I mean another 6 Jews passed me. The class was 60. The end of the first year was year ten or 11, yes? The music teacher called me up in front of the class and asked me to sing. I love music but I had no voice. And then he took my ears in front of 60 young boys and said, 'you dirty Jew.' How can I forget it? That is what you call singing and he failed me. I was, like now, I was crying. The other five Jews were crying, but the no-Jews were laughing because there was not a very friendly pro-Jewish atmosphere in Romania, no. So my father, I went back to my father home and my father phoned up his friend, the governor, told him the story. He said don't worry, his name was Avron, he called him AD, Avron David. I'll find out. Within half an hour he phoned him, he told him AD had discovered this teacher is the head of the Cuza Garda fascist, anti-Semitic party, the most extreme right-wing. That's one thing. Number two, he needs all this money because he likes to drink a lot and who is his banker? A Jewish fellow called Dauber. Dauber was a cousin of my father. [*Laughs*] You understand? Dauber was not the banker, he worked in the bank. For him my father [*UNINTELLIGIBLE*]. So my father immediately contact Dauber and said what, he called up the music teacher and said how can you do it to my cousin? The music teacher said how am I to know that Dauber and Nagel are related? But he's such a nice boy. Give me some money. He gave him and then I came in September with not important subject music, he passed me with flying colours and told me what a nice family, what a lovely boy I am. That was the story which was a fact which I have never forgotten. That's it. You understand? Now, and this story, when that happened, it just shows you two things: that Romania didn't kill Jews. The Germans did. Ukrainians did. The Poles did. Czech, everyone, Hungary - but not the Romanians. The Romanians as many examples in my life, when I, I did a lot of work for Romania afterwards but want

to tell you the story in a moment. Shall I do it now?

10:34:06:17

Interviewer

If you like.

10:34:08:09

Willie Nagel

So, I was called, Years later [*pause*] that was incident, my Bar-mitzvah, both of them came and it worked etc., and the four Rabbis came to my Bar-mitzvah, Rabbi, bishop, you know. Have you ever been to, have you ever met a Hassidic rabbi?

10:34:38:00

Interviewer

No.

10:34:38:23

Willie Nagel

No. Okay, not trying to influence you. So, after that [*pause*] I was passed, then my Bar-mitzvah came, then came the incident, then Hit, Hitler attacked Poland on the first of January. 17th of September the Russians came in from the other side of Poland, you know that? And then King Carol came to the radio and had an address to the public in the morning of seven o'clock. I remember it like now. My father didn't speak Romanian. I was with my father, and I translated him, and he said citizens, I've just come back from a visit to Stalin, to Hitler, to Mussolini, to [*indistinct*]. And they all assured me that Romania, like Switzerland, will remain neutral, don't worry.

10:35:50:23

Business was booming in Czernowitz, the frontier next to Poland. I remember the refugees coming in from Poland, from the frontier to Czernowitz. My father, that is where I cannot, my father said tonight we're going to Israel, Palestine. My mother was excellent housewife. Whatever my father said had to be. I had no, I didn't know whether I was 15, er yes, and so did my sister, younger than me. So how could he manage to go to Israel that evening?

10:36:34:07 [*Willie interjecting*]

Interviewer

Before we talk about that, Willie, do you mind if we just talk a little bit more about the build up to going because um, I don't want to miss anything. We definitely need to talk about that in a minute, but I'm struck by, um, what you're saying, essentially that although you were in a minority of being Jewish in a, in a big school, um, and that you experienced a lot of antisemitism, you nevertheless felt some kind of circle of protection around you by your father that he was influential enough that even though you were experiencing antisemitism, you had some kind of safety around you. Would you say that's right?

10:37:16:12

Willie Nagel

Yes, definitely.

10:37:18:20

Interviewer

Um, can you tell me a bit more about what it was like to be Jewish growing up in a community where everybody around you was destined to hate you?

10:37:27:17 [*Interviewer interjects*]

Willie Nagel

No, but there were quite a number of Jews, I told you, 40%, 50%. The mayor of Czernowitz at one stage was a Jewish fellow, like I [*indistinct*], I, I didn't in any except the incident with the music teacher, I mean I, I really had a privileged upbringing.

10:37:48:02

Interviewer

But nevertheless, there was a rise, wasn't there of, of the Nazis in that time and you must have known that the political situation around you was becoming precarious?

10:37:57:23

Willie Nagel

Yes.

10:37:58:08

Interviewer

Is that fair to say?

10:37:59:19

Willie Nagel

Yes.

10:38:00:14

Interviewer

Can you tell me a bit about um, about Hitler and, and what he meant to you as a young man?

10:38:07:15

Willie Nagel

Well I must admit one thing to understand some of the Germans, that is why the purpose when I was a young boy and I heard him speak on the radio, I was drawn to it. It's unbelievable true, even now. If I remember his speeches, and I knew he wants, he hates Jews and everything, but he had the magnetic diction, or the magnetic way of expressing himself. I stood to attention when he came to this speech. So I can understand the Germans did exactly the same and that nobody's ever understood that. But that's exactly what means a demagogue and that's exactly what means if you have this personality, which in many respects here if we're seeing this Boris Johnson has. I'm not saying he's like him, I'm not saying that but as a personality, he attracts people who don't want to think much.

10:39:12:12

Interviewer

Very interesting, you must feel very confused about that now that you can be drawn to a figure who created so much, um, suffering.

10:39:21:16

Willie Nagel

Yeah, that's true. I was ten years old, or 11 years old or 12 years old, you understand, but whenever he made his speech, I was happy to listen to it, happy and to go to attention. I can't understand it, that's a fact.

10:39:37:22

Interviewer

But it helps for you to say that because it kind of helps to explain why he had so much power, that even to a young Jewish boy he was magnetic.

10:39:47:12

Willie Nagel

Yes of course, I understand it and because of masses of the people in Germany were not educated or whatever and they just did what he wanted. Simple. It can happen anywhere if you got that sort of personality. I suppose Stalin had the same.

10:40:09:18

Interviewer

Yes, that kind of personality,

10:40:12:00

Willie Nagel

Mussolini certainly had the same. All the dictators

10:40:16:24

Interviewer

Okay, let's move on a little bit to, um, so we established that you had a very privileged upbringing and obviously a very warm and loving family. Your mother was clearly a linchpin to all of that and um, you, you seemed to know at the time that you were living a privileged life.

10:40:35:01

Willie Nagel

I don't know whether I knew it, but I enjoyed it.

10:40:37:13

Interviewer

Yeah, how lucky, lucky. So, um, let's talk about the Declaration of War. You were 14 weren't you when war was declared, do you remember um, Hitler invading Poland initially?

10:40:51:15

Willie Nagel

Of course. I was very interested in politic, you know, when I was. When Italy invaded Ethiopia, I think it was, I must have been ten or something, I was always interested in politics even as a young boy. I couldn't speak till the age of five, I was taken by my father to Vienna, which is the metropolis for our area to the best children's doctor 'cause he was very worried, I couldn't speak. I've made up since. I couldn't speak, yes, and he said not to worry, I would speak, you understand? So, I was telling you, what was the question about the,?

10:41:38:05

Interviewer

We were talking about the declaration of war. But that's extraordinary, you couldn't speak until you were five?

10:41:40:08

Willie Nagel

So I in those days, pardon, No, no, that's it, Call it what you like,

10:41:52:20

Interviewer

Sorry, okay so the declaration of war.

10:41:55:01

Willie Nagel

Declaration of war. Yes, before I was telling you I was so interested in politics as a young boy, I, because I couldn't speak, I was reading newspapers like I do today books, nonstop and I was very upset that Italy occupied Ethiopia. I'd never been to Ethiopia or anything. I, I formed a society at school of support of the poor Abyssinians. Yes, it's true. I was, etc. and had many joining me.

10:42:31:06

So when I came to Palestine in 39, I discovered in the press a year or two later that the Negus, the ruler of Ethiopia lives in Jerusalem, so you know my sympathy with him. So I went to Jerusalem, I must have been 17 or something like this, and knocked at the door. I knew the address. The caretaker came out, I told him I support etc., but his answer was no. Close the door, which of course made my, was very unpleasant situation.

10:43:13:07

[Cut for card change]

10:43:13:07

Interviewer

Um okay so [Willie] we're going to um pick up where we left off. You are 14 years old. Um you explained to me earlier, from a very young age you were very politically astute, you knew what was going on.

10:43:23:17

Willie

Yes. Absolutely. All my life.

10:43:26:15

Interviewer

So how did you, um, er react, when you were 14 years old, and um Poland was invaded by the Soviet Union? You must remember that very clearly?

10:43:40:15

Willie

I said I saw the refugees' cars come in because Czernowitz is next to the Polish frontier before war, so saw the cars coming in.

10:43:48:21

Interviewer

So your immediate reaction was to see the, the, the Pole re... Polish refugees arriving? And, and what did that feel like? Can you remem-

10:43:56:09

Willie

Terrible. Terrible. Er that was, but when they arrived on that day, my father made his decision to leave that evening. That was explained to you how you could be [though in] you don't know whether you're aware of the fact. Because of the Balfour Declaration, you know what is the Balfour Declaration, the British have all been very good

10:44:25:00

[FEINT NOISES] in making things not clear. They sent the Jewish national home, but without in any way diminishing the right of the [Palest, er Arabs], which is sometimes impossible; you can't have either one or the other, but they managed, but they didn't manage er to resolve. And the, the, and so that's what it did. What was I going to say?

10:44:56:05

Willie

And the consequence of that, they only allowed, from the millions of people who needed to escape, 5,000 certificates a year I think. Don't remember [indistinct] handful, not to in any way unbalance their so-called fair play. But they have always had, until now, a love for money. You can quote me. And like the oligarch now who find refuge in London, in those days

10:45:33:00

they looked out always for some people, like my father, who was reputed to be wealthy to make him join them. So what happened, they approached, er I haven't told you that yet, but my father, when he got this land, he started to send a lot of every week two or three boats he hired to go from Constanta to Haifa, where he put in everything, [indistinct], maize, slivovitz,

10:46:13:12

cows, horses, everything, not only to Palestine but also to the neighbouring

countries; as a consequence of which and the Trade Fair, the first Trade Fair in Israel took place in, in er 19 hundred and er 37. No, no. Yeah, 19, of course 1937. And he had [indistinct] he had his own pavilions there advertising all the goods he sends. So the British who were in charge of Palestine Mandate,

10:47:00:07

they brought my father and asked him whether he would like to have a visa of entry, but everyone knew it's war coming, everyone knew, a visa of entry to Palestine not only for him but for his whole family; that's the point I'm making, so never mind 5,000 but if you have money. And my father being a businessman took it. Not only that, because he exported such a lot from

10:47:32:10

there he became the Head of the Romanian Palestinian Chamber of Commerce. And he had a counterpart in Israel, [Sloosh?], who was the head of the Israeli and Palestinian end at that time and Romania. All these helped him. So when we had this famous speech of the King, is again vis, life is a vision entrepreneurs [indistinct] but you learn

10:48:00:20

[indistinct]. He decided it's time to go. So when he decided it's time to go that day, he was, you know he was a breadwinner, he did everything for his family, he went to his three brothers and asked them to join him. They said, "You're mad." They worked for him. Here is, everyone knew the wage in Palestine was economically stagnant.

10:48:28:22

Rommel, remember Rommel was in Libya, everyone is afraid he will attack Palestine, and he, they didn't want to join him. One brother was killed after in the camp. Then, it's an interesting point here, then I, [indistinct] because remember his visa said he can bring his whole family. He approached the sister of my mother, who was a very intellectual woman, and she was a professor of German at the university, and she had just married another budding lawyer, and both of them were what you call pseudo communist.

10:49:20:10

That was a time of socialism, communism. And she said, "No, [Arde], " that was his name, [Ablum David Ayte], "no, we are staying here." So my father argued with her, "Why don't you come?", "No, if the Germans come [UNSURE OF WORDS]. " He said, "No, if anything happens I go to Mother Russia, full-stop." Who [enters] him? His brother, the father of his wife, and the mother of his wife went with us. You understand?

10:49:59:18

So when the war came a year and a half later when they invaded despite what the King said, she flew the hus, she [indistinct] the husband into Mother Russia. There was some bomb attacks. He in one of place. She never saw him again. So there was this spoilt woman, highly intellectual, remaining alone in this Mother Russia and where she taken? To Kirgizija. Do you know where that is? Chinese border. And there she got a job because she was teaching German, and the, most people there were Chinese.

So they were, they were sure Hitler will come there so it was very happy to study German. She spent a, a lonely year and a half, two years or more. Then the war, Hitler was defeated. And then she started the way back from Kirgizija, she had no money, no friends, to back to Czernowitz in order to see whether her brother is there still; he was a society doctor. I don't know h, She lived 'til the age of 97, she, she died in, a few years ago in er, in Israel, but she was a remarkable woman.

10:51:27:04

So she ma-managed to get back all this way. You know look at [indistinct]. There's no plane. By bus and by train. You know it must have taken months and months. And she went to Czernowitz, went to the house which my uncle had, everything destroyed. No one is there anymore. So she decided she will go [who can be]. A friend of my father was the archbishop, and she knocked at the monastery, and she asked, he came out and he said, "Do you know where my brother is by chance?" He said, [indistinct] I know, I harboured him here for year and a half!" This [rabbit], antisemite because he was a friend of my father, harboured him at, but he left last week to Bucharest, which is a big distance; it is the capital of Romania. But if you think of it, that, that, even the worst antisemite makes exceptions.

10:52:36:12

Interviewer

That's an extraordinary story isn't it Willie, amazing. Um...

10:52:40:14

Willie

And also the Ambassador, whom I'm meeting this week, had been to Czernowitz many times, because he was Ambassador to Romania, said and he discovered that it was known that this one harboured a Jewish fellow in his house. And if he had been found out he would have been killed by the Germans in no time! That's a story I wanted to tell you.

10:53:06:07

Interviewer

An extraordinary story. Thank you very much. Um before we talk about the journey to Palestine and, and what that meant for you and your family, do you mind telling me, your father, you told me that your father tried to encourage his whole family because of his extraordinary visa. Do you mind telling me who stayed behind and what happened to them? How many members of your family were killed by the Nazis?

10:53:29:09

Willie

Well he... I am, am telling you he had three brothers besides the brother who went with him.

10:53:33:11

Interviewer

Yeah, but if you could tell me what happened to them. Did.,

10:53:36:21

Willie

They, they survived the war. One was, one was taken to the concentration camp in Transnistria was a famous concentration camp, Ukraine, Romanian and German. And they were killed, he and his wife and daughter were killed. And his son managed to escape to join us in Palestine. And he joined the first war, er Palestinian-Israeli war. On the last day of that war he was killed.

[cut for direction]

10:54:08:07

Interviewer

Um, Willie, just imagining all the privilege that you've had in your life and the luck that you had with your father, um and the protection that you were afforded because of him, it must be very difficult to think of all of those who were left behind, and all of those who didn't have that escape route that you had?

10:54:29:07

Willie

Sure. I'm aware of that. That's my point, I agreeing with you.

10:54:38:16

Interviewer

Because it was desperate times, wasn't it? You were, you were very, very lucky, but there were so many millions who weren't.

10:54:44:02

Willie

Yes but er all the time I was in Palestine and all the time people from Europe escaped and came to Palestine never-mind the British didn't and, take my au... my aunt I was telling you. She joined her brother. She met him in Bucharest; it's unbelievable. They went together to Palestine, but they had no visa, so the British turned them away and sent them to Cypress.

10:55:13:19

And they stayed three years in Cypress. What happened? My, my aunt was a tremendous linguist. She learnt English in Cypress. When she came to Israel to see us, she could al, she is, 97 she died, she could teach English to old and young non-stop and not need a penny from any [relation]. And my uncle, who was a doctor, became the Head of the National Health Service.

10:55:47:12

Interviewer

You're from an amazing family. So let's just talk about your journey to Palestine. How did you get there?

10:55:54:16

Willie

We went by boat! And this boat from Constan, lux, it was at that time a luxury liner which went from Constanta to Haifa. Would you believe it, so many years later, it is

still er flying now but now as a freight. Isn't that unbeliev, his name was, The name of the boat was called [indistinct] but that's what it was.

10:56:20:07

Interviewer

I'm just trying to imagine what it must have felt like because your father made a very quick decision to leave that night didn't he?

10:56:26:05

Willie

Absolutely. And when he arrived there because he had done export he had money, official money. And then he went immediately from Haifa we went to Tel Aviv. In Tel Aviv he was used to having everything his way. He took a whole floor in the best hotel in Tel Aviv, in those days Ha called Hayarkon. We stayed there for a year until he, he, [LAUGHS] yes he got a flat. But he had money. He had nothing to do but he was very active. So when his brother phoned him up from Czernowitz that there's a plot of land to be bought very, very cheap, my father, being a trader all his life, he couldn't resist. He took a plane, went to Czernowitz, bought it, [?] then came back [?]. Once a trader always a trader.

10:57:19:13

Interviewer

[LAUGHS] Can you tell me a bit more about what it felt like to leave your home, everything that you knew around you, to feel the anxiety of invasion, and although you had money, and you knew that you were leaving you were still in danger and what did that feel like?

10:57:35:06

Willie

Well, when I think er it was er, it was an ongoing process, because the whole time he had people coming, arriving, we managed to escape. But of course er Palestine was very uncertain, not only the Arab situation but, with the Arabs but also because of Rommel and other factors, so the situation in Palestine was very unstable. And I remember vividly, as I told you, I went first for the, when I arrived without knowing Hebrew, I went to the best school in Tel Aviv called Herzliya, which is world-renowned.

10:58:21:20

And then my father decided to send me to Haifa, a) because it was wartime, also because I was very spoilt. And there was my aunt, and this school was supposed to be very disciplined. It's the finest school you can imagine it, to this day. Really in Haifa, ask anyone, it's a household name. And, er, it was an excellent school and um I stayed there for a year. I passed a little baccalaureate. It was called, I was 16. And then, again the family, all of us, went to Jerusalem, because bombs were coming, etc.

10:59:10:06

In Jerusalem, I could have gone to the Terra Santa College, English college. I didn't like it. And then, the danger of war receded [FEINT NOISE], invasion by the Germans. I went back to Tel Aviv, and I went to the Balfour School, which I finished

with flying colours, and it was at that time the best school in Tel Aviv; no more Herzliya.

10:59:43:04

And after that, I wanted to, my father, he is again entrepreneur, he had money, and he met some refugees coming from Europe. One of them, the diamond industry had a lot of er, er manufacturing, etc., dealing in Antwerp. Belgium was overrun. He was a Belgian great expert in diamonds. My father, who had never been in diamonds, didn't even dream, but he had the sense to e, discussed with him and he heard that nobody in Europe is manufacturing anymore [?]. Um, South Africa, De Beers had got the monopoly in those days in diamonds, and they are all owned by Oppenheimer who was Jewish originally. Who were the buyers? No Indians. The, the buyers of America, the main dealers were Jewish. My father said, "Why don't we establish a factory here? I finance you," and that's what happened. He had the first big factory, 120 people, is a lot, in outside Tel Aviv, with this fellow, and it er, And then my, it came a point when the fellow was such a good expert he didn't do anything, so he said, "Why?" Because he was such a good expert he could see that it wasn't worthwhile. Er, er so my father said to him [?], "You cannot make money by doing nothing. You've got to take a risk," which he did. It's, it's you know it's commonsense.

11:01:29:16

Interviewer

Your father seemed very agile in the way that he conducted his business. He was a very quick mover, wasn't he?

[Talking over each other]

Willie

Absol... Yes, very. Very agile. Very agile, yes.

11:01:38:00

Interviewer

Mmm. Um your father had saved his family, and as you said he had money. Er but he didn't stop there, did he, because despite focusing on business, he was a very kind man and he um fought to rescue other people as well. Can you tell me about that?

11:01:53:18

Willie

Yes, but then he n, he was very modest, unlike his son, [LAUGHS] but he, he, he didn't tell me anything. When he died, I saw tons of people coming to the shiva, the mourning, and I said, "Who are you?" They told me, "Your father saved me," [That turned out to be]. So when I told you before that he hired two boats er or three boats every week, sent people to Palestine, er th, for these goods, on the advice of his rabbi, the Rabbi [Vishnant], he took in 30 or so stevedores to help, which was, he didn't need to do that. They arrived in Haifa. The British were very tolerant for, for visitors. They give them permission to visit the holy places for 48 hours. Not one came back.

11:02:51:08

So the British, after one or two said, realised that and they said, "Who owns this boat?" My father. They fined him. He paid. Do you think the British stopped that? No, it went [LAUGHS] on. You're not surprised. The.

11:03:06:18

Interviewer

So your, your father essentially um allowed for people to go on the boats, 30 people at a time? Was it just children?

11:03:13:08

Willie

Originally stevedores to help the...

11:03:15:02

Interviewer

What, what are stevedores? What's...

11:03:16:12

Willie

To, to assist them with what er ever good was, any excuse.

11:03:21:06

Interviewer

Yes, of course. But so they were employed essentially to work on the boat um to help transport the goods to Palestine, and when they got there they disa... they went to look at the holy sights for 48 hours but didn't ever get back on the boat, and your father paid the fines to the British Government at the time?

11:03:38:10

Willie

Many a time for two years, and the British never stopped him. [LAUGHS]

11:03:42:06

Interviewer

So there was a great deal of tolerance going on so the British...

11:03:45:00

Willie

Sorry?

11:03:45:19

Interviewer

There was a great deal of tolerance. The, the British knew what was going on, do you think?

11:03:49:04

Willie

Yes, of course. But they not only tolerate, but they also got money; the fines were con, it's considerable.

11:03:58:09

Interviewer

Is it possible to say how many lives your father saved with.

11:04:02:01

Willie

Hundreds for sure.

11:04:04:09

Interviewer

Was it just um. W-Was it families or was it children or?

11:04:07:17

Willie

No, no families, all were boys, who studied the [shiva] of Viznitz, and the rabbi recommended them to er go in the boat.

11:04:17:12

Interviewer

They were all boys?

11:04:18:06

Willie

Yes.

11:04:21:10

Interviewer

And when you say hundreds, how many hundred?

11:04:23:06

Willie

I don't, I don't want to guess but it must have been 300 or so.

11:04:27:21

Interviewer

And at his shiva you said that there were a number of people who arrived?

11:04:31:13

Willie

Some of the survivors came there to condole me. I never known of them, I never met them, and they explained to me.

11:04:39:15

Interviewer

And how did that make you feel because your father had never told you?

11:04:42:15

Willie

No, never told me.

11:04:44:15

Interviewer

How did it make you feel?

11:04:46:08

Willie

Very, very proud and humble.

11:04:52:05

Interviewer

And how extraordinary that he didn't ever think to tell you.

11:04:55:07

Willie

No, because he, you know he was very old-fashioned in certain respects; for example, he took in afterwards he, among those people there were five brothers, that he saved. [*indistinct background noise*] And they came to Israel and then he decided, he had a diamond factory, to train them to study diamonds, which he did. And one of them became afterwards Managing Director of the firm, which he did; my father didn't understand anything about diamonds.

11:05:33:23

And then something very sad happened. When he was 81 or 82, [*clears throat*] he noticed that all the time the brother, his partner who ran the business, tells him that he, he, he must from his private means put in more money the business. [*laughs*] That was the time when I was, my own business in diamonds was going strong as a broker of De Beers, and I knew from other clients, competitors, that they make money that's possible, and I could see that this fellow, whom he saved, is taking advantage. [*clears throat*] cause I lived in London. There were three brothers. They established their own factory. My father knew about that. And this partner of his, certain goods are profit and certain of the goods he sold [*indistinct background noise*] to the brothers and all the loss of that was his gratitude. So I was very upset, and I went to the President of the Diamond Club in those days, and he called him, and he admitted he was wrong, and I made my father he should retire, because he believed in his partner like God. He saved him as well.

11:07:14:01

And he retired with very little money, everything 'cause, And I had the problem of my, my mother had died many years before. He lived alone. [*indistinct background noise*] I didn't want he should, Mentally he was, he, he had also terrible misfortune that he lost his vocal cords 15 years before, so it hampered him in business, that's why also the partner took advantage of him, and I had a problem because I didn't want him to go down mentally. What did I do? I invented, later on I invented problems I have in my business which were not true and asked him what he would advise me to do. The poor fellow thought and thought and wrote le, he wrote to me all his life a day, a letter every day. All his life I wrote him twice a week. So he came forward and said, "Dear so and so," but it was imaginary. So I told him, I s, "Very good," I'd say, "but there's a new problem," until he died seven years later, the problems, because I came, and I was right, I came to the conclusion sometimes it's, it is only fair to be cruel to be kind. That's it.

11:08:40:13

Interviewer

So you kept him intellectually interested,

11:08:43:18

Willie

A hundred percent. A hundred percent.

11:08:45:08

Interviewer

,and still connected to the industry despite the fact that he wasn't working officially.
Mmm.

11:08:51:20

Willie

Yeah. Yeah.

11:08:52:13

Interviewer

But you always had that in common, the fact that you were working in diamonds together?

11:08:56:23

Willie

I didn't work together with him in diamonds.

11:08:59:05

Interviewer

No, I know, but you were in the same field weren't you, you were in the same field?

11:09:01:13

Willie

Yes, yes. Yes.

11:09:02:22

Interviewer

Mmm. Um what was it like living in Palestine when you first arrived?

11:09:10:22

Willie

It was a difficult time because there was, there was shortages. Wartime, don't forget it was wartime and dangers, as I told you bef, dangers very coming up at every stage. And er, but it was, in spite of all that, it was the whole time growing the Jewish consciousness, more people coming in. I remember, [*indistinct background noise*] I was living in London, but when I came to visit my parents, it was b, just before the, in the '47 or '46, yes, the British had a lot of curfews, when they had people to come out [*indistinct background noise*] you see because there was terrorist acts going on. And I went out in my area with curfew and went out with hundreds of other people. We waited until it was all clear.

11:10:16:01

Years later, Begin, who became Prime Minister of Israel, came to London, at the reception he comes up and he says, "You didn't know but I was standing next to you in this," because he lived opposite me which I didn't know, during this and he had such a memory he remembered exactly but I didn't know who he was. Isn't that influencing?

11:10:40:06

Interviewer

Yeah, amazing. Um. There, there came a point when you were 17, so you'd established your life there, but you decided to go and work in a kibbutz, didn't you?

11:10:50:05

Willie

No, I didn't decide at all. I didn't like it. *[laughs]* No.

11:10:53:08

Interviewer

You didn't like it.

11:10:54:08

Willie

No, I didn't go to kibbutz. There was a, er every, You had the working youth and the learning youth.

11:11:02:01

Interviewer

Yeah.

11:11:02:17

Willie

As I had been going to school the learning youth. But they needed because the people in the kibbutzim were sent to the front line. Had to help out the kibbutzim, so they sent the learning students. The learning youth were sent *[indistinct background noise]* in the summer to help the kibbutzim. That's right. That's right.

11:11:30:02

Interviewer

And what was your contribution there?

11:11:31:14

Willie

Well, *[laughs]* I'm as, I'm ashamed to tell you. The first, I've got a photo that *[indistinct background noise]* in the heat, to, to er work with the *[indistinct background noise]* t, not tractor the name. In the field it's very difficult so I complained. Remember, I was a student, I was not a soldier. So the teachers whom I was friendly terms put me on to pick up potatoes. You go after tractor, and you have to bend. That was not for me, so I told him. What did I do? I walked on my *[four]* and picked up the potatoes. He came up to me. He said, "You, It's a bad example." I said,

"Potatoes are made to eat. I don't want to hurt my back." So he decided to send me, which I had the best job, I'm ashamed to say but true,

11:12:26:17

They needed a-according to the rules of the er the wartime education, one e, in every group they needed one student to give at the end of the day, they all live together, the news of the day of the war progress. Well I was s, I was appointed to do that, it was a really easy job, so I needed to hear the radios all the time. But the radio was in the kibbutz only one. I insisted I must have my own rad-radio [?]. I got everything I insisted. And in the evening, the Jews came, I told them what happened in the day. And then they were tired, having worked very hard. I could go on dancing, but they couldn't, they were too tired. That's it. So it wasn't, it wasn't very er onerous. *[clears throat]*

11:13:31:19

Interviewer

And do you remember um being told of what was happening back in Europe, of um the knowledge of concentration camps and, and what your fellow countrymen were going through?

11:13:45:04

Willie

Yes, because people came, survivors, I told you. Er one was a son, but is many other f, f, My friend who became the manager of Air, Air, Brit... um, er no. Um. Not Air Britain but the name, BA. British Airways. Yes, the whole, the whole-time people come in telling us the story, but no one really realised there were millions being killed because there was the difficulties not knowing what happened. But they didn't realise that, not to the same extent as afterwards came clear.

11:14:30:01

Interviewer

Do you remember liberation?

11:14:31:01

Willie

Yes.

11:14:32:05

Interviewer

What can you tell me?

11:14:34:13

Willie

Exuberant. Ah! Fantastic. It full of glor, land of glory.

11:14:41:19

Interviewer

And then now let's talk about post-war, so you were about 20, 1945. Um what did you learn of your family and, and what had happened to them in Romania?

11:14:56:17

Willie

Well we had many of my family, I told you one uncle was killed that I know for a fact. Then of course, I had an aunt, sister of my father, and her children, who were in the same came. They were very lucky to survive and came to Vienna and live in Vienna until now; the mother became, you see, the mother lived 'til 103 or 104, [*indistinct background noise*] and she became the Angel of Vienna. And I remember I went to visit her when she was 102. She was bedridden, her ment, er, er. I asked her a question which I could never ask my parents.

11:15:44:18

Her name was Fagir. "Can you tell me why did my father marry my mother? They're so related. So this woman of 102 without a flicker of her eye said, "Of course I'll tell you. [Huo?] left very poor," which I knew, "and your father was working very hard in Chernowitz making money, came back every weekend home. And my, our mother noticed he liked the daughter of his brother, 'cause he had no time. And then she thought, 'He's doing well.' She encouraged it because she thought, 'Why should he spend his money on other families when we need it,' and she encouraged it and that's what happened. Whether true or not I'll never know. You know for a woman of 102 to give me that reply is not bad.

11:16:43:05

Interviewer

Very impressive. Um you studied at is it um the Mandate School?

11:16:51:18

Willie

I studied law,

11:16:53:15

Interviewer

Mmm hmm.

11:16:54:07

Willie

,the first year in the law classes in Jerusalem, and, for a year. Then I wanted, my father wanted me to join him in his factory, but I didn't want. What can I do? Didn't want to. And I wanted to study law. But it was after the war, at the end of the war, all the ex-servicemen er want, got preference. I wrote to many university until the only university which accepted me was Edinburgh, right. When I came to London, for a, just before I went to Edinburgh, I then decided London was destroyed. No feeding. No food. [NOISE] Even had fog here all the time. It was not pleasant so I fors, wrongly, thought to myself, 'To go to Edinburgh it can't be worse.' But not true, it wasn't, it wasn't worse, it was much better.

11:18:04:17

And then I managed, I always wanted to achieve something; I did. I r, for, saw in the list the Dean of the university course was called Schwarzenberger. I said, "He must be a Jewish refugee!" So I went, asked for an appointment to see him, I got it. I went to see him, I said, "Look here, my dear professor." I didn't realise he doesn't want to

be, recognise the the fact that he's Jewish, I didn't know that, and so I left it. But I said it's very vital, "I don't want to go to Edinburgh, I want to study here, somehow."

11:18:40:23

Under such pressure from me he gave in and said, in those days there was, specially here, an evening class doing the same as a day class, and he let me into the evening class. But a month later, having been there pretty m, it, it was not normal to have to go in the evening, so I went back to him and he, again, instead of being um, being er bombarded by me, so allowed me to join the class which I enjoyed.

11:19:14:10

Interviewer

And from there you went to study in Cambridge?

11:19:18:00

Willie

That I finish, because I was called to the bar, I will indeed show you a photograph, and I was called to the bar; I was too young to be called, I had to wait a year. Then I was accepted to Cambridge. And that was impossible [?]. In Cambridge, you must understand, the International Law faculty is a small one but it's the most important one, 'cause the, the professor [*indistinct background noise*] for International Law at Cambridge is always the advisor to the Foreign Office. In those days, it was Professor Lauterpacht. Does the name mean something to you? No, Lauterpacht. He wrote also public address rules, the textbooks.

11:20:06:07

I had a friend of mine whom I couldn't stand from Israel here at university college who said he'd been to Cambridge and couldn't get in. He had exactly the same marks as me. So I had a bet with him for two and six that I'm going to get in. Then I said I must be different. I wrote a letter to Professor Lauterpacht, I didn't say who I was. I said, "Is it possible to have an interview with you?" So he must have thought, because he was the rabbi of the [*mic noise*] whole International Law, he must have thought that this lecture in India or in Bangladesh, so he's a big authority here, he said, "Please come," and not the boy of 24, "please come and di, and have coffee with us at six o'cl, four o'clock this afternoon, Six Cranmer Road at Cambridge," which I did.

11:21:02:04

First time I'd been to Cambridge so an umbrella, a t, bowler hat. So I arrived there and he, he said, but he was very, there was unusual man, he lectured in seven and eight languages including Hebrew, 'cause his, his wife was the niece of Abba Eban. You know who is Abba Eban, yes?

11:21:26:04

So, we had the te, conversation and then she apologised to let us talk and to cut a long story short, he asked, "What can I do?" I said, "Either you throw me out or you admire me. I'm Jewish, I want to join the Foreign Office and I want to study under you." He said, "You must, you must go to the Board of Research Studies." I said, "I know but er, which I know that my friend," or so-called friend, "had been refused." So I said, "Are you not a Dean anymore?" He said, "Yes," so that, so he then gave me,

after a long discussion, four conditions: that either bring him letter of recommendation from [?] blah-blah-blah. One was Mr [Winifield] who was a lecturer of thought, at Lincoln's Inn, where I studied for the bar, then he'll accept er my, too long?

11:22:22:00

Interviewer
Mmm.

11:22:22:14

Willie

I then I um will be accepted exceptionally in January; it was November. Er I went back to London, Lautgower, was er the Minister for in the London School of Economics for Commercial Affairs er for Commerce, and he almost thought I was his best pupil, for some reason. I told him the story, which he was full of admiration. He said, "I know what this Lauterpacht did." Professor Winfield in those days was half-blind. He never met his student, he just lecture 2,000 people, he went home. He's, yes, he never gave a letter of commendation that Lauterpacht knew to anyone! So he said, "I'll speak to him, he's my friend." I got it. I got up and Lauterpacht asked me the question, "How did you get a letter from, from Winfield?" I said, " [Uri Galitern], he was born, Lwow and I am from Czernowitz [?], " that's the story.

11:23:18:02

Interviewer
It helps.

11:23:18:16

Willie

Became great friends afterwards.

11:23:20:18

Interviewer

Um before we talk a little bit more about what you did with your career, um can I just ask you another question about your father? Um Sir Nicholas Winton has had a huge amount of credit for the children that he saved. Sir Nicholas Winton.

11:23:33:15

Willie

Mmm, I met him.

11:23:35:12

Interviewer

Yes, I'm sure. Um. The fact that your father was so modest and didn't share what he had done, do you regret that slightly? Do you regret that, I mean Sir Nicholas Winton was very modest as well, but do you wish that he'd had more credit before he died for what he had done in his lifetime?

11:23:53:12

Willie

I think, I don't know what, must have lots of question but I think one thing, for him it

was important have done it and also to please the rabbi. And why he didn't tell us is simple. In Coriolis philosophy whatever he do must have good deed, etc., he's is, [*indistinct background noise*] it is er, his conscience, etc., but he could say that all this is being his secret, including, which affects me as well. It's secret. He didn't want in any way. I don't understand it. I never asked him because only learnt about it when he was not alive.

11:24:44:19 [*Interrupting each other*]

Interviewer

Do you wi,

11:24:44:24

Willie

I understand your question but [*interruption*] I've no answer to that.

11:24:47:18

Interviewer

Do you wish that you had known more so that you could have talked to him about it before he,

11:24:51:08

Willie

Yeah, certainly I would wish but,

11:24:53:12

Interviewer

Mmm. What would you have asked him?

11:24:54:20

Willie

Hmm? [*indistinct background noise*]

11:24:55:13

Interviewer

What would you have asked him?

11:24:57:06

Willie

More details how it came to be and er isn't he proud of it, etc. But he was not in any way, He was very modest really, part because he was very re-religious. That's part of his philosophy, of helping people and not rep, receive a reward for it, that is how I see it.

11:25:22:18

Willie Nagel

Now, I want to tell you I remember telling the story with the teachers might be calling me Jewish, whatever. Years later, I, I was always very, I was very friendly with a Romanian person in London who was a high, he's still there, not here but he's an active Romanian, high intellectual. But he was, in Romania if he was intellectual than he's tops, you understand? So yah, he asked me one day, Willie 'I, we need to buy,

er I must obtain 2 historical swords given to the first Romanian king [?] by the ruler of Russia and one by the ruler of Serbia. The swords are in the hands of the liberal party chief who lives in Paris now, who can't stand us. And somehow can you find where to buy it.' Ok don't know where it, its if we understand its going to be sold right, end of story.

11:26:49:10

I discovered, I er, how much money can I pay. So he said '£200,000' you know 20 years ago that's a lot of money and they are a poor country, so I didn't believe him that I'll get paid, so I said who guarantees it? He said they've got a ver very old bank of Romania, so I got a letter until it was covered that in point of fact, er, they are coming up for auction in Christie's. So I went to Christie's, who would want to buy these historical swords and I got them for £60,000, and I phoned him up and he was very happy and the next day I thought maybe Romania, maybe I should have told him. I said, I don, I said I don't want to earn anything, if you want to help you do what you, what you tell him you come and do you like. He said what a shame, I already told him 60,000, okay. A few months later he insisted that I should accompany the swords to Bucharest, it was the middle of winter, January, very cold, and to present it to the nation. I didn't understand the big fuss, I couldn't get out of it. You offered me either the best hotel [?] but the [hotel name] they didn't promise, the telephone would work for me. So I got there, a nice hotel, got somebody else to accompany me which I didn't realise was supposed to watch over me. And went to the erm, that evening, I went there it was a [?] to the airport about 5 ministers of the government big fuss.

11:29:00:00

And then the president of Romania, whom I had met before, Iliescu, invited me to a special restaurant, cause the- have you ever been to Romania? The food is excellent. Have you been to Romania?

11:29:13:18

Interviewer

I have, yes. I'm just, we we've just got a few more minutes just to finish off the er interview though. Yeah.

11:29:18:23

Willie

Yes yes sorry, I'm finishing.

11:29:20:08

Interviewer

Ok.

11:29:20:13

Willie

Ok. So what did I say, yes, so Iliescu and the minister for foreign affairs, minister of culture, er 6 ministers and me, the food was excellent, but it was freezing cold and the president knowing how cold it is called the maître d' and said to him 'tell me what happened to the electricity', it was the heating. He said oh it's just conked out. Ah I found out afterwards that it hadn't been working for 6 months. So then they started speeches, they all could not understand, how did I agree to buy it and not to earn

anything. They couldn't understand it, for Romanian not to earn anything would be terribly unusual. And the foreign secretary said how is it possible? So I told, and the president said its only [?]. I then got up and said that's the point of the story, to the president, no. And I told them the story and of the the foreign secretary was 38 years old, didn't know, closes the er- what was the word? You know the top of it 10% yes. That's it, it's not true, because after this event, I said they wouldn't do it lift a finger for you but why did I do it? Numerous clauses here, why did I do it? I tell you why, because your previous President Ceaușescu, who Iliescu was his assistant, you understand? And now he's against him, so I said to him, but he had a certain interesting points. One was, you don't know this, the first peace treaty between Israel and Egypt was engineered by Ceaușescu. He was very friendly with the Egyptian. You understand me? So that one thing which a lot of credit should be given for, number one. Number two, the the first for \$2,000, then for \$4,000, then for \$6,000, I help to collect money from rich Jews here and everyone else. Ceaușescu released 600,000 Jews to Israel. Did you know that? You did.

Interviewer

How amazing

Willie

But you knew about this?

Interviewer

A little bit, so thank you for telling me

Willie

And that is something for which, [yeah], all praise to him.

Interviewer

Amazing, well done.

Willie

And number three. Number three. Just, all, forgetting Ceaușescu, Romania, all the neighbouring countries killed every Jew. Not Romania. For you, and that is why I enjoyed it, for you, get your money out of them. Getting to buy you drinks, nicer music teacher, it's more important than killing people [interruption] and for these reasons, I did what I did.

Interviewer

Well done. Well done, Willie. Can I just ask you one final question? And it's about faith and whether or not you have a faith, whether you did have a faith and whether or not your faith has been tested with everything that you have experienced and gone through?

Willie

What do you mean by faith? Religion?

Interviewer

Yeah

Willie

I do believe, I have now an example. Friend of mine, not Jewish, lost his only son 24 years. He committed suicide, the German, because he couldn't get to Cambridge, and he couldn't disappoint his father. What can you tell somebody in such a glaring that they believe in it? If you believe in God, which I do, which I do, you must believe that it was God's will to have his son next to, nearer to him for reasons, which I don't want to know, and you don't want to know. But if you believe in God, you believe in afterlife, which I do, then sooner or later you'll be, you'll be reunited with him. Because otherwise, how can you explain this and also the Holocaust, if you come to think of it, must have been a sort of punishment or something. Nobody's come back from up there as to how it is up there. So that is something which no figures of we could ever explain, understand, or want to understand. That's my answer.

Interviewer

Okay, is there anything else that in terms of the questions at the beginning about messages to future generations that you want to say?

Willie

I think is very important because as time recedes, it is extremely important to have this work—I'm a member of the Holocaust Educational Trust—that that that one should have this message. It's very good that two girls are listening now. I think it's very important to learn the lessons because like I say, you must forgive but not forget, but must also try to remember in order that it shouldn't recur so easily again. That is the message which I would like to convey, that by learning from the past, you present to the future, you don't fall prey to the same reasoning or magnetic voice or excitement that the Germans, Hitler did before. I think that is really important because people say 'oh it's hundred years ago, so many others, look what is happening now in Syria, etc. But this one is not exclusive.' The other one has the, you may accept the fact that too many people alive, but it is not the fact, the fact remains that we have to avoid any such killings because of religion and our being a minority, it's what I can tell you.

ARTEFACTS

ARTEFACT 1 – Scan of picture of Willie with father and sister

11:35:54:10

Willie Nagel

My father, my sister and me. My sisters name was Suramitte, but she was called always 'Mitte', like I am Willie short of William. It is one of the nicest photographs. It must have taken in Romania, definitely. It must have been taken, I figure it's about '37, '38.

ARTEFACT 2: scan of picture of Willie at school

11:36:23:17

Willie Nagel

At school, I played the violin but only for show, didn't like because I had a problem. The teacher wanted me to stand, and I was very spoilt. And I said I can play the same sitting down, he had a heart attack [*laughs*]

ARTEFACT 3: scan of picture of mother on holiday in Poland

11:36:43:00

Willie Nagel

That was, very famous resort the other side was Poland, remember. It was before the war and it was a beautiful place and my mother, in those days it was fashionable to be fat, you know that you ate a lot, to be fat means a sign of prosperity and I was slim, so she fattened me. That's what was in vogue the, the opposite of now.

ARTEFACT 4: scan of picture of boys on boat to Haifa

11:37:15:00

Willie Nagel

On that boat, [*indistinct*] we went that year by boat to Haifa from Constanta. That's it.

ARTEFACT 5: scan of picture of Willie in Palestine

11:37:24:18

Willie Nagel

When you arrived in Palestine I went immediately to the best school in Tel Aviv called Herzliya, but I didn't speak Hebrew enough. I had only, I had my Bar Mitzvah in '37 in Tel Aviv but didn't know to speak, had to learn to speak. And um, with me came this fellow, a son of a partner of my father from Czernowitz. We went to the same school; we left together as us. We took him it was us, his parents were in Australia, escapees of war. We took him, it was us and his brother to Israel, to Palestine.

ARTEFACT 6: scan of picture of Willie and friend from Cambridge

11:38:09:23

Willie Nagel

This was a great friend of mine at Cambridge. He was the son of the Prime Minister of Uganda.

ARTEFACT 7: scan of Picture of Willie and friend from Cambridge

11:38:19:17

Willie Nagel

No he was not at Cambridge he was a contemporary [*indistinct place*] in London. He's the one who went with me in the boat with my parents. We took him because his family had been in Australia. He came with us to Palestine, went to Australia and then came back to London to study.

ARTEFACT 8: scan of Picture of Willie and friend from Cambridge

11:38:40:23

Willie Nagel

Robert Titler, he's not alive for many years. It's very funny because he got a job with, when he came back he got a job with Heseltine in the company, and he was supposed to do marketing for them which he did very successfully. When he died as young man, Heseltine arranged for him a memorial, what do you call this? His life in the church, Anglican Church, high church this was a [*indistinct*] that I couldn't understand why. Years later when I went of course, I asked him, didn't you realise that your employee was Jewish? No he didn't. That's the story.

ARTEFACT 9 – Scan of picture of Willie visiting grave in Czernowitz

11:39:26:15

Willie Nagel o/o/v

When I took all my family back to visit my hometown we went to Czernowitz and my father was a very big landowner, went to various villages where we visited. And then one village where I knew that two cousins of mine had been killed by the Germans with their parents, we asked a passerby, do you know, do you

Willie Nagel iv

remember Mr. [Warlow?] The woman said, yes of course, he was our neighbour, the two brothers. We said, what happened to him? He was killed, she said, she was Ukrainian, but the Germans I'm not convinced that they're so, I think it was by the Ukrainians themselves, they were not in that respect very friendly. So she said, she then said to me, if you want to I can take you to their graves. So she took us to the grave which was a cemetery not for Jews, a general cemetery and there was a plot there where 18 Jews were killed, two were my cousins and there was, we erected something here and I said kaddish on behalf of my cousins.

ARTEFACT 10 – Scan of picture of wedding picture

No commentary

ARTEFACT 11 – Scan of picture of Willie as a baby

No commentary

ARTEFACT 12 - Scan of picture of Willie as young boy

No commentary

ARTEFACT 13 - Scan of picture of school class

No commentary

ARTEFACT 14 - Scan of picture of group standing in front of Romania building

No commentary

ARTEFACT 15 - Scan of picture of Willie in field

No commentary

ARTEFACT 16 - Scan of picture of group with cows

No commentary

ARTEFACT 17 - Scan of picture of Willie with father

No commentary

ARTEFACT 18 - Scan of picture of Willie with John Major

No commentary

ARTEFACT 19 - Scan of picture of Willie with his wife Josephine

No commentary

Caption: SCHOOLING IN PALESTINE

11:41:49:07

Willie Nagel

Yes on the whole it was a happy time, it was war time. remember it was war time, it was a frontier of, it was in Libya, that was before your time so it was a threat that you had to people what will happen. The situation in Palestine was terrible. My father escaped and he came with a lot of money so that wasn't so, too difficult. The second year, my father because he was extremely spoilt only some, to send me to my aunt to Haifa and in Haifa is up to now the absolutely er, fantastic school, secondary school called Reali in Haifa. It was, what do you say, before you go to the Techniom - which is renowned - you go to the Reali Haifa where I spent the year in [?] baccalaureate. It was very...excellent school. And then my parents again send me to Jerusalem because bombs was supposed to come over Tel Aviv and Haifa and so I entered Jerusalem where I had enrolled, you know, all this time different schools. And Terra Santa was a college, an English college in Jerusalem; I didn't like it. And then I was, I went back, times became quieter and then the best school in Tel Aviv called Balfour for two years before I took the 'A' levels or whatever the baccalaureate.