IMPORTANT

AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
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Interview Transcript Title Page

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV200
NAME: George Loble
DATE: 2nd February 2017
LOCATION: Newcastle upon Tyne
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

What is your name please?

George Loble.

And you name at birth?

Günter Löbl.

And when were you born?

26th of September 1926.

And where were you born?

Bamberg, in Bavaria.

Thank you very much for having agreed to do this interview for the AJR Refugee Voices Archive. George, could you please tell us something about your family background?

Yes, my- my family - both my families, actually - lived in that area for many years. The, the Löbl family used to live in Bohemia, where there are lots of Löbls - a very common name in that area, the… Austro-Hungarian Empire. And my- on my maternal side the Frieds… lived in Ebelsbach, which isn't very far from Bamberg. A lot of them were hop merchants on the- on my… maternal side. My maternal- my, my paternal family- my paternal grandfather, Hugo Löbl, was first of all an electrical wholesaler. And later on, he became an electrical manufacturer. And when the business got too big, two of his sons split away and formed a company called "Hugo Löbl Söhne" - 'Sons' and they manufactured different parts. So, one- one son ran the wholesale business, which was in the old *Stammhaus [parent company]* in Germany, in Bamberg on the… station road, if you like. And… the others built a new factory outside town. It was a very modern factory at the time, because most factories were multi-stories in those days. This was the first factory which was only on one story. They had… windows all- all along the roof. They had very large, clear areas for manufacturing. That factory was built in 1928.

And the company?

[sound break]

[00:02:30]

Yes, you were describing this, the…

Yes, this- this new company was called "Hugo Löbl Söhne" - Sons of Hugo Löbl. And it was a very successful company because they were the first people to use plastic in lighting fittings. The advantage of plastic is A- that it doesn't corrode. Because before, all lighting fittings were made of- outdoor lighting fittings were made of metal and had to be painted regularly. And B- they were double insulated. So, if an electric wire touched the casing of a lighting fitting, a metal one, you could get a shock. You couldn't get a shock from the plastic ones. And I went- used to go to the Hanover trade fair after the war, and many of the people there - older people - remembered my father. They said, "'Oh, yes. You are so-and-so who left… who- whose father had the first plastic lighting fittings." It was quite revolutionary at the time. It was a- a material called 'Bakelite' which was a very crude - you know, by our

standards - plastic material made of phenyl and sawdust. But it did the job very well.

So, your father was one of the 'Söhne' of the…?

My- my, my father and my Uncle Robert.

They ran it together?

You see, there were, there were four brothers -four Löbl brothers. One of them went to Katowice [Poland] and became a coal merchant or a steel merchant. I- I don't know anything about him. But he married twice and had no children. And the other three lived in Bamberg. One of them continued to run grandfather's wholesale business. That was Salamon otherwise known as 'Sali'. And the- Robert and Fritz ran "Hugo Löbl Söhne".

And what is your earliest memory of growing up in Bamberg?

My earliest memory is probably when we moved… from the Schützenstraße to the Hainstraße, where we had a much bigger flat - an eight-room flat. And my two brothers and I had two rooms between us. We- we slept- we slept in one room and we had a playroom. Quite a large room with… you know, tables, chairs, cupboards for toys. And of course, a nanny… who… had her own room a bit further down the corridor. I've actually been to that flat in 2011…

Yeah?

…with, with- with my children and grand- grandsons. And it is now an office of the Court of Bamberg. But they showed us around. The staircase, the door - is exactly the same. The inside of course is entirely different. They now have grey metal walls and grey metal cupboards and things like that. But the rooms are still identifiable.

[00:05:25]

And where- in what area of Bamberg was it, the flat?

Hainstraße. Park Lane, if you like. Which, may- may- Yes…

Was that where Eva [Shapira, née Buxbaum] lived?

Well, the Buxbaums lived number 14 and we lived number 16. Literally across the road. So, I mean, I've known Eva since she was a tiny little girl.

Mn-hnn… But you're a bit older.

Yes, I'm a few years older. Yes.

But you remember her?

She was an only child.

Yes.

And of course, my Uncle Robert lived at number 17, which was… Yes, yes which was next door to the Buxbaums at number 15. And they owned the house. We didn't own the house. We- my parents rented the house from the Wassermanns. The… The Bamberg Wassermanns were bankers. But they were related to the famous Doktor Wassermann… who you, you know what that's about? He- he discovered VD. And the joke at the time was, "How can you be so positive?" But… And Doktor Wassermann who was -lived on the first floor - we lived on the ground floor - his wife was a Petschek. And the Petscheks were virtually the coal kings of Czechoslovakia. They used to come with two cars. They used to come with a Rolls-Royce which they- they'd travelled themselves. And a Daimler where their staff came. And their staff were in uniforms and always wore gloves so they couldn't contaminate the family or any food or anything they handled. So, it was always a big event when they came from the Czech Republic to Bamberg. Mrs. Wassermann, or Else Wassermann was a Petschek.

So, you- your two parents were born in Bamberg?

Yes.

Yes. So how did they meet? Do you know how they met and…?

[00:07:20]

No, I'm afraid I don't. I think in Jewish circles everybody knew everybody. Although my- my mother's family lived in Ebelsbach.

Yes.

You know, at the time, it wasn't very easy for people to live in a big town. They had to have a certain amount of money… and… quite a few Jews had to apply several times before they could… move into a- a big town. I mean Bamberg at the time probably had a population of 60,000. This university- the university wasn't there, and Bosch wasn't there. But even today it doesn't have many more than 60,000.

Yes. How many Jews were there? Do you know? At that time?

…900.

Right…

Because there are now 900 Russian Jews there. The Germans were very clever. They didn't let them all congregate in one area. If there were 900 there, there were 900. If there were 1,000 there, there were 1,000 there. So, they were very well spread. And as far as I'm aware, there was hardly any… problems with the refugees. I mean in Bamberg there was- the synagogue was destroyed of course on Crystal Night. And… The leader of the congregation at the time was called *Kommerzienrat* [honorary title for outstanding services to the economy] Lessing. It was like somebody who had a knighthood because he'd been so… generous to the town.

Yes.

That was all forgotten, of course, under the Nazis. He went to the synagogue to try and save the Torah scrolls. And of course, they- they beat him up and didn't let him get the Torah

scrolls. And he died a few months later. To make things better, there's now the Willy-Lessing-Straße in Bamberg. They went to his house. He lived in the first floor. They threw his furniture out of the windows. It was a very bad night, the Kristallnacht in- in Bamberg at the time.

Where were you during Kristallnacht?

We lived in the Hainstraße at the time. My eldest brother Willy, who was an apprentice in our father's factory, was going to work on his bicycle at seven o'clock in the morning. And when he went out of the door, he saw smoke rising from the synagogue - which you could just see the top of over the trees - and he came back in. And said, "There's something wrong with the synagogue. It's on fire." So, we looked out of the window and of course we saw the police and the Gestapo marching some of our neighbours and the Jewish people - men - we knew down- down the street. Of course, we had no idea what was going on at all. So… our- we asked our maid to go outside and, and - and see what's going on. And she came back and said, "They're arresting all the Jewish- Jewish men in town and taking them to prison."

[00:10:07]

There was a prison in Bamberg in the [Obere] Sandstraße. And so… in due course, they came and took my father away as well. And of course, we were absolutely frightened to death, because …there didn't seem to be any rhyme or reason for it. You know, Father and Uncle and all the other Jews were benefactors to the town, employers - nobody had done any wrong. Their crime was that they were Jews. So …we kept a low profile. Of course, my brother didn't go to- to work. And my- our middle brother Ronnie didn't go - and I - didn't go to school. And then we were very afraid of course every noise, because they used to climb on the windows and paint swastikas on or 'Jew'. And… two o'clock in the morning the doorbell rang, and my father came back from prison. And we, we- of course we were highly delighted. But… he… We said, "Well, how is it that you're here?" He said, "Well I went to school with the chief of police, and he came to prison and said, "Fritz you can go home now, but I can't protect you if you get beaten up in the street. So, take all the back lanes and get home as quickly as possible." And …he managed to do that. …And then of course we, we- nobody went out for a few days and then it…it, it calmed down. And after about three or four days… father went to work again, but we couldn't go to school of course. We were excluded from

school ‘for our own protection’. And … I have a- I have a certificate to- went back to, to Bamberg in 2011 with my family. And of course, instead of being excluded from the *Gymnasium*, the grammar school, the head of the school was waiting for us in the courtyard to welcome us. And he very proudly said that - in the, in the assembly hall they had all the poets’ and the composers’ names – and he very proudly told us that the name of ‘Mendelssohn’ had been reinstated.

[00:12:30]

But you were at that time in the Gymnasium.

I was in the *Gymnasium* - in the second year.

Yeah. And tell us, before Kristallnacht, did you have any bad experiences? Before? I mean there was- before ’38?

Not really. Bamberg was a very Catholic town. And of course, Catholics were also- well, all the religions were not really liked by Hitler, because Nazism was to be the religion. So as far as I was- Don't forget I was only twelve years old at the time.

Yeah…

It's quite possible that our parents protected us from this sort of thing. But we didn't have any problems until- I personally didn't have any problems until 1938 until after Kristallnacht. Then of course before that, there was a little problem in school because… some of- some of my fellow scholars were in the Hitler Youth. And that was the elite at the time. And they were so proud of it that they went to school in their uniforms. And the head of the- the headmaster of the school, Doktor Schäfer, was really quite sympathetic to the Jews, and he didn't dare tell these boys not to come in their Hitler uniforms. We heard later on that as shortly afterwards Doktor Schäfer was replaced, because he wasn't a good enough Nazi.

This was in the Gymnasium?

Pardon?

This was in the Gymnasium, or…?

In the *Gymnasium*, yes.

We did have …We did have one or two teachers who were very decent as far as Jewish boys were concerned. But I also remember our singing teacher who always blamed the Jews when somebody sang a wrong note. "It's the damned Jewish ears," he used to say, "who can't sing the music properly." Doktor- Doktor Stockmann, his name was.

And how many Jewish children were there in, let's say your class in the gymnasium?

About eight or ten, I should say. There were two or three classes of the second- my, my cousin Hannah was in another one and Eva Pawson- you know, there were- there were others. And Inge Stein as well. So…

In the whole school?

In the, in the whole- no, in - in our class. In the second class. I think in the whole school there were probably… I'm guessing, about forty to fifty.

That's quite a lot.

Yes. Well, it was a- it was a - a community of 900 people.

Yeah – yeah. And you went- before you went to primary school. So, did you have- what sort of friends did you have? Did you have non-Jewish friends, Jewish friends…?

[00:15:08]

We had, we had- we had friends and we had non-Jewish friends. Of course, after Crystal Night or round about that time when the Nazis- you know the Nuremberg laws became more effective. They- they didn't dare speak to you in the street because they might have been- you know the, the, the Nazi frightening system was very invidious. Because I mean, they even

asked the children to report their parents if they listened to a foreign radio station. At the time, Radio Droitwich was the radio station in England- from, from England. And the, the aerial masts are still there to this day…if you drive past there. And of course, we always listened to, to the radio. But there was very little about Germany. There is some doubt as to whether England knew about it, or whether they were trying- 'trying not to get involved', I would say.

But what was the- were you frightened? Or you- what was the atmosphere of…?

Well, the atmosphere round about that time was very frightening. You know, you, you went to school and you came home. And of course, by that time, they had these laws. You know, Jews were not allowed in restaurants. They were- they were not allowed in, in, in parks - on park benches. They were not allowed in swimming pools, because it would contaminate the water. Theatres, cafés, cinemas… So, we had a fairly isolated life until the community bought a small restaurant in the middle of town called "Die Weiße Taube" - the white pigeon - which was a restaurant, a café - had a garden and a large hall. And so, we could congregate there. And that actually became the ghetto in 1941. Both my grandmothers were incarcerated there. Which of course we only discovered later on…"The Weiße Taube" is still- well it's now a new shopping mall. But I believe there is… a plaque on the, on the outside- on the Theaterplatz [Bamberger Theatergassen]

[00:17:19]

And what- when was the first time you heard your parents discussing immigration, or leaving, or…?

After Crystal Night. My- my family were Germans who happened to be Jews. Not like a lot of other families particularly from the East, who were Jews who happened to live in Lithuania or Poland or somewhere. There was quite a difference. And of course, when Hitler first came around, my father and, and his colleagues who were all- served in the German Army in the First World War, and were awarded all sorts of medals, didn't think, "No, this man with- with the moustache is not going to hurt us" - until Crystal Night. Then they realised that there was no hope for them in Germany, because the country became a lawless country, as far as Jews were concerned. Jews hadn't done anything wrong, but they could be,

you know, denigrated and beaten up in the street and this sort of thing. So, then they started to talk about immigration. Our eldest brother Bill - Willy – who, who was then about seventeen years old- he was sent to America, because we had somebody to give him a guarantee. You- in those days, there was no such thing as a- as an immigrant who- or an asylum seeker or anything. You had to have a visa. And you could only get a visa under certain circumstances. So, Brother Bill had somebody to guarantee him in America and lived there all of his life. My brother Ronnie, who was two years older than I, was sent to a school in Kent where brother Bill had been for a summer course before. And the people took him in. It was called 'The Glack' in Deal, near Dover. Although he didn't go to school. He was a motor mechanic. They just allowed him to live there. And he was a motor mechanic. And the reason he was a motor mechanic was that when people realised that they had to go- that they had to leave Germany, and they didn't know which country they- they could get into, they all started to learn a trade where they could learn- where they could earn a living with their hands… never mind knowing a language. So, my mother's brother Stefan who- who was a lawyer, he became a photographer. And his wife, who was a school teacher, became a physiotherapist. And they made their way in America in due course. So… it was very- it was very, very difficult. And we actually, my family and Uncle Robert's family - he had a son and two daughters - were allowed into England because they undertook to open a factory and employ British people. And I have the letter.

[00:20:15]

Who undertook that?

My father and his brother. Because at the time 1938, '39 there was very high unemployment in the UK. In fact, in this area, in the northeast it was thirty percent.

Yeah…

So, what they did, the- the… government department at the time, built advance factories. They drained a- a valley in Gateshead called the Team Valley. And they built advance factories – 6,000- 12,000- and 18,000-square foot factories. And they let them to anybody who would- who would come north to employ people. Now, British companies of course were not interested because it was north of Luton. So, they… They had the bright idea to let

refugees come- come here. And there were several estates in this area. There's one in Bishop Auckland and County Down. There's one in Cumberland. And of course, the other big one was- was in Pontypridd in Wales. And quite a lot of refugees went there. So, my- my father and uncle decided on the northeast, because they had in Germany- from Germany, a very big export trade to Scandinavia. And they thought, "Well if we are somewhere near the port of Tyne, we can just make products and ship them across the- the North Sea." So that's how we got into the Team Valley Estate in Gateshead. And of course, it was very advantageous, because the government was desperate to, to let these factories. And they let them for one shilling- that's five p [pence] per square foot. And they got a twenty-one-year lease without a break.

[00:22:06]

So, that was, you know, a big advantage. And of course, we were, we were- we were very lucky, because when my father eventually came and, and my uncle- my uncle was- had a friend in, somebody he met on a holiday in, in Belgium in Knokke-le-Zoute called Sir Robert Dunlop C I E D S O, who was a lawyer and lived in Newbury in Berkshire. And he had the company that- it needed an English director of course, so as Sir Robert became a director of the company. And they formed the company… and called it 'Loblite Limited'. It was Sir Robert's idea. Loble and lighting fittings, because that's what they made. So, when my uncle and my father first came to London, to England, they …hired a one room office in Ropemaker Street in the City. I don't think it's there now, due to the bombing. And that's where they bought second hand machinery, negotiated the deal with the factory in Team Valley. And, you know, tried to establish the company. Because… the condition of their entry into the UK was that they established a business and produced accounts within twelve months. Now, if you can imagine going to a country where you didn't know the language, you didn't know the products- my, my father did speak English actually. No customers, no suppliers, no plant, and… they did it! And… so it didn't last very long actually, because when the war started, all materials were strictly controlled. And... they then got war contracts. They were told by something called the Ministry of Supply in those days, what machines they had, and they had lathes and presses and milling machines. And they got drawings and- that said, "Make this." You see they were nuts and bolts virtually for the war effort. And... So, the plan was at the time, or the system was at the time, that they would have to… give details of the manufacturing costs and they got ten percent gross margin. So, that's really how the company

was financed. Because the company had no money at all; they had to borrow money left right and centre. And I remember my father took five pounds salary home, to our home in Low Fell, for my- my mother, my brother Ronnie and myself, and we lived on that. And quite frequently on a Friday they didn't have enough money to- to pay the wages. And he took three or five pounds back to the factory, so he could pay the wages. That was- however we survived the war. We, we- the company worked day shift and night shift.

[00:25:27]

You know, eleven-and-a-half hours each. And it was well thought of by the authorities. Although of course in May 1940 all males… over the age of sixteen were interned. Because the government realised that it had a lot of Germans in the country, and they didn't know whether they could be trusted or not. Well, one would have thought that refugees - Jewish refugees who had escaped Germany - could be trusted. But they didn't- they didn't appreciate that. So, one morning in May two very nice policemen arrived at our house in Low Fell and said, "We're terribly sorry Mr. Loble and Ronnie…" - my…my brother. "We've got to take you away. You've got to be locked up because… you know, the security for the country. This is a highly industrialised area, and we can't- we, we can't leave you here. So, finish your breakfast, pack your suitcase…" You know. Entirely different to the German police who said, you know, "Damned Jew. Hurry up or else." So, very nice policeman and they… They took them away. First of all, they took them to Fenham Barracks, which was an old barrack in Newcastle where my mother could visit them, you know, under certain hours. And they were there for, I don't know, just a week or two. And eventually they were taken to a place called Huyton near Liverpool.

Yes.

[00:27:03]

Huyton near Liverpool at the time, was a brand-new housing estate. It had the houses built, but no doors or windows. And… so, they put barbed wire around it and some soldiers with fixed bayonets to guard it. And they, they put- they put these refugees in there. And of course, you realise among the refugees there were doctors and professors and manufacturers and all sorts of people. So… I think it became Mr Wilson's constituency later on. And

eventually, they put in the doors and windows. And of course, you know Germans are- German people are very organised. So, my father actually became the deputy camp father. In other words, the manager of the- the manager from the in- from the inmates' point of view vis-a-vis the government. And the government was represented by lieutenants in the Army. So… And when my father was eventually released, this lieutenant… wrote him a letter and said, "You are released herewith and I'm terribly sorry you're leaving." [laughs]

What- how did your father see this experience when he talked about it?

Well, look, he was very pragmatic. He said, "Look, I can see their point of view. We know entirely- we know they're entirely wrong because no, no- no Jew would ever help a German." But the government didn't know that. I mean the British government at the time knew about empire; it knew very little about Europe.

So, he wasn't bitter about it?

No, he wasn't bitter about it. He- my parents were very pragmatic - with everything they suffered. My, my mother eventually, you know, in Keswick had to get on her knees to scrub floors for a shilling an hour. Never complained.

So, she, and you, had to leave Gateshead?

Yeah. Well… about two Sundays later, the two policemen arrived again. And said, "Mrs. Loble I'm sorry, but you've got to leave town - again, for the same reason." It was- I mean my, my mother was a housewife and I was thirteen years old. Nevertheless. So, the only place - my parents had only been in the country less than a year. So, the only place we knew of was Keswick. So… in the Lake District. So, we… packed a suitcase and went, went to… Marlborough bus station in Gates- in Newcastle, which doesn't exist now. And got on the bus to Keswick. And having learned this from my experience in Abbots Langley, I said to my mother, "We'll walk down the street and when we get a little out of town we'll knock at a few doors and somebody will give us a room." Which is exactly what happened. So, my, my, my mother got a job the next day as a cleaner in a school. And I got a job as a farmer's boy on a farm, which I must say in retrospect I enjoyed. Because my first job in the mornings, six o'clock was to take a handful of grain and catch the pony - Sally the pony - which eventually

pulled the two-wheeled milk, milk- milk trap. So, I caught the pony, had to brush it down, used to harness it, get it ready. By which time a farmer Horn had milked the cows, got the churns onto the trap, and… went, went into town and to- to deliver the milk. And in those days, because there were no bottles, he had a, a half-pint, a pint and a quart ladle, and the people used to come to the door with their- with their milk jugs and they used- he used to ladle out the milk.

[00:31:00]

My next job was of course then to sweep the cowbuyer. Because cows …are very productive with manure while they're being milked. And I had to sweep that up and clean it up. And then I got breakfast on the farm, which of course… in war time was- was very useful. I mean I was a growing boy, and rations didn't mean anything there. The farm had everything. We had- we had breakfast at six o'clock, we had elevenses, we had lunch, et cetera. Three o'clock till, till tea time. Six o'clock I went home to have- to, to, to spend the night with my mother. And… I did- did that for three months until my father was allowed back in Newcastle. He was thought 'safe' or 'reliable'. And then I came back to Gateshead as well. And I did another term at school, by which time I was fourteen and then I left school.

One moment because you have to go back a little bit. You haven't told us about your arrival in England. How did you find it?

[00:32:08]

My arrival in England. Well… After Kristallnacht you know the- the, the… Jews- most Jews in Germany realised that there was no hope for them to live there. So my eldest brother was- got into America in December, which was very quick. My middle brother Ronnie went to the school in, in- in Deal near Dover in January. And in March… My- I was- I had a suitcase which I could carry as a twelve-year-old boy with my clothes in. And my parents took me to Würzburg, which is not far away by rail- by train, to hand me over to some distant relatives called Hammelburger. And they- they took me to- to England via Harwich, Hook of Holland. And of course, you can imagine once we crossed the border-at the border of course getting out of Germany, they examined everybody, you know: "Have you- have you got any gold? Have you got any money?" I had ten shillings - literally a ten-shilling note, which is all that

was allowed out of the country. So, I, I- I arrived here with ten shillings. And… it was quite frightening, of course. I was- I was twelve, I'd left my parents and lived in a very close family all my life. But I realised that… you know, this sort of thing had to be done. I remember my, my - my brother Bill. He had- he was permitted to take some furniture and stuff with him. In those days it was called the 'lift van'. A lift van was like a container, except it wasn't a ready-made container. It was a big box, made to measure. And of course, being a young man, he didn't have much. So, they put in- they put in a bookcase and a bed and a this- you know some- some basics for him. And I always remember my parents bought him a new Erika typewriter. And it was my job to put clear glue all over it, to make it look old and used. Because the- obviously the lift van was packed under the surveillance of a customs officer. Mr. Dederbeck, who was a very nice man because… at lunchtime he said in a loud voice, "Mr. Loble, I'm going for my lunch now." And just left us to put in the lift van what…what we could, you see.

What did you take on your trip – apart from the ten shillings?

[00:34:49]

The suitcase I could carry, with my clothes in. And my father had to pay five hundred marks export duty. The Germans had a marvellous system of depriving - stealing – any- any money you- any- any refugees had. Because Germany was always short of foreign currency and they were very keen not to lose any that way. So… I had- they- I had to pay for, for my suitcase. I don't know how much my brother had to pay for the lift van. But… of course eventually my parents had to sell the factory. And I mean the people who came said, "Look we know you have to sell your factory. So come on, let's get on with it." And of course, my parents weren't particularly worried about it - my uncle and my father - because they knew they couldn't take the money with them. So, I- I don't know the figures at all but, say it was worth a million marks, you know, they said, "Well, we'll give you half a million. Good bye." They said, "Thank you very much." The Gestapo then… took the money and… it went on to a blocked account. I mean my- my father's salary at the time was about 2000 marks a month. And he was allowed to draw 2000 marks a month - from his own company, from his own bank account. If he went to town to buy a suit, he would have- the shop would have to send the bill to the Gestapo, and they would pay it from his account. So, there was no way that you could take money out of the country. However, … Eve- my wife's father. He was rather more astute

than this. A- He left Germany in 1935 but he only went to Holland, so he had to move on after that. But what he did he- he was a casing merchant. Casings are sausage skins. In other words, intestines of animals. They're sold in different diameters from different animals. And he over-invoiced people abroad, by arrangement. They sent them the right amount, and the extra money they kept for him in- in Holland or abroad – wherever. And when he was in Holland, the Germans discovered this, and they took him to court *in absentia*. And they fined him half-a-million Reichsmarks and gave him nine years' prison. Which was of course…an absurd sentence. So, after the war, he couldn't go to Germany. Because in Germany - the Germans did everything legally. You know, he- he was a- he was a currency smuggler and he was taken to court and he was punished and that was the sentence. So, the first thing he had to do, was to… get- firstly the same judge was still in the court. First, he had to get the judge demoted. And secondly, he had to get the sentence quashed. And that took several years. And I've got the newspaper article you know which says, you know, "Heinemann… Innocent." Because that's- that's how- how it went at the time. So, the, the, the, the currency was a major problem for the Nazis – always.

But your father didn't bring anything out when he came?

No. I- I think. I don't know how. I think when we came- when we came to England, I think, he had 300 pounds… with which to feed a family of four. And… establish a business. That's where, you know, he borrowed money from friends.

[00:38:29]

Yeah. And what were your first impressions arriving in England?

Hah. Very interesting question, that. Two- two things I saw on the train from Harwich to- into London. The first thing was 'FOR SALE' notices - of houses. Because in Germany they didn't do that. And the other thing was of course the number of chimney pots. You know. Every- every room had a fireplace and every fireplace had a chimney pot. And I thought that looked very strange. But I soon got used to it.

Those two things stuck in your mind.

Pardon?

Those two things…

Yes, that was- that's what stuck in my mind. Yes.

But- and how long did you stay- you said you stayed in London?

Yes.

Where did you stay?

East End of London - yes.

So, tell us – what happened to you?

Well, I was- I was taken in by a very nice family called Platt. Mr. Platt was a tailor and went out to work. Mrs. Platt ran what is now known as a 'convenience shop'. It was a small shop where they sold hair grips and ice cream and cigarettes – cigarettes! - for those smokers who are listening. Five Woodbines for two pence - old pence. Now, a packet of cigarettes costs about ten pounds. And… So- and we lived upstairs… in a very small flat. They had four daughters. And- and a grandmother. So, I was given the privilege of sleeping in the front room on a- on a moquette settee. Unfortunately, I had all sorts of red spots all over me all of a sudden, which I didn't know what it was. And I realised that it must be something like fleas or lice. I mean I didn't know.

[00:40:16]

So, I had- I had something called- I had something called hair- hair tonic with me: '*Dr. Dralle's Haarwasser'. 'Birken-Haarwasser'*, it was called, which obviously had some alcohol in it. So, I used to douse these things with *Birkenwasser* to alleviate the itching. No bathroom. We went to the local baths once a week with our clean clothes in- under our arm. And… outdoor toilet, of course. Cold-water tap in the kitchen to wash in. However, the- the Platts were very nice to me; they looked after me very well. And they took me to the cinema

about two or three times a week, which was a big thing at the time. And that's really where I learned English. …Not- not from them, because they all spoke with accents.

What did you see? What films? Do you remember?

Yes. I remember the first colour film I ever saw. It was called '*The Four Feathers'*. It was a film about the Sudan and the British fighting there. And one of them was a coward and so they gave him the, the feathers, you know. But… As I say- and on one occasion I remember we went to- we went to either a Bar Mitzvah or a- or a wedding. And everybody was- there's a photograph of it somewhere – all beautifully dressed. And… so I had a- quite a reasonable life there. Now, when I was- when I was there for three weeks, the truant officer arrived - otherwise known as the 'Education and Welfare Officer' - and he said, "There's a boy here of twelve years. Why isn't he at school?" And they said, "Well, he doesn't speak any English." So, he said, "It's nothing to do with me. He's twelve. Tomorrow he's at Kells Lane School, or else." So, I was taken to Kells Lane School and… fortunately there was a teacher there who spoke a few words of Ger-English. So, he and I communicated quite well except that on one occasion I know he gave me the cane for some reason. But… I survived that as well.

[00:42:33]

So, you had no English?

No, no English. Well, yes, I knew two very useful phrases.

Yes? Go on…

One was: "If you do not know the way, ask a policeman." Which of course was very useful, except I wouldn't have- understand the answer. And- and the other one was: "My ear trumpet has been struck by lightning." And I don't know where that came from, but that's what I remember.

And tell me, how did you… How was the connection made to the Platt family?

Well yes… we knew the Platts. My parents knew the Platts. The Platts' eldest daughter

Debbie was a school teacher. And she wanted to learn German. So, two or three summers before that, she spent about four weeks with us in Bamberg. So, she was- she was looked after by, by - by my parents then. And of course, … when, when I- after I, I came to live with the Platts, my parents sent me a bed couch, which was you know, just a couch in a box. And it was a couch during the day, and you could lift up- it was spring loaded, and you could put the pillows and things inside. Now inside that of course were a length of suiting for Mr. Platt and five gold watches for Mrs. Platt and her daughters. And we- we- they got that- that was by way of payment for looking after me, because they couldn't pay in money.

Yeah… and how long did you stay there?

About three months. From- from March to… Yes, from March to May when my- for two months, when my parents came. And that was of course a- a very worrying time, because all- all three brothers- all three of us were out of the out of Germany. But of course, our, our parents weren't. And it depended on my father and Uncle Robert selling the factory and getting that…[coughs] I need some water. Thank you.

[audio break]

Yes. You were saying you were worried about your parents.

[00:44:43]

Yes, because Germany was a lawless country at the time, and you never knew whether they were arrested, beaten up or anything else could happen to them.

Yes.

So, we were greatly relieved when we heard that… they were coming. And of course, people nowadays have mobile phones and telephones and computers and email - that sort of thing. And of course, in those days there was none of that. You- if you wanted to phone our brother in America, you had to book the telephone call at a certain time on a certain day. And I think it cost three pounds for three minutes, which was a great deal of money at the time.

What happened to him in America? Where did he go?

He… he- he- he stayed in New York, and he got a job as a toolmaker because he was an apprentice to my father which- which was the whole idea, so that you could earn your living with your hands. Later on, he… he became an export manager of some very large companies in America. And of course, before that, he joined the American Army. And- as a private. At- after some training and here and there, after the invasion of course in forty- in '45, he actually came to England. And he- he was stationed in a place near - near Birmingham and the whole family went down there to see him, because it was first time, we saw him since 1938. So that, that was great and he- he, he was a sergeant by then I think. And when the invasion started of course he went over to France. He was in a company… where the commander was General Patton. I don't know whether you know General Patton was a bit of a celebrity. He carried a pearl-handled revolver and all this sort of thing. And… my brother eventually became an interrogator of prisoners of war 'cause he spoke German. So, he had a Jeep and he had a trailer and he had a tent. And he had two chairs and a table and a 'cat o' nine tails' [a whip] which he used to put behind him on the wall when he interviewed German prisoners to frighten them a bit. And of course, he had to be right at the front, so that they were still shell-shocked from being captive - captured. So, he went all the way- he went all the way to Bamberg fighting with the American Army. And he was in something called the 'Falaise Gap', which was a place where the Germans actually surrounded the Americans. And he actually had to fix his bayonet and fight his way out of there with a bayonet. He said he had to kill a few Germans with a bayonet, which although he didn't like them, wasn't very nice. Anyhow, eventually they arrived Bamberg.

[00:47:53]

Now Bamberg was a very beautiful city - like a bishopric. It had a cathedral and a castle and love- lovely old buildings and churches. And some of the Germans wanted to surrender, because they didn't want their town destroyed. And some of the Germans of course said, "No, no, we must fight for- we must fight for the Führer until the end." Anyhow. The former ones won. They won because… a medical professor - a surgeon - who actually operated on me… before the war - Professor Doktor Lobenhoffer. He, he- he persuaded the Nazis to give up. And as a result, of course, Germany [Bamberg] is a world heritage site now because it's a very beautiful place. And when …my brother in his Jeep drove into Germany with the

American- American Army, you see, my grandmother's old cook or maid looked out of the window. And she shouted, "Jesus Christ! There's our Willy!" [laughs] So that's how we found her again. She was a good Catholic. And of course, she was very kind to my grandmother. She used to throw food over the ghetto wall when she could.

What was her name?

It was… It wasn't Babette Fugmann. It… What was her name?

Connie Gunther?

No. I'll think of it in a minute. Yes… She- we used to visit her in the Catholic care home where she lived towards the end. And somebody said to us, "You're obviously giving her money because you know, to show your gratitude and make life a bit easier for her. But don't do it because she gives it straightaway to the church. She doesn't spend it on herself." So, we used to give her things. …Kuni- she was called Kunigunde. Yes.

Kunigunde.

Yes. So, we saw her quite a- quite a- all of us. And my cousin Herbert and Werner. We all visited- visited her after the war, because we knew where she was, and we knew that she looked after Granny very well.

[00:50:14]

So, when did your brother- when was he- when did he get to Bamberg? Was it…?

Well, it must have been… March, April '45 I would say.

And was the first place- where did he go? Did he go to your…?

No. No then- then, then of course the Americans occupied Bamberg and the surroundings. And they took over the barracks. And the Americans lived, you know, occupied it for several years afterwards. But my, my - my brother then was discharged from the Army. And the

Americans were very generous to their soldiers. And there's something called the 'G.I. Bill of Rights'. And then he studied languages at Manchester University for a year or two which means he could learn a language and he was in England so we could be together. And in the, in the, in the - in the end, it worked very well because as I said he became export manager to some very large companies. And he went to Germany and he went all over- he went all over the world. And on one occasion we visit- visited him. He lived in a place called Glen Rock in New Jersey. And I said something about my flight bag. So, he opened this cupboard and there were about fifty flight bags in it. That was the thing. Airlines gave you a flight bag at the time, if you were a customer, and particularly a business-class customer. So, he had loads of those. And he also told me at the time of course that he had to have two passports. One for Arab countries and one for Israel. Because otherwise- and they, they did that for businessmen at the time. So, he- he travelled the world you know, quite a bit. And when he was about forty the company moved from New York to… Minneapolis. And in those days, it was either leave the company or go with them. Now, at forty, in America, your- your career was just about over, you were an old man at the time. So, he took the, the, the wise decision to go with the company to Minn- to Minneapolis. And… it served him very well, because he- he worked for the company for the rest of his life. And even after he retired, he told me that occasionally he got a very nice Christmas present from the company still. Ten thousand dollars for Christmas – you know. So, it- he'd obviously earned it.

[00:52:31]

But just to come back to you, at the beginning… in the early forties. So '39 your parents came…

Yes.

And then where did you all go - when they came? What did your…?

Well, when, when, when my, my, my parents came as I said in the forties, first of all my father was interned.

Yes…

And he went to Keswick, as I said.

But just to interrupt you, you said you were evacuated as well. When was that?

Ah, that was from London.

OK…

Third- third of September 1939 from St. Paul's School in Swiss Cottage, to Abbots Langley.

And for how long?

Well, I was, I was there till about July, August I should say, again '39. And then we moved to Newcastle because my father and uncle opened the factory. And after that… of course it became '41 when they were interned. And there's a very interesting little story about that. Every town had an 'Aliens Officer' who was a police inspector who looked after the refugees. For instance, when I… had a job on the trading estate, there was no roadway between Low Fell and Team Valley. There was only a foot path. So, I needed a bicycle to go to work. And of course, I was a German and an enemy alien, et cetera. So, I went to the police and said, "Look, can I please have a bicycle?" Because bicycles were restricted in case you lent one to a para- a German parachutist, you see? So, I now have my Alien's Registration book which says that I am 'permitted to have in my possession and under my control a pedal bicycle'. And I used that for quite a long time. So, my, my brother Ronnie who was older than I, wanted to go to a dance at the YMCA occasionally on a Saturday night. And of course, we had a curfew to ten o'clock. And so, we had to go to the police station and say, "Look next Saturday I want to go a dance at the YMCA. Can I please have an extra hour… to, to- to be out of the house?" And they usually gave it to him. Anyhow. When- when the… German refugees and Austrians et cetera, were interned in May 1941, the Aliens Officer then had to look after the businesses of the refugees - because there were lots. Most of the Team Valley trading estate had- were, were, were German- were refugee industrialists because British companies didn't want to come here. So… he discovered that some- a friend of the family, who was English, ran the company. But… was writing promissory notes all the time. So, he was- he was trying to make money out of the company. Which of course at the time had no money. So- and this is- I think this really explains why England is such a

wonderful country. Because this British police officer was instrumental in my father getting early release from internment, so he could go back to the business and run it properly, instead of an Englishman… taking money out of the business with future promissory notes. And I think when you- when you think about it, that English police officer helped a German refugee. So, he could deal with an English businessman. I think that ex- that says everything.

[00:56:45]

So, he helped your father to get out?

Yes – yes.

But your brother stayed longer in internment?

Yes, well he was- he was only sixteen or seventeen at the time. And of course, all the refugees had to go before a tribunal, you know. And they were categorised 'A', 'B' or 'C': dangerous, not so dangerous, or doubtful or whatever. And my Uncle Herbert- my Uncle Robert and his son Herbert, they were- they were in for about six or eight months. In Huyton.

They were all in Huyton?

In Huyton, Liverpool.

Did they meet somebody? Because there was a famous composer, Hans Gál who wrote 'The Huyton Suite'. I don't know if you know about that… Did he meet?

Who?

Hans Gál.

No - never heard the name. No.

Did he meet any people who became famous later?

No. Well of course they had famous people there, because some of the- for instance they had Rawicz and Landauer… that- a couple of men who played the piano beautifully. Used to play on the BBC and everything else. They had violinists… They, they - they had discussions, they had lectures, they had concerts. You know the, the, the- the Jewish refugees were very able in many ways.

Yes.

Now my wife and family who lived in, in London- well, they moved from London to Boars Hill in north in, in Oxford. But they also, they also- were also interned. And my wife was probably ten at the time- twelve at the time. And they took them to the Isle of Man. There's a very famous book called '*The Island of Barbed Wire'* and… So, they- they had to- they had to leave- they had to leave London. That was before they moved to Boars Hill. And they were taken to the Isle of Man, and in the Isle of Man of course the camp were hotels and boarding houses. So, they lived very well for quite a while. I mean my- my, my, my parents-in-law had quite a lot of money because my father-in-law was clever. And she paid the hotel to change her towels every week. You know, she, she- she really lived a very comfortable life, although she was interned. Now about ten years ago, my wife and I went to the Isle of Man. And the Isle of Man- it's a very pretty place as you know.

[00:59:10]

But we had an introduction to the archive there. And we went to the archive and we- we found the registration card of my wife and my… and her, and her mother - and her brother, who was even younger at the time. Claude.

It was a family camp.

Yes. They were all in the women's camp. But for some reason the record cards of all the male internees in the Isle of Man were destroyed. So, there are none.

In which camp were they? What was it…?

We have it – Onchan.

In Onchan.

Yes- yes. So, they had a- they were literally on a holiday. But… of course, you- as you know the Isle of- the Isle of Man was also used for- to intern people during the First World War.

Yes – yeah.

And during- while- when they first went to the Isle of Man, of course the government didn't know who was who. They actually had Nazis among them. So, they actually got some Nazis. And there were Nazis and Jews in the same house. And it took them a little while to sort that out.

[01:00:18]

But I wanted to come back to you, and ask you whether- I mean you lived for a short time in the Swiss Cottage area, where there were lots of other refugees. And then you moved to Gateshead.

That's right.

So how was that contrast - for you?

Well of course in, in - in London I was a schoolboy, either in London or evacuated at Abbots Langley. And when I came to Newc- when I came to Gateshead, I- I went one term to again, an elementary school. And I was fourteen in September, so I could leave school at Christmas. And on the 2nd of January I started my apprenticeship. That- that is of course another story because… I was very fortunate. I applied for an apprenticeship with a company called 'Sigmund Pumps' which was a Czech company, but not Jews. They came here to expand their business. There were three sons… all pump manufacturers. One in a place called Lutyne, in, in- in the Czech Republic. One stayed there. He was eventually shot by the Nazis. Although he wasn't Jewish. One went to France, to start a factory there. And one came to Gateshead to start a factory there. And… the one who came to Gateshead of course had the experience and the money and the wherewithal to start a factory because they weren't

refugees. And so, I was very lucky, because I got a job with him. Got a job in the company. A- It was wartime. B- I was an enemy alien. B- I couldn't speak English very well. However, as luck would have it, they had very, they had a great deal of experience with apprenticeships in, in the Czech Republic. And when they came to England, they employed the Institute of Industrial Psychology to select their apprentices. They took in thirty apprentices a year. And… I was- I was fortunate to get a job there because as I say you know during the war, I was very lucky to get a, a job in a factory. And we made stirrup pumps and we made fire pumps for engines and we- we worked day-shift and night-shift. So, I was very fortunate. And they also had, which was quite novel at the time, a first year off the job. So, for the first whole year, we didn't produce anything for the company. We were just trained… for machine- on machinery and hand tools. And of course, we were very- we were very skilled engineers, because nowadays it's all done by computer. So, our skill is really wasted.

And what was it called? An apprenticeship in – in what?

[01:03:01]

I was a- I was a fitter, turner and toolmaker apprentice. And… they also made sure that we had theo- theoretical training. So, we were sent to Gateshead Technical College. First- during the evening for the first few years and then it became day release, which… was progression. So… Of course, having no- having no basic education as such, I had to do the access course first - Junior One and Junior Two. And then I did an Ordinary National Certificate and then I did a Higher National Certificate which wasn't run in Gateshead at the time. So, I had to go to Rutherford College in Newcastle, for which the Gateshead Education Authority had to pay the Newcastle Education Authority to train me, you see. And then I got the job in London… and I went to the Regent Street Polytechnic to get the necessary endorsements. So, you know, I'm a…a Chartered Mechanical Engineer. Doing it the hard way.

But the apprenticeship was still during the war?

Yeah- oh, yes.

Yes. And was there any- was there any bombing or...?

Not really. There, there was a bomb in Newcastle… where, where- where they had… stored butter and sugar. And they burned like anything. As a matter of fact, my father and uncle had a 6,000 square foot factory at the time. And… they had to give up a quarter of it - fifteen hundred square feet - to the Ministry of Food, so that they could store butter and sugar. And everybody had to do that, so that it was spread well about. And… if they had a hit like they had in Newcastle with a big warehouse, they wouldn't lose all the food. Because- because at the time, food had to be every- most of the food had to be imported.

[01:05:10]

And you didn't want to work in the factory of your father at that point?

No. My- my, my, my father was - was very wise as far as that was concerned in that he said, "You know you can learn something from me in due course. But first of all, you learn something from somebody else." And all - all of us worked somewhere else. We are both- all three of us were engineers, and… you know, we all made a living at it.

And did you eventually go to your father's…?

Yes, in… I got married in 1953. And then shortly afterwards my, my, my father took ill; he had cancer 'cause he smoked all his life. In Germany he smoked cigars. In England he couldn't afford them, so he smoked cigarettes and pipe. And… he was very, very ill. And then Ronnie first came into the business, who also worked for another company called the Bren Manufacturing Company. It was a company that made the Bren gun. The Bren gun was a twenty-millimetre cannon invented by the Czechs. And it was called the 'Bren gun' because it was made- made in a town with an unpronounceable name like 'Gebrrrilno'.

Brno.

Brno. And so, so he was a- he was a qualified Production Engineer. Ronnie did the same. Also went to night school. And he worked, he worked- he worked for the Bren Manufacturing Company. And then you're- when my- when our father took ill, he went into the business and ran it for a while. And then I came into the business with him. And then- then our father died and we both took it- took it on …full time. And then unfortunately

Ronnie died at the tender age of forty-two. So… Then I was left with the business. …Which lasted nearly sixty years.

[01:07:26]

And one day somebody came to see me. I can't even remember what he was trying to sell me, but he said, "What are you going to do with your business?" And I gave him the- the then standard answer: "I'm waiting for someone to make me an offer I can't refuse." And three months later he did just that. So, it was- it was never really on the market.

So, you sold to this man?

Yes. Well, I was… seventy-something at the time, so…

But you've been active in all kinds of other aspects as well. Maybe just if you could…

Yes well…

Summarise for us what…

The family… The family have always been you know, supportive of people less fortunate than we are. My parents- my father was chairman of this, that and the other over the years. And… When we got married, we lived- we lived in a- in a house in Low Fell and our neighbour said to me, "You know, you should join Round Table." And I don't know whether Round Table is still about, but it's not very active as far as I know. Round Table is an organisation of business and professional young people between the ages of I think twenty-one and thirty, or something like that. So, I went to the Round Table. And, you know, we did voluntary work. The- these organisations usually have the same thing. They- they help local authority, they help local charities, they help local businesses and they do international work. For instance, you know we used to send money to India to- for eye clinics and that sort of thing. And when I was about thirty, somebody said to me, "Join Rotary." So, I joined Rotary which does the same. They- they have vocational service and international service committees. And I worked on that. And I've been in Rotary for sixty years. I was president many years ago… and then one of the Rotarians said to me, "Why don't you become a

magistrate?"

[01:09:39]

You know, one thing leads to another, it's quite incredible. So, I was a magistrate for twenty-nine years. And then somebody said to me "Why don't you become a school governor?" And I was a school governor for thirty years. Different schools. The, the most rewarding were of course special schools, because there you see some fantastic work done. And then… another friend of mine started a breast cancer research facility. Which the- which the government didn't have at the time. We raised money. And we charged women twelve pounds for a- for a mammogram. Women who couldn't afford it didn't pay anything. Women who could, paid twelve pounds. And this grew so much, that after a few years we got 160,000 pounds from the… National Lottery… Fund to develop what we were doing. In other words, we bought a big- we bought a mammography machine and we did research at Newcastle University with it. So that was a very satisfying job. Apart from that of course I had- my, my late brother Ronnie and I had children. And they went to the Orthodox cheder, Sunday school. And- which was not our, our custom. So, with some friends in 1963 we started a reform synagogue in Newcastle - with some friends and lots of help from the Leeds reform synagogue which was the nearest to us at the time. Rabbi Doctor Henry Brandt helped- helped us a lot. And of course, eventually we were chairman and president and everything, so I'm still- I'm still active in that. So, I have a- I have a few hobbies which keep me out of mischief.

Such as? Tell us one, or something else.

Well, that, you know. I do Holocaust talks. Anywhere. You know at Third University…. Age of the…

University of the Third Age.

Yes, that's right. And- and has schools and clubs. And I do guided tours of the synagogue for school children. Give lectures about Judaism. Talk to Rotary clubs.

[01:12:05]

So, when you speak to school children, and you tell them your story, what- what aspect do you focus on, or what's important for you?

Well of course the thing is to inform the children, because neither they nor their parents know anything. And you make it- you make it as interesting for them as possible. You know. I don't- I don't do children under ten or twelve. So, when they're twelve I say, "Look, you know, I was your age. Can you imagine that your parents were locked up, or your parents were- were told they were terrible people… and you had to leave the country?" "You don't speak the language…" you know, to try and make it somehow realistic for them. Because I was talking to a lady where I live last night and she said, "You know, from what you say, I've had a fantastic life without realising what's actually gone on in the world." Which is a lot- is the case for a lot of people. I mean, in, in my opinion even a lot of Jews don't know everything about the Holocaust. Particularly those who weren't touched by it, or - or didn't have people who went through it at the time.

Yes.

It was an incredible period, and of course nowadays they are compared with or spoken of in the same way as Darfur and- you know. But they are entirely different things. I mean in Germany it was an elected government which turned on his own innocent people. I mean, the Jews weren't trying to do anything against the government. They were just trying to get on with their lives. In these other countries it's either political or religious. So, it, it, it- it was entirely different to what's going on at the moment. Sad as it is, and terrible as it is, in many countries of the world.

Yeah. …Tell me a little bit about the background of your wife. You said that you got married in 1953…

Yes.

What was her background?

[01:14:02]

Well… my, my, my wife was born in Düsseldorf. She had a brother, Claude - or Claus. They were called Heineman and… my father-in-law's father – my, my wife's grandfather - was a casing merchant. Casing is sausage skins.

Yes, you mentioned that…

And they started- they started in a very small way. He and his father - grandfather – used, used to go to the slaughterhouse at five o'clock in the morning with a hand-cart, to collect the offal or the- the casings. They then took them to their little workshop, and they put them through a mangle and, and - and cleaned them brine – salt water - and put them into barrels. And they sold the barrels. You know, first of all it was in Germany, because they made a lot of sausages in Germany. And all over the world. And then when the Nazis came in 1935, they left Germany and went to Holland, because they had a lot of customers there. And when the war- when the- war approached and Holland was in danger, they came to England. And they were very lucky to get into England, because my wife's maternal grandmother was English-born. She was- she was English-born, by the name of Stern, who married her German cousin. Which was done at the time. So, we- she had English relatives and of course they could get into the country, because they had- they were- they were English family. And then, then my father-in-law started a casing business in England again. And not- they didn't only do- they didn't only do sausage skins they also used the sausage skins for tennis rackets. And of course, for medical- medical sewing thread. You know, catgut. That's what it was called at the time – before. Nowadays they use clips or nylon. But that was a business at the time. And then, in Germany still, they did so well they started a margarine factory. And the margarine factory bec- became so big, it had two complete football teams. You know. They employed several hundred people. And nevertheless, you know, the Nazis said, you know, "You're a danger to the country you are terrible vermin." And… But my father-in-law saw the- the signs rather earlier than my father.

And left in '35?

Yep - yes.

And how did you meet your wife?

Now… We're- we're not agreed on that. But I say it was at the- what's the hall called, of the West London synagogue? It's around the corner.

[01:17:09]

Montefiore Hall? - No.

No… Anyhow… at the West London Synagogue. It's still there, but I can't remember the name. And she- she said we met at a, at a, at a common family friend where, when I was a bachelor in London, I used to be invited on a Friday night. And she was also invited on Friday night - with something in mind, obviously. So, we, we- we married, and my wife was very capable and very beautiful. And… we had two children - Monica and Peter. And so, when they- when they- well we lived in Low Fell of course, because it was in Gateshead near the factory. And when the children were of an age to go to school, we moved here to Gosforth and… because by that time my wife had a brain tumour. And it was- it was a very large tumour and it disabled her to a certain extent. So- and I- and I had to go to work, you know. The factory started at half-past-seven in the morning, and for years and years I was there at half-past-seven in the morning. And later, when it got bigger, I went at eight o'clock. So, we- I couldn't take the children to school. But when we lived here, they could- they could walk to school, or a friend could walk them to school. So, as I say Pete- Peter went to Arundel School eventually and Monica into Froebel. She was at home, while Peter was away. And… And they made- you know, had good careers since then.

And what sort of identity did you want to give your children? How did you raise them, or…?

…I don't- I don't- well, I want to raise them to be decent and, and - and helpful citizens which is of course, you know, I think they saw what my wife and I were like. My wife still today, although she has dementia, is very, very helpful to the other residents in her home. If, if - if one of the ladies at her table's plate is empty, she will point to the carer to take the plate away. If somebody spills some tea, she'll take a tissue out of her handbag and mop it up. So certain traits are, are still there. And so- and I suppose our children have seen that. I mean both Monica- I mean Peter used to - when he was working in the City - he used to give maths lessons to immigrant children in his lunch hour. And Monica is chairman of WIZO in Newcastle. So, you know, they have- they have taken a few chips off the old blocks.

And did you speak German at all to them?

[01:20:06]

Not very much. You appreciate that during the war, of course, one did not speak German at all. And eventually you know they, they were educated, and they went to- went to college, et cetera. So, we didn't actually- we didn't actually push that very much. But I must say Monica speaks very good German. And Peter's not that- not that good. But she also speaks French, because on her husband's side they had a- they had German grandparents who lived in Switzerland. So, when they visited them- so they both speak, more or less, English, French and German.

And did you talk about your past and your experiences with your children?

Oh yes, they know all about it - yes. You know I am of the- I always say I'm not a real survivor. I- I never had to suffer in a concentration camp. I was…on- on the fringes of it, if you like. I mean the most- the most heartrending part of that- the Nazis generally, is what happened to my- both my grandmothers. Both my grandmothers could not leave Germany because we couldn't get an exit - well exit we could have got - couldn't get a visa for them into any country. And believe it or not, in 1940 we got visas for them - for Cuba. Now Cuba was a place nobody had ever heard of or perhaps heard of but had no idea what went on there. However, by that time… there was a war on, and they couldn't leave Germany. So, I'm afraid they, they were both- they were both killed by the Nazis. Now among my… documents, I have my grandmother - paternal grandmother's - *Heimeinkauf* contract. In other words, a contract to buy into an old-age home which said, you know, you have so much money, shares, house, money. You, you, you give so much for the journey to the home, the food on the journey, the care in the home. And what's over, is given to people who can't afford it. And of course, … that's how the Nazis took all her money from her. And the care home turned out to be Theresienstadt. So, she paid for her own death.

[01:22:45]

And my, my maternal grandmother was the same. They- they were both- one was I think

seventy-eight and the other one was eighty-one years old. So, you know, it is inconceivable what happened to these poor ladies. They had to- they, they- they took all their money… then they put them in a cattle truck for three days.

Yeah…

Still… happened to lots of people, I'm afraid. And of course, since then, the Germans have tried to make amends as you know. They built synagogues, they… They do- And they have something called a *Stolpersteine* - a "Trip stone". So, my grandmother Loble, her trip stone was paid for by the girls' school she went to in Bamberg. They baked cakes and they had a film show and they raised the money. It's only I think 200 euros, or something. Nevertheless, they did it. So, in front of her home where she lived, is this brass plate which says, "Here lived Caroline Loble [Karolina Löbl], born so-and-so, murdered so-and-so" – Treblinka, or whatever. Then we did the same for my maternal grandmother.

What about Eva's grandmother? Is there one, or…?

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

So, was that…?

It can be- it can be done. They're still doing it.

Is it- was it important for you to have the Stolpersteine?

Absolutely! And I've- I've got photographs on my mantelpiece, you know, to remind us of what happened to our two grandmothers. And of course, we didn't only lose grandmothers- two grandmothers. For instance, my… my father- were four brothers. As I said, the three of them were in Bamberg in the electrical business. The fourth one went to Katowice. Well… he was lost. So, he, he - he must have been murdered. And my, my wife Eve, she had two uncles who were also killed by the Nazis. But you see in those days people didn't- at the beginning of the war, before the war, people didn't realise how gruesome it could be. Because they were already in Holland. And they went back to Germany for the Bar Mitzvah of one of their friend's sons. Inconceivable today. But that's what they did at the time. So, it cost two of

them their lives.

So, you said you don't see yourself as a survivor, but do you see yourself as a refugee?

No. …I'm part of the establishment.

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

I'm British all the way back to my naturalisation papers… Which happened in 19… 48, I think. And of course, then we changed our name by deed poll to make it more easily legible or pronounceable.

From Löbl to…

To Loble. Yes.

[01:25:54]

But the past is important for you because you- how is it important for you?

I think the past is very important, so it doesn't get forgotten.

And you've published a book…

Yes. Yes, well, because I'm bilingual, I can read and translate old documents. It actually started with my cousin Herbert, whom I call "my illustrious Cousin Doktor Herbert Loebl OBE", who started research. And- but now has been taken over in a very big way by my son-in-law Gerald who has 12 or15,000 family names on his website. And they're not only names; he has a most fantastic website. Books they have published, jobs they have done, honours they've received.

Genealogy?

Absolutely. You know - thousands of them. And he- he works on it every day. And of course,

the interesting thing is that people found him, and he found people on the web. So, he's- we've- we've met all sorts. Gerald's father and mother were only children. And they only- they always said, "We have no relatives." Since Gerald has been really a very skilled genealogist, he- he has loads and loads of family. And he went to America last year. Any he- he had a meeting in New York, and I think there were thirty-two members of his family there. Which his parents were not aware of before.

[01:27:30]

He found a relative in… in… Northampton, I think. Who- who- whose name I think- he had a very German name, but he was- he was in the Army in- in Scotland; I can't remember the name now. And he- he was a sheriff of Northampton. And he also found another lady somewhere in England who used to play in the sandpit with his father. And we went to her ninety-ninth birthday or something. She's died since. So, it's been absolutely wonderful for him because I always felt guilty. The Lobles have family galore and all over the place, but his family have really expanded since he's been working on it. And he does it- he does it almost every day.

And what about you? What is important for you of your German Jewish heritage? What is the most important aspect?

Well, I think the, the- the important thing is that the Holocaust and Judaism is remembered. It's of course getting more difficult as time goes on, because there are all sorts of- you know, people marry out and people have- change their sex and what-have-you. To which I am… a bit old to appreciate what's actually going on. But …I, I - I think, you know, that I don't- I don't mind what people do because that's- that's what they have to do anyway. The thing is that it's- the heritage is remembered. And particularly the, the - the Holocaust. Because that is something which people should never forget and hopefully it'll never happen again. I wouldn't be surprised if it would. But… I'm doing my best to remind people about it anyway.

How do you think would your life have been if you hadn't been forced to- to leave Bamberg?

Well. There are two possibilities. If the Nazis hadn't come, I probably would have finished my school career, gone to university and become an electrical manufacturer in Bamberg. You

know? Because that's how it- I was the third… generation of electrical manufacturers in our family. And our son - whether he liked it or not – would have become the fourth. … There is the fact that I was very fortunate in my life - all my life. Get out of Germany. Find- I had my parents here. Had my family here. Got a job during the war. Got training. Made- made my living as- at engineering all my life. I'm ninety years old. I'm in reasonable health. You can't get any better than that.

Yeah…that's right. But is there any message you would have for somebody who might watch this interview – in years to come?

[01:30:44]

Remember it. And try and follow in my footsteps, because - not that I'm a paragon of anything but - I've been lucky because I think my personality, and my training, and my family- my heritage- have enabled me to… to go through tough times without needing counselling. You know? I know a lot of people need counselling if they have a trauma of some sort. I am- I think I'm very lucky that my personality and character is such that although I- I've seen some very horrible, and terrible things and upsetting things - I am not delighted talking about it now – but, I think it's got to be done.

To talk about the Holocaust?

Yeah – yes.

And how do you see for example the role of the AJR or other institutions? How do you think should they develop in their- in their perspectives?

Well, the more the merrier. Because you see, I mean you know there's- there's the AJR, there's all sorts of organisations. There's the Sternberg Centre and all these- the more of those there are, the better it is because I think people must be educated about this. And what I'm hoping is that people will pass it on. It'll make such an impression on them. I mean you know I've talked to school children who have been to the camps through- through the [Holocaust] Educational Trust. And of course, … that's where it's- that's where it's at. <u>They</u> should remember it. <u>They</u> should tell their children. They- <u>they</u> should know what it's all about. And

of course, there are so many diversions nowadays that… it may well- it may well last another generation or two. But after that, it's history. You know, I always say to children, you know, "I saw this with my own eyes. This is not Cromwell or Henry the Eighth." But I think eventually… it'll become that.

[01:32:48]

What you think for example about the new- the Holocaust memorial which- it's hopefully going to be built next to Parliament?

Well, I think it's- I think it's right, you know. …Not- not only that, because it'll, it'll- it's right in the centre- centre of London. And to help people remember this. And- I mean there's a- there's a Holocaust Centre in the Midlands, you know, also, also- also very good. And there- there are- I mean in Newcastle we're going to have a- a Jewish exhibit of some sort. And as you said in Leeds, they have them, and in other places. And that's got to be done. You see, somehow… Jews al- always get a bad press. …And it's probably because we are very hard working… and we are no more capable than anybody else, but I think it's a case of "When needs must, the devil drives". So, if you- if you read a book which I- which I've mentioned to you before, you know, "*Thank You for Your Business*" - the contribution of the Jews to just this country. It's …you know, quite phenomenal in proportion to the numbers. I mean people don't know that Dylan Thomas and people like that were Jewish. You know. Our- and I think the worst people at propaganda is Israel. You know, I mean Israel- Israel gave- gave away the Gaza Strip, which was at the time the most fruitful part of, of, of the country. It had huge exports. And it gave the Arabs that part of the country and their own police and guns and everything. Hoping, no doubt, that it would alleviate some of the enmity and that they would colonise it and expand it and work it. What have they done? Dug tunnels and send missiles from there. You know, that- that is really a shame. And Israel is very poor as saying that. Because …I mean, every time a missile lands in Israel, you know, you may or may not hear of it. But every time they fire a missile, it's on the front page. And that is an attitude.

Yeah…

And I don't know whether one can- whether one can ever change it. But we have to try.

[01:35:28]

And maybe a last question. You've lived now in Newcastle or around for many years.

Yes.

Do you feel you are a Geordie, or do you feel you are local- have a strong local identity?

Oh absolutely. I wouldn't like to live anywhere else. It's- it's a- the people are very nice. It's a very nice area. The weather is not always of the best, but you can't have everything. No, we are, we are very well settled here. And of course, we know the area quite well. We're- we're not too far from the Yorkshire Dales, we're not too far from the Lake District, or Scotland or Ayrshire. There's a lovely countryside around here. And we've been to most of it. We've been abroad as well, but- around the world a couple of times. But it's…

[sneezes] *Sorry.*

That's all right.

And do you think it was different - I mean as a sort of refugee, the experience here, up north - than in London?

Oh absolutely. In London you know, I mean, when we lived in Hampstead many, many years ago, people used to say, "English people need a passport to get in there." But they don't. You know, "The Dorice café" and all these special Jewish things which unfortunately don't exist anymore. But they helped the refugees to establish. For instance, I don't know whether you ever heard of something called "The Wayfarer café"? "The Wayfarer" was in… Orchard Street. And when I was a young man, we- and lived and worked in London, we- we used to meet there. And it was the first café in London where- as, you know, young men who didn't have much money could spend an hour or two with a cup of coffee. And if we had a good week, we could have a piece of cake as well.

Yes. So "The Dorice"or"The Cosmo" were there as well…?

That's right- That’s right, yes.

[01:37:16]

And there was nothing like that - here?

There was- No, New- Newcastle- when we first came here, Newcastle had- had a few hotels. Many fewer than now. And it had two restaurants. It had The Pineapple Grill and it had something else, and that's all there was. And it had The Moo Cow Milk Bar. But now there are hundreds of restaurants from all… nations. The only thing we don't have in Newcastle is a real French restaurant. And of course, we don't have a kosher restaurant either. We have a kosher shop. But the really- you know, observant Jews live in Gateshead, where they have two shops where they can get everything. And Gateshead’s only across the river. You know Gateshead was started by a Newcastle Jew called Birdstone in about 18-something or other because Newcastle wasn't *frum* enough. So, he went to Gateshead and he hired a room, and he started his own synagogue and eventually it became *yeshivah*.

Yeah…

And… So, that New- Gateshead is the Oxford and, and- and Cambridge of Jewish learning in Europe. And, I believe, absolutely fantastic. And of course, they have a junior school and they have a grammar school and they have a *kollel* and they have a seminary. It's a fantastic facility for orthodox people.

Did you have much to do with Gateshead at all?

Yes… not the Jewish community. I am probably the oldest student of the Gateshead Technical College.

Yes?

And when I was ninety, they gave me a birthday party. And next week I’m going to open something for them. So, I, I - I keep in touch with them and I’m also doing something for the

BBC in March. So… you know they… they… There are not many of me about, unfortunately or… So, I do what I can, you know, while I can. Mostly to pass on some of the things which should not be forgotten.

Is there anything else you'd like to add which we haven't discussed or haven't talked about?

No, I don't think so, I think you've covered it very well. I've had a very long life…. Which I'm surprised at. But of course, it proves the old saying that only the good die young. But… by and large you know obviously into each- into each life some rain must fall, and it has fallen in mine in a big way. But I've managed to, to- I've managed to cope with it and I'm still enjoying it. I mean, after I retired, my wife and I went round the world twice. You know, I like travelling. I used to like skiing. I was in Switzerland sixty times. And… so, you know, we- we mustn't forget the good times either.

OK…

Right? Thank you very much indeed.

Thank you very much for sharing your life history with us.

You're very welcome.

[End of interview]
[01:40:34]

[01:40:49]
[Start of photographs and documents]

Photo 1
This is a picture of my two brothers and myself on our bicycles in the garden of our house at Hainstraße 16, about 1938. You will see that we are both- we're all wearing *Lederhosen* - leather, leather trousers, with the fancy braces, which were then the equivalent of jeans are now. The greasier they were and the grubbier they were, the more worthwhile they were.

Photo 2
This is a picture of myself at the age of six, on the day or the day before I went to school - to elementary school - for the first time. It was a custom in Germany to reward, or bribe, children to go to school with large cardboard cones filled with sweets. And as you can see, I have several. So, I was well rewarded.

Photo 3
When all the Jewish children were expelled from school, the Jewish community tried to teach them in the synagogue. There were only two committee rooms in which this class, as you can see, over a wide range of ages, was taught by three teachers. I am in the white shirt, in the top row, the third from the left.

When was this?

This was 1938.

[01:42:36]

Photo 4
This is a picture of the Platt family, the family I stayed with when I first came to the UK. It shows Mr. and Mrs. Platt and their four daughters. And I'm in the foreground. It was on the occasion of either the wedding or a Bar Mitzvah of one of their friends. It was taken in 153 Clapton Road London East 5. [E5]

Photo 5
This is our wedding photograph, which shows my father-in-law, Fred Heineman on the left-hand side, our bridesmaid Renate Kaufman, who was about twelve years old at the time. My bride Eve and myself, my father and on the far right, my mother. It was in April 1953.

Photo 6
On the left-hand side is Stevie and his sister Susie Loble, the children of my brother Ronnie. And the two children on the right are our children, Monica and Peter. I would say this was taken about 1960.

Document 1

Here we have the earliest catalogue of the Löbls' electrical business. On the right-hand side: 'Hugo Löbl', my grandfather. It's dated 1913. And on the left-hand side, the British company, which was called 'Loblite Limited', and its anniversary in 1989.

Document 2

This is a 1935 catalogue of Hugo Löbl Sons in Bamberg which shows a very modern factory which was actually built in 1928. And it was a first factory which made plastic lighting-industrial lighting fittings, because they were non-corrosive and double insulated.

George, thank you very, very much for sharing your story…

You're welcome.

… and your photographs.

[End of photographs and documents]
[01:44:52]