



Herbert Levy, born 1929 in Berlin, died 2015 in London. Herbert emigrated with his parents to the UK in June 1939 and they joined the synagogue in 1940.

Herbert Levy was interviewed by Dr Bea Lewkowicz on the 11th of February 2000.

We eventually moved out from Number 20 Buckland Crescent to Number 30 Buckland Crescent, and we had a ground floor and a basement and on the ground floor for the first time we had a room, which was a part-time synagogue. I think you've heard that all our services before were held in St John's Wood after the synagogue was burnt in the Montefiore Hall. Every Friday night we had a service there and that was the only service we had, apart from the High Holiday services. It was on Friday night, we had a service at St John's Wood. Salzberger used to live in Hemel Hempstead, not in London, so he came in on a Thursday when he gave religion classes. When we moved from 20 to 30 Buckland Crescent, we had this additional room which could be used as a synagogue, so on Saturday morning we had a service in that room and we went there for the first time. I can hear him now, Salzberger saying 'And let us all promise that we would come here, if at all possible, every Saturday morning', but normally Davidson did all the Saturday morning services.

I then, later on, had my Bar Mitzvah a little late, before I was 14, because we thought that the war would end and my grandmother would come, little did we know what happened to her, so I had my Bar Mitzvah in June 1943 and it had to be on a Friday night, because the rabbi wasn't available on Saturday mornings. Henry had his Bar Mitzvah before me, because he had it on the right date, so he had it on a Friday night and that was before we had the 30 Buckland Crescent. But by the time I had my Bar Mitzvah, we did have them - and so I had to have my

Bar Mitzvah on Friday night and on Saturday morning and do the whole thing again, so I had two Bar Mitzvahs.

Can you tell me more about your Bar Mitzvah?

I had the instructions from Cantor Davidsohn and I had a great liking for him. I always got on well with him – [laughs] – he was a grand man, he really was, he was a bit of a shouter, a bit of an actor and all that, but he was a loveable character. I had my first encounter with him in Berlin, I told you we used to go to Levetzowstraße, where, like here, the children go up for the *Kiddush* and my mother used to take me to various other synagogues and once we went to the Fasanenstraße, where he was the Oberkantor, and I didn't realise they didn't do this in that synagogue. I went up there and he looked at me and my mother was coming after me and he said '*nehmen Sie das Kind weg*'. He was fantastic, he used to live in Fitzjohns Avenue, he had a room there and I went there for my Bar Mitzvah lessons with him.

How old was he then?

He must have been in his seventies. I still remember, he said to me '*Du wirst es so gut machen, die Ruth wird stolz sein auf dich*' - this was the girlfriend I had - I turned bright red when he said that. [laughs] I read the portion, we didn't do *Haftarah*, one of the other things I really blame the synagogue for - when we were being taught on the Thursday afternoon - that was *Bibelstunde*...

Every Thursday in the afternoon?

Yeah, after school. But we weren't taught any Hebrew. All my Hebrew that I knew - I learned in Berlin. And for a time, while we were in Stamford Hill, we went to Egerton Road, a synagogue there and I went to Cheder there while we lived there and also sang in the choir. But we weren't taught any Hebrew.

Why was that?

I don't know. I can't tell you. But I think that that's a regrettable thing, they should have done.

So, what did you learn in this Bibelstunde?

Biblische Geschichte. I remember once, it was about Jesus - I don't know quite what, we were so innocent, not like children of 11 or 12 nowadays, but so innocent - and I said to him: 'Wie können Gott und Maria ein Kind haben, die waren nicht verheiratet' I'm sure he was thinking I was pulling his leg, but I was so innocent. Anyway, it was about Joseph, *Reich Israel, Reich Juda*, and goodness what, but no Hebrew.

Who was in the class?

Three of us, first of all, and then some time afterwards Heinz Kuttner and this girl Ruth Schmeidler, so there were five of us. All about of similar age, well, Norbert is about five years older than I am, that's quite a difference at that age, and Karl-Heinz is two years older than I am, but we were pretty good friends. I'm not quite sure when we finished going there, but it was over a number of years.

The other thing that Salzberger did, he also did a *Bibelstunde* for grown-ups, he did that once a week and people loved that - he was very good in that way. But people behaved like that in that time.

As a child, you only encountered Salzberger on Friday nights in the service?

Later on, he came Saturday mornings as well.

And when was that, do you remember?

Well, as a child it all seems like a long time, it probably wasn't - I think a year or something like that. But I do remember Davidson took the service, and I remember that very well, his English was worse than Salzberger's, and he did the prayer in English. The only thing that was done in English was the prayer for the King, everything else was done in German. And I still remember Davidson talking about the Duke of "Edinburg" and things like that, it was quite fun.

Was that prayer read from the very beginning?

Not immediately, but soon after. Certainly, during the war. I think once they had the Saturday morning services it very soon was put in there, and that was the only English thing. Everything else was in German, apart from the Hebrew prayers of course.

What was the general atmosphere like?

Well, they were refugees, who had very little money and I think that's why Davidson played such a big role in it. He really kept the synagogue together, because every Sunday afternoon there was a cultural event, which he organised and ran. Lots of my cultural knowledge comes from these afternoons. People were very poor, they couldn't work or had very little work, some did homework, and some people brought these things with them to the concerts, nobody minded because they realised people had to earn their living. They did that while people sang and recited and did all sorts of things. He made it into a community. I remember those things very well. He was the main character. He was really, how can I say, he was an opera singer, you know, they all really want to be on stage. But I really appreciated him and liked him very much because of what he did.

I remember very clearly once he came and talked about, on a Sunday afternoon, about the 50th anniversary of the opera *Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo that must have been about 1942. Apparently, it was such an unusual thing that you have the - I don't know whether you know the opera - anyway, there was a musical item on an open stage without any singing, apparently it was such an unusual thing in 1892 and he talked about that and it was something fantastic to realise - now it's even 100 years ago, but even at that time it was 50 years ago, that was something new to happen.

Where did those meetings take place?

In Buckland Crescent.

And how many people would attend a Sunday afternoon?

Oh, a great many. It varied, but certainly up to a hundred, I think. And he got fantastic people, people that were at that time unknown, but you know Norbert Brainin, who is the leader of the Amadeus Quartet, he was quite a young man then before the quartet had been formed and he was one of the people who came regularly to play. There were lots of refugee artists who came, singers and actors. My uncle did a lot there and my aunt was an opera singer. They

did *Die Zauberflöte*, they did *Die Fledermaus* and my aunt sang Rosalinde, and Franzi, now Goodman, you might go and see that, she will tell you about it because she has a very good memory of my aunt who was a fantastic singer, really. It was a whole cultural life, nobody could afford to go to the theatre, to concerts, or very few people could. So, this was a whole cultural upbringing I had.

And you enjoyed going there?

I went on most Sundays, yes.

There must have been very few children.

There were very few children, yes, the five I have mentioned and afterwards - I don't know whether you have heard of the Summerfield twins - Peter und Günther Sommerfeld, Peter - he is a member of the board as well, and George Summerfield. They are about four years younger than I am, at that age that makes a lot of difference, but I am still quite friendly with them now. And then this boy that I mentioned sometimes came, but apart from that there were hardly any children there, not that I can remember.

So, one of the people that was there who was the organist and accompanist, was Melitta Heim, Henry has probably told you something about her. And I remember her very well - all these people were so poor - for my Bar Mitzvah, I'm going to get so emotional about this, I'm sorry about it, she gave me *Band 1 Schillers Werke*, I've still got it, I'll show it to you afterwards, and it's one of the best presents I ever had, it's fantastic. Melitta Heim was the organist there, and Henry has probably told you something about her career, she was an opera singer as well. She was to have a very big career. I'm not quite sure why, she was a very intense person, and I know Henry will tell you exactly why it was, I'm not so sure about it - anyway, at the Wiener Staatsoper or somewhere she did an audition, and her voice cracked, and she never sang again. It was terrible, a terrible thing. I knew her very well, because my aunt was an opera singer.

What was your aunt's name?

Johanna Stauberg. She played for her a lot, Melitta, and at the corner of S station, it's all now built up, there used to be a road down there and there was a music shop and upstairs they had a little studio with a piano which you could rent. They very often went up there for my aunt to practice and she would accompany her, and I think I must be the only person alive who actually heard Melitta sing. She never sang in public, never. I used to go there quite often

and listen to them. My aunt, one of her roles was the countess in *Figaros Hochzeit*, and Melitta had sung Susanna. Do you know anything about opera?

Not that much. [laughter]

And there is a famous scene, where the countess dictates a letter to Susanna and they did that, it's the only time I heard her sing properly, it was quite an experience, it was a terrible thing that happened to her.

For how long was she the organist for?

I am not quite sure when she died, certainly most of the war years, probably about '46, '47, something like that. I don't think she was the first organist, I think Paul Lichtenstern did do something beforehand, I'll tell you about him afterwards, but he then afterwards went to St John's Wood, he played the organ for many years at St John's Wood. So certainly, during all the war years she was the organist there, on Friday night she played for the High Holiday service, which at that time were at the Wigmore Hall. And the congregation grew, they eventually had two services, one in Wigmore Hall and one in the Montefiore Hall in St John's Wood and even at one point, the synagogue gradually grew with new members that we even had a very small third service at Buckland Crescent.

Salzberger and Davidson did the services at the Wigmore Hall. Somebody else did the ones in Montefiore Hall and for the second day they changed over. There was someone called *Rabbiner* Dr Baron, something like that, they just engaged him to do this little service and then afterwards they changed to St Pancras town hall. That was much bigger, so you'd have the whole congregation together. Of course, Melitta Heim also played on the Sunday afternoons, and I very often turned pages for her and things like that.

So, she was one of the regulars?

Yes.

On Sundays, were there mostly people from inside the community or also other refugees who could come and perform?

Oh yes, I don't think Norbert Brainin was a member, I don't know, but I don't think he was. There were so many out-of-work actors and singers, and they used to get five shillings, which is what, 25 pence, that was quite a lot of money then.

How much was it to join the synagogue?

I can't remember what the actual fee was, but I know you paid monthly or even weekly. The secretary was called Mrs B., I don't know whether you have heard about her. She was in the office, she knew everybody by name. I just remembered at 30 Buckland Crescent she had a little office, and she was quite a character, too. I got on very well with her, but she could be - if she didn't like you, you had it. But she was very good, she was also a social service: people came and talked to her about all their troubles and goodness knows what and people did have a lot of trouble. People came to her and paid them, weekly or monthly, I don't think anyone paid yearly contributions, people didn't have that sort of money.

Did some people not join because of the money?

Oh no, I think if people were unable to - I am sure that people didn't pay the full rate, or even didn't have to pay anything, that was always the case, no one was ever refused membership because of financial difficulties.

At that time, from a child's perspective, did you perceive different groups in the communities?

Well, there were people who had done very well, you know. You see, very often, and I have noticed this in the interviews that I do, the oral histories, if they had business connections over here, they had done exporting or whatever it is, and if they could come over here and especially if they came early with money, afterwards you came over with '20 Mark', that's all adults were allowed to bring out of Germany, '20 Mark' and children weren't even allowed to do that. They could set up businesses here, they could probably do quite well. For someone whose name is on the board, Carl L., I remember him, he had a very nice place, also in Buckland Crescent I remember. I am sure you know that he subsidised the synagogue. There were a number of people like that.

I think we were really lucky to have Lily Montagu. She was the first chairman of the synagogue, I remember her very well, when I first joined the board, she was still chairman. And we owe to her that we've got our own synagogue. I don't know whether you have heard about it, but we are *liberal*, which means we were really more to the reform over here, liberal and reform are reversed over here, the other way around than in Germany. I think as far as I remember or from what I have been told is that West London, they said, come and join us, you are

welcome, join our services. Lily Montagu was the one who said, let them do it their way, she supported the founders of the synagogue, that we could have our own services. Firstly, it was all the melodies and things and then it was the language. Who, at that point, knew any English or a lot of English. Somebody phoned me up the other day for some article in the paper and they couldn't imagine everything was done in German, but it was.

Now, shall I tell you something about some of the other characters? There was someone called Dr Freyhan. He was - I don't know how to describe him - great intellectual, of the arts, he was a professor of literature and all that. And he was also a very nice, very eccentric man, all these people were eccentric. He gave lectures on art, on Othello, with the English words, but he did it in German, he also gave lectures on Goethe, Faust, and as I said we were in 30 Buckland Crescent and we had the ground floor and the basement, and there were people, there was a flat upstairs, there was always someone, all these people coming in seven days a week. Sometimes they didn't quite like it. I remember, this was during the week, he gave this lecture, I think it was on Faust, you see, and he got very emotional and very excited. Suddenly there was knocking upstairs, it was too noisy, and his wife said, '*Liebster, Liebster, es wird schon gebumst*'. And he said, '*bei Goethe wird nicht gebumst, bei Goethe wird gepocht*'. So anyway, he was also a member, and it was all intellectual stuff, it was a great influence on me, all these people.

Did you also have private interaction with him?

Yes, he and I shared a birthday, as it happens, he died when he was in his nineties. And I still remember his last birthday. I went to him, and I gave him a book, it was a modern play called Lear which is based on King Lear. That was the last time I saw him before he died.

What did he do professionally?

Nothing. They paid a shilling or something, people who came to these lectures, or sixpence. They were both, his wife as well, they were both very nice people. The first year we were married, Lillian and I, we went to Switzerland to Brunnen and they always went to a place called M. which is half-way up the mountains and they were high in their eighties and we always said we must meet, we must meet and we got to Brunnen to our hotel and they had already come down, half-way down the mountain, to see us, then we met them afterwards, and I still remember both of them walking along like youngsters. They were really fantastic people.

Who else do you remember of that period?

Eric Goodman, Franzi is his widow, he was also a fascinating character. Probably Henry has told you something about him, because they were very close with his family, when Franzi and Eric got married, I think Henry's father gave them a *Hochzeitsfeier*. Eric Goodman's father was the *chazzan* in Potsdam. He was very, very talented, both musically and he wrote a lot of things. In fact, I very much wanted to, especially for Franzi, I wanted to edit some of his things and get it published, but unfortunately, as I said the other day, unless you get someone to sponsor it, no-one will publish these things.

So, he wrote a number of things, including some very good poetry in German, and I recited some of it, I did some of these Sunday afternoons and various other functions, I've still got some of it here, some of his poetry and I would love to do it for fun. He did some beautiful caricatures as well, I told you about Mrs B. And the two of them I don't think got on very well for some reason, and he wrote this poem about her, *Ach, Du grosser Bär...* And all this sort of thing. And then he did a thing on *Röslein auf der Heide*, he did Finchley, Finchley, Finchley Road, *Gossip auf der Gassen*. Various things like that.

We are talking about the forties?

What we did as children, we did these plays. With Dr Kuttner, Henry's father, we did this play, *Esther*, '43, '44, I have got some pictures I'll show them to you afterwards. [looking for pictures for the date] Right. Officially this was written by Dr Hans Kuttner, Karl-Heinz Goodman and Herbert Levy. Well, the older generation, their English wasn't wonderful, and we had to do lots of corrections. We always put in 'thank you for our delivery', like a milk delivery, rather than deliverance, but anyway, Eric Goodman did the music for that, it was done at Buckland Crescent, it was quite successful there. You can see from the number of children that were involved in it, there weren't all that many. For years afterward, I still remember it was very embarrassing, I played M, and with no modesty I must tell you I am a very good actor. It was very moving, people cried and goodness knows what, I was only 14 at the time, and for years afterwards, when I went along Finchley Road, these old ladies cried across the road [laughter]

Who directed the play?

Kuttner did, and he had very little idea about directing. I was also, I think I told you, not in the FDJ because I was too young for that, but they had something called the younger youth group and again, I was quite a good actor. The FDJ actually asked me to join them for a thing they did Lessing's '*Die Juden*'.

FDJ - Freier Deutscher Kulturbund?

Freie Deutsche Jugend. FDKB is Freier Deutscher Kulturbund.

And that was a sub-division, the FDJ...

It was the youth group - and I was in the younger youth group. They were all in their late teens or early twenties. I was by far the youngest - I got the photos there as well, I think. So, we did Lessings 'Die Juden' and I played 'ein Reisender'. It was actually - do you know the play? No, I don't think anybody does.

When did you join this group?

I was a member of the younger youth group for years before that, but when I was about 14 or 15, they said, would I join in that performance. There's someone called Werner Blumenthal and he directed that and he was very, very good. For the first time I saw a proper director, young as I was, I was very rude to Kuttner and criticised his directing.

Were there many people who were both active in the synagogue and the Kulturbund?

Yes, well, I brought Karl-Heinz Goodman and Heinz Kuttner to that and that's a long story I'm afraid. When I was 13, I wrote another play, called 'Pardon my Impersonation' and I wrote the play and directed it and played the main part in it, which I think was resented by Karl-Heinz's mother, you've read about her in Robin's book. Heinz Kuttner told me two days before the performance that Karl-Heinz wouldn't be in it. This was one of the most traumatic things that happened, just imagine you are 13 years old... I am sure I was a bit over-bossy, I am quite sure about that, but anyway it's a terrible thing to do. Anyway, they were persuaded to do it, so we did do it, but that was the end of my friendship with Karl-Heinz Goodman. It wasn't until I came back to the synagogue, that's ten years later, that we restarted the friendship. He was my very best friend when I first met him in 1940.

At that time, they were both in the synagogue and...

But after that they stopped. That was a very, very big break. But I stayed there, and Ruth Schmeidler, the other girl, she was there. There were lots of other children, not all Jewish,

there were some children of political refugees. But there were a number of Jewish children who weren't attached to our synagogue.

I am sure for the adults, if you were active in the Kulturbund you would probably not join the synagogue and vice versa or was that not the case?

Not necessarily. I think, that's the other thing, what I said about the intellectual life, because the *Kulturbund* provided so many things. They had theatre performances - and it's very difficult to say, a refugee life, what you miss from your previous life, and there is no substitute and these things, the theatre performances, the intellectual pursuits that you could have at the *Kulturbund* and because of Davidson in the synagogue.

So, they were complementary rather than a sort of competition?

Yes. Certainly, lots of people were in the *Kulturbund* and it was gradually being taken over by the Communists. And that's why they had the Club 43 because they decided they didn't want to be there anymore. Because all these people, the original members of the Club 43 were members of the *Kulturbund*. And by 1943 they said, we don't want to be associated with this. It didn't bother me, because first of all, I was too young to appreciate that anyway and on the other hand I have always been very left wing, in any case. Politically, what made me look up was the invasion of Czechoslovakia in '48, when I was old enough to be able to appreciate it.

What about political differences at Belsize Square at that time. Do you remember any issues or debates?

I was too young. What I do remember, and that was later, was the Montefiore CMC, did Henry tell you about that? The CMC was founded towards the end of the war, about '44, '45, by Dr Kuttner. And I was never very involved with it, not to a great extent, because for the most part, the people were much older than I was. I don't know where they suddenly came from, these older people, but they were there. It was the CMC, the Claude Montefiore Circle. And you asked me if there was a clash. I do remember that some people from the FDJ came and they obviously wanted to put their point of view across, there was quite a big row and it was quite embarrassing for me, because I knew both sides. I was much younger than most of them, it was a bit embarrassing for me, because I sort of didn't know where to - I probably won't say very much about the CMC, Norbert will tell you all about it, I think at one point he was chairman.

Was the CMC attached to the synagogue?

Oh yes, it was one of the first youth groups, it was more like a young adult's group really. It certainly didn't appeal to me.

Why not?

Well, because I think I was too young for it. I then afterwards spend a lot of time in St John's Wood, there was a friendship club which St John's Wood started for lots of young people who came over after the war. But then it eventually - there were lots of English-born people afterwards as well.

What was that called?

The Friendship Club. But that was separate from anything from the synagogue, it wasn't even attached to the St John's Wood synagogue.

Are there other people you would like to mention?

I talked mostly about plays and things and intellectual pursuits, this is all in the 40s, I told you about 'The Man Who Didn't Come to Dinner' and I am sure Henry told you about the 'Eternal Flame'. I don't think I've got the programme for it. That was written by Dr Heinz Kuttner and Eric Goodman with the help of members of the cast.

Henry told me about it.

Thankfully, Kuttner got my uncle to direct it. And most of the things had been done in Buckland Crescent, this was done in No 1 Broadhurst Gardens, I don't know what it is now.

In West Hampstead.

Yes, behind what is now Waitrose. In fact, on the corner of Greencroft Gardens, which was then a hall attached to it with a proper stage and everything, this was just at the end of the war, '45. It was called the Eternal Flame, it had scenes about each festival, not about the festival, but something which had some meaning for the festival. I know that for Chanukah there was a thing about the rebellion in the Warsaw ghetto. I played the old man.

Who has got the play, have you got a copy?

I might have one, I have tried to look up all sorts of things.

Is it in English?

Oh yes, all the plays that we did were in English, some of them very faulty English, but the plays were all in English. Let me see... This is 'The man who didn't come to dinner', there are a number of scenes, sketches, it wasn't a play as such and I was the conferencier, I remember I did that in German, but all the things in it were in English.

How come the plays were in English?

I mean, we were becoming more English. I noticed I would have probably spoken to Karl-Heinz or Heinz in German at the beginning, but it gradually turned into English. He changed his name to Charles Henry and Heinz to Henry - I didn't have to change my name. It gradually became, certainly for the young people, I mean we went to school here and it was all in English

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You said two of them were performed in '45.

The 'Eternal flame', yes.

Was the end of the war relevant for the synagogue?

What was very relevant, and I remember that was when we first heard about the camps. I remember Salzberger, he talked about it in a service, because until then we didn't know what had happened, I should have had my Bar Mitzvah in July '42 when I was 13, and my parents postponed because my grandmother was in Berlin, cause the war was going to last 3 years, they would say, and we will wait until she's here, little did we know. That, I remember that. I don't remember what he said, but he said it and we all heard about it.

When was that, roughly, in '45?

No, no, that was I think towards the end of '43. I've heard about the camps in the war. People say we don't know about it - we knew about them. The end of the war as regards the synagogue - I can't really remember, I remember how it affected me and V Day victory in Europe and VJ Day Victory in Japan, and how it affected me personally, but as regards the synagogue, I don't.

What about internment in the UK?

Yes, that happened before we joined.

It would be interesting to know how many members were in the Pioneer Corps.

There were a great number. Obviously older ones than I was. I don't know whether I have this on one of the oral histories, when they joined the army these people, they had to swear loyalty to the King, have I told you this before, and most of them didn't know any English, so they swore in German, to the English King to fight the Germans. As regards that, I think that time, the late forties and early fifties aren't so much in my memory as regards the synagogue, because probably I was a little more distant in those few years, I told you I was a member of the Friendship Club in St John's Wood and then I was in the Army, my National Service, in '52, I was in the Education(al) Corps and that was quite an experience.

I told you about the CMC, Norbert will be able to fill you in at great length, it wasn't to my taste and I think very positively, I was too young for it, because most of the people were quite a bit older. I didn't have very much to do with the synagogue at that time, I was in the army, and I came out of the army in '52. There had been a number of young people who were born in this country during the war and who were part of the synagogue and eventually the school increased, had more pupils. Davidson gave me my Bar Mitzvah lessons, but he didn't participate in the schooling as such, but that changed, I am not sure when it changed, but it did, and he, poor chap, his English wasn't very good, also started teaching and he was known as Uncle Davidson, which was a fantastic thing after having to say *Herr Dr Rabbiner* Salzberger [laughs]. He tried very hard - he had to do it in English, these children knew some German, because their parents were German, but English was their language, I am not quite sure how this worked, but anyway there were a number of young people, English was their first language, and I think there were a number of attempts to have a youth group. One of them was named Richard Graham - he's no longer alive, he died a few years ago, very tragically. And then Charles Goodman stepped in, there's a very odd thing with Charles and myself, I told you we were very good friends, very early we'd started our own youth group when he was about 12 and I was 10, called Youth Up. We made an agreement that I would do all the intellectual things and he would do all the business things. It ended up that he actually became a teacher and I became a business man. How odd. Anyway, that's just by the way. So, he revived the youth group, they called it the 'Phoenix', out of the ashes.

He revived it when?

'53, '54, I can't give you the exact date. We still weren't very close, and then he came to me and he said would I come and do the drama there. That's how I joined the Phoenix, Lillian was a member of the youth group and Charles said to her he was so pleased that our friendship had been redone, and I got on very well with him, it wasn't like it was before, but we were pretty close.

Tell me more about the Phoenix.

You saw in Robin's book, he writes very well what it meant for these people, it was away from school, away from refugees, and that is largely due to Charles Goodman, he handled that very well. Richard Graham also helped him and I came in to do the drama. I also did various other things, like for instance, you know Charles was very good, but he was also very old-fashioned, at the end of the evening they could dance which was frowned upon at that time, and all sorts of things like that...

Where did you meet?

At that time the synagogue had moved to Belsize Square, but there was not the synagogue building, the room was the synagogue, and you could use that at other times as an assembly. So, Robin says it in his book, he said Herbert Levy brought laughter into the thing - he said it, I think I brought a certain lightness into it. It was a fantastic thing for the people. There was a theatre in Westbourne Grove which we had and put on three extracts, we did the trial scene from *Merchant of Venice* and, the first act of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and we did the final scenes from *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I think it was of quite high standard. If you look up our congregation, they said, we thought it was going to be a duty to come - it was worthwhile. And it was for young people, it was professional standard, good lighting and things like that.

So, you hired a proper theatre.

Yes. The age group was 13 to 18.

What was the actual aim of the Phoenix?

Well, to have something for young people in the synagogue. It was before discos and things like that. It was very successful, we didn't have a hall, the synagogue wasn't built, it was sometimes too successful, we sometimes had a hundred people, and the facilities weren't there for that.

How long did the Phoenix last?

This was in '57. It lasted until we got married. It lasted a little longer than that, we did another play, that was in '61 and was repeated in '62. It's amazing how long this spirit of Phoenix has lasted, it's something that stayed with them for the rest of their lives.

The peak was '57 – '61?

A little bit earlier, about '55 – '62. I don't believe in drama competitions, but we won first and second prize for Merchant of Venice and for The Importance of Being Earnest. We won a cup, there are photos there. We did another couple of things, *Queens of France*, which is a one-act play. And *Fortunato*, which is an extract.

There were no German plays? Is that a coincidence?

One of the things was we had a change of rabbi. I don't know what you've heard about this. This was before I was on the board, but I was involved in the synagogue. The thing was that Salzberger was a wonderful preacher, as I have told you. But he would talk in German. Still at this time, most of the members of the synagogue were German, and German was their first language, but they had this group of young people, although they understood what their parents said to them, they all had these German expressions, but they couldn't speak German. And that was a great difficulty, Uncle Davidson was trying to teach them. I remember they had one youth service where they asked Charles Goodman to give the sermon in English, and he wasn't allowed to go up - there wasn't a proper platform, just a little step, but he wasn't allowed to speak from there.

So, the leading members on the board thought it was time for a change. I think it was '74. Davidson had already retired, about '54, '55, and we got Joseph Dollinger. I'll tell you about him afterwards, a wonderful man as well, I got on very well with him and his wife, even now, they both died just a few years ago. There was a special thing, the eleven o'clock, you went to their house and they had special things prepared for you. She was a fantastic woman, very left wing, even more left wing than I am - and I know she liked me very much, I got on very well with her. He as well, he was like a father figure to me, my father died when he was 60

years old. He was very, very, very nice. He was originally from Poland, I recorded an interview with him. He had a fantastic voice, a beautiful voice. Davidson as an old man, his voice had gone, Dollinger had a fantastic voice.

I haven't really talked about the Lichtensterns, I must also come back to them, Hanni, she was the singer, Paul was the organist, she fell in love with his voice. He did lots of things before he came to us, he was an opera singer, and he came over here just before the war, it's all on the tape, in a synagogue near Tottenham Court Road which was bombed. And I was about 13 or 14 and went to the theatre and saw something called *The Lisbon Story* and he was in that and I remember his voice. When he came to the synagogue, I remembered his name. He joined in about '55.

This thing about language was a great difficulty, as far as I know. Kokotek who during the war had been at St John's Wood because their rabbi was on active service and he came to us quite often. He'd been to Dublin and Liverpool as well. So, that time it had to be someone who had to know English but who also knew German.

Was the arrival of Rabbi Kokotek a new beginning?

It was an end and a beginning. They said '*diese Gemeinde ist zum Sterben verurteilt*', this was in the mid-50s. A German congregation, all these people are old and that will be it. Well, now Kokotek., whose English wasn't perfect by any means, I liked him, but all the kids were in the back giggling, some of them made notes of all the various mistakes he made, but he could give sermons in English. This was a great revival in the synagogue. Many younger people, now in their eighties, joined and there was a big increase in the membership. First of all, he said he was going to give only English sermons. Actually, I was one of the anonymous people who drafted a letter on behalf of these older people, 'bring back the German sermons', and so it was decided that, I think, on Friday night he would speak English and on Saturday morning German.

So, it was very important for many people to keep the sermons in German?

Yes, yes. It lasted for some time. The same thing happened after we had decided to go from Ashkenazi to Sephardi pronunciation. And Eric Goodman, he made this very good joke, 'on Friday night it's C, on Saturday morning it's K?' It certainly was a revival, and also that we put on this play. We waited to put on this play until the new rabbi had come.

Was there a change of religious orientation?

No, the services were the same. Kokotek used the same prayer book for the High Holiday services. Also, a very important thing was the *Seelenfeier*. And we decided then, I was on the board, that the *Seelenfeier* should remain in German, because it was so important for the people.

For Yom Kippur?

Yes. Today it is not in German anymore. But at that time. I don't see Rodney doing it in German [laughs]. But for quite a number of years it continued.

Was Salzberger more orthodox compared to Kokotek?

Yes, definitely, he had a kosher home. But he did go to the *Cosmo* restaurant, where we all went.

So there was a big change when Rabbi Kokotek came?

Yes, with Salzberger it was a purely German refugee congregation. Kokotek was a much younger man, in his forties when he came. Salzberger was in his fifties when he came over, late fifties.

The membership changed as well?

Yes, not necessarily English people, I don't think there were many English people, but there were lots of people with young children who had been born over here and there was a big increase of membership. That's always the way when you have a new rabbi.

Is it still there?

The Phoenix was started in that time?

Yes, just before K came.

Was it an attempt to somehow give roots to the children, help with the transition?

Yes, Robin puts it so well, what these children were like. To some extent we were in the same boat, except that we were born in Germany, but still we had such a change in our lives. And our language had become English, but you spoke German at home. I was in the Army, I was up in Yorkshire. For weeks, I spoke English, English, English all the time, and then I came down for a weekend, and arrived at King's Cross and I phoned my parents, and I spoke to them in German, you know, I hadn't spoken German in about six weeks. That's the way it was. Last night, and I spoke to Sue Strauss, talked to her about something and she threw in a German expression, that stayed with them, but I mean they're English, you see. That was the change that happened in the synagogue.

What I remember from Robin's book was the notion of an escape from home. I don't hear that in your story.

Well, I was older, I had already been away in the Army. It was also denial, it was only later that I actually acknowledged that I wasn't born in this country. I think my English is pretty good, and no one would realise that I wasn't born over here. So, I would never, never reveal this. It was a very similar thing. These parents were so different from any other parents, who couldn't speak English properly. You know in Robin's book, where I bring my cousin from America, and his mother says, 'ach, you don't understand us Brrritish'. [laughter] And that really happened, you know.

Perhaps I can tell you about this - I am very proud of this, it also had its effect on the synagogue in quite a number of ways. You know I've always written, when I was 10 years old, I wrote this play and when I was 14 years old, I wrote this play that was actually performed. At the time of the Hungarian uprising in '56, I wanted to do a play about this and I also wanted to do something like 'Soldat Schwejk'. We'd been doing these plays over a period of time and I thought I want to write a play for the club. So, I had this idea I started working on it. I always come to a point where I get stuck, I can show you, I have many attempted plays which I never finished. So, Robin, who was about 15 at the time, he'd been on the previous plays, and whenever we did a play, we had some notes, we did these three plays at the theatre. I wrote an introduction for all three plays, and I got one person from the cast to do a play. And Robin who must have been about 13 at the time, wrote an appreciation of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I always got on quite well with him anyway. So, I said, how would you like help me write this play? He was very flattered, I was about 10 or even more years older than him, but there was never this age difference, never. So, we decided to do it together, it's quite fascinating, it was almost living in each other's brains. We always would discuss it and afterwards read things to each other, things like that. I did one scene, I wrote it and then I couldn't go on. Then I met Robin and he showed me his scene, and his scene started where I had left off. It was fantastic. This was about the loss of innocence, about a club, I must show

you some of the letters we got about it, perhaps when we finish this. It was called *Project M* and it's about a youth club called the Phoenix. The play had no scenery at all, I was always influenced by people, it was a very Brechtian type of thing, there was a swimming pool and everyone had to imagine the swimming pool. These people wanted to do something important to revive their club and they had all sorts of fantastic ideas and finally they decided to have a refugee boy and bring them to their club. I've got this one letter, saying 'I couldn't understand the first act because it was much too funny'. They are then disappointed with this refugee boy until this boy, the narrator of the thing, he talks to him, you don't hear him you just see him, and the second act tells you about his story and it's about how he escaped, and his parents didn't escape. Well, I think it's very good and we are both very proud of it. It's got a fantastic cast, we had everybody in it, not only the Phoenix, but all the others. I've got the programme here, we had a cast of 30 or 40, everybody was used in it. And you can still find people talking about it now, it stayed with them all their lives.

For the mime we needed some music, and also, I put in some songs, one very Brechtian song, 'The Song of the Sociable Satellite' and there was some mock American pop music, I didn't know who to get to do the music, in fact I asked Hans Selig, who wanted to be a musician. I asked him whether he could do some music for it and he said yes, but it took him so long, it was so complicated and many different instruments, it was too difficult. With the Phoenix, we also had weekends away. For example, we went to Bracklesham Bay, it was near Chichester, from the AJY, the Association of Jewish Youth, they had a house you could hire by the sea. Two or three times the Phoenix hired the house. We had a weekend, we had guest speakers, Kokotek came down to speak to us, Charles Goodman who was then no longer the leader, he came down as a guest speaker. On Saturday night, we had a big social, with music and dancing and people put on a show.

There was one little girl there, who was 13 at the time, she played the piano, and I did a scene with somebody, I don't know what it was, and she accompanied me, improvised. Robin and I looked at each other and said: 'she's terrific'. Her name was Susan Schiffer. We thought, she is the one who's got to do the music, she was fantastic for her age. We had some very good music for the songs and some lovely music for the mime. Cause it was quite a long time, about 15 or 20 minutes long. And Susan Schiffer is now Susan Strauss. Everything she does in the synagogue now is due to our discovery at this weekend. Peter Strauss is slightly older than she is, not that much, he actually later on helped with the running of the Phoenix, not for very long.

That was '61?

'61 and then we did it again in '62.

The emphasis on performance and good quality seemed very high.

It was, really. Because we had fantastic lighting, we did this in the synagogue, because we didn't have the hall then. I did other things afterwards and I always used the synagogue. Kokotek was very good, he let us use the synagogue and we could put up lighting - we had the services for that weekend in the Kiddush room. We had big, I don't know what you call them, things where you could put lights up. I worked with John Hill, who was an expert on lighting. It was especially done without scenery, that was the whole point, everyone was supposed to imagine those things and talk about them.

Was that the most successful play for you?

We did *Joseph* with Sue Strauss, that was also very, very successful. These revues that we have done - they were fine, they were very good, but they are not on the same intellectual plane.

When did you perform the first revue?

The first one was in '81, just at the time when Kokotek died. I had written another Shakespeare sketch at that time. We were going to stop it anyway, but his widow said, you have to go on.

I think the synagogue has changed and the sort of thing we did there, I don't think they do anymore. Membership has changed. As I have tried to indicate all the time, coming from a German culture, there was a high intellectual standard.

It seems there was a very strong focus on culture from the beginning?

I suppose to a certain degree, that was because we couldn't afford any other culture - now people can go to concerts and to plays and things which was impossible at that time. We had to bring our own culture.

From what you have said, it seems culture was equally, if not more important than religion?

Yes, but I told you I was going to speak about the cultural side of things rather than the religious side, although I was also involved in the religious side, I was a warden for 30 years.

What's the function of a warden?

Being in charge of the service. Once Kokotek died, I took charge of the religion school, until Rodney came, in fact, I sort of helped him with it.

What has the religious practice changed over the years?

Kokotek was less orthodox than Salzberger. I don't think the service has changed as such. One other thing that happened during Kokotek's time - and that was - he did a very good thing, he started the youth services during High Holidays, and they were run by Hanni and Paul Lichtenstern and by Martin Lawrence, and both boys and girls participated in these youth services. And they brought in young people to give an address or sermon.

What were the Youth Services like?

It first of all started when Salzberger gave sermons in German, which none of the children would understand, so they were taken out into another room and something was done with them. By the time we moved from St. Pancras town hall, first of all to Haverstock Hill, there was a big cinema, and then to Swiss Cottage. And while we were in Swiss Cottage and Haverstock Hill, the children were taken and walked to our synagogue and had their own service for about an hour- an hour and a half, a shortened form of service, but of course all in English. They asked young people to speak. Charles did it for a while, I did it for quite a number of years and Harry, Harry Davis also did it. That was the initiative of Kokotek. The other initiative was that for *Minchah* on *Yom Kippur*, the choir would have a rest and the *Chazzan* would have a rest and he initiated that the young people should do that service. *Minchah* is now done by young people. That was organised first with Hanni and Paul Lichtenstern. Now, the other thing that happened under Kokotel, and that was quite a big change, was the Bat Mitzvah of the girls. The first two girls who had Bat Mitzvah were Ruth Schmeidler and Judy Field, who is still a member of the synagogue. Ruth, I know was about 16 and Judy was a couple of years younger. I remember this very well because this was the day when I had my exam and we still had our place in Buckland Crescent. But on a Monday evening at the Montefiore Hall in St John's Wood, they had a celebration. I don't know what it was, they said some prayers or something like that. So that was the first so-called Bat Mitzvah, in 1946. After that, I don't quite know how it developed, the girls had a joint thing - there were half a dozen of them and it was then during the Saturday morning service, they said some prayers.

Actually, I have got a son and daughter, there are three years between them. This is very interesting, my son was the first one who had a Bar Mitzvah in our synagogue whose father has had a Bar Mitzvah, second generation. My daughter was coming up for that age, three years later, and I was unable to explain to her that while her brother could be called up and read from the Torah, why she couldn't do it. I just couldn't explain it to her, I had no explanation for it, or to justify it

So, I talked to Kokotek and said we've got to do something about this. Norbert, who's got a daughter, he also was very keen about it, we brought it up before the board. I said I think it's time now that girls have their own Bat Mitzvah. But we had to have one concession: they weren't to read the passage of the weekly portion, because they think that's not very nice for girls to read, never mind the boys. They were called up to the *bimah* to read the Ten commandments. And that was Hilary and Judith, they were the first to have their own separate Bat Mitzvah. When Rodney came, I discussed it with him as well, he said, 'you can't take out the ten commandments all the time.' I said, 'no, but that was what was arranged.' He said the girls should read exactly the same Torah portion as the boys and that's how it is now.

So now the girls read the portion?

Yes. They can read their portion, but boys get invited at the anniversary of their Bar Mitzvah to read it again if they wish to. But girls can't. I am not quite sure what's been decided lately, but I think up to a certain age they can. I cannot tell you some of the discussions, the intellectual level of some discussions, I cannot tell you how they are - on the women's issues.

What happened as the next change between Rabbi Kokotek and Rabbi Mariner?

Rabbi Mariner made sure only kosher food was served in the synagogue, which wasn't strictly adhered to before. He altered the services to quite an extent. He lengthened them considerably. For instance, on certain days you had the *Hallel*, on Saturday mornings, and we used to cut out the *Shacharit* on those days and start with the *Hallel*, now we do the *Shacharit* and the *Hallel*, it's much longer. Other, additional things have been introduced to the service. So perhaps we are a more conservative congregation than we were during Kokotek. We used to use Singer's prayer book. Mariner produced all these new prayer books, which are very good indeed. But for people who come in from the United Synagogue, and if they see a Singer prayer book, they feel much more familiar than if they see a new prayer book.

Rabbi Kokotek died unexpectedly in 1979, he had a heart attack when he was 70. He died just before the High Holidays, we had no-one for the high holydays, and I actually took over the Sunday school, as I said. We had quite a number of applications including Rodney.

Were there any applicants with a German-Jewish background as well?

I think I went to Berlin because an aunt of mine had died, just after Kokotek had died. There was a potential candidate. But there was not a necessity for a German speaker anymore, the sermons in German had long finished.

The community then didn't feel the need to have a rabbi who ...?

No. Perhaps some of the very old people in the homes whose language still was German. But that was a very minor consideration. By the late seventies, it was a very English congregation. It started with German people, but even the people who were old by that time had been young when they came to England.

So was it a conscious effort to find and a native English-speaking rabbi?

I don't think it was relevant. I mean it was very unusual to have a rabbi who didn't have a German accent. We have never yet had anyone with an English accent, because Rodney was Australian, Larry is American, Bergman was South African. Cantor Larry Fine and Rabbi Mariner have worked as a team for now for almost 15 years. I think Rodney's been there for about 18 years.

What changes did they bring about?

I don't think Larry has brought so many changes, it's up to the rabbi to make changes. He's possibly brought in some melodies. Rodney was very much against the organ, now I don't mind whether we have an organ or we don't, but what I object to is singers without an organ. Have you been on a Saturday morning? I've tried my hardest to either do away with the organ or have the organ with the singers but not have the singers without the organ.

Is there no organ on Shabbat morning?

Rodney dislikes the organ on the Shabbat. That's my opinion. He instigated that we should have a quartet of singers. Well, I spent 15 years at Sadlers Wells, opera, you know, and I know what singers must be able to do. They must be able to find their own note. I always believe you should have as many members of the synagogue participating as possible. And if they are not such good singers, fine, but if they are outside people, they've really got to be tip top, otherwise what's the point of having them in there.

Actually, that was one of the things for the Phoenix, we had committee meetings, sub-committees, everyone in the Phoenix was the member of some committee, everyone did something, wasn't just a member, they all had to do something. I think that was the success because everyone felt himself to be part of it. That's why we should involve members of the community as much as possible.

You see this is the difference between generations. You know, everybody looked up to *Herr Rabbiner* and *Herr Kantor*, and this was somebody very special. You wouldn't call a rabbi by his first name, impossible! I once objected to something and someone said to me, he's the rabbi, he should know. You mustn't argue with a rabbi, he knows exactly what to do.

How do you see the future of the synagogue?

I am a bit worried about it actually because of the issue of women's participation. I don't know what the answer to is, but it is a topic which divides the community. In our synagogue, I am very much for an egalitarian service. I can't explain to my daughter why she can't do what her brother can do, everywhere you look, women are equal to men. I just can't do it.

What direction should the synagogue take?

It must progress, it's a progressive synagogue. Things have changed over the years anyway, how quickly it will change, I don't know and whether it will change quickly enough. My daughter and her family also worry about that. My granddaughter is now four years old, by the time she is 12 or 13, I don't know whether they stay in the synagogue if nothing has changed. And you can't be a progressive synagogue if you don't progress.

I know everybody says it's not revolutionary, it's evolutionary. We used to sit separately in the synagogues in Germany. They sat separately and they started it off here, too.

When was that changed?

I am not sure, but very early on. They used to have the services in the synagogue in St John's Wood, and I think they sat separately there. But then that synagogue was bombed and they then went into the Montefiore Hall, they used to say, women one side and men the other, and they just - there wasn't a central division. I think that's when it stopped. I mean I couldn't go to a synagogue now where I can't sit with my family, I find it impossible.

So, you think the synagogue should move forward on the women's issues?

Yes, sure. I've been on the forefront all the time, with the Bar Mitzvah/Bat Mitzvah. Who was it that suggested that there should be a girl reading the Haftarah on Yom Kippur - it was my suggestion, because I thought, there's no Torah, so no-one can object it. The thing is when you start a thing like that, nobody talks about it now. That's how we do it.

It takes time.

But you see, the thing is, since we had the Bat Mitzvah, and they had that when the girls were 14, my daughter was 14 and she is now 32, that's a long time for something to advance, and nothing very much has advanced since then.

Do you think today the community is like any other English-Jewish community?

I don't think it is quite like any other community because of its origins and its history. I think that will go on for quite a time. I mean it is changing all the time, we've got very many people now with no German connections. We are also getting a younger membership, but that changes as people get older - when Kokotek came, we had a much younger membership as well...[laughter]. I think once Mariner will retire, we will get a new rabbi, and there will be another resurgence. I've seen it all before.

To summarise, what was or is the most important aspect of Belsize Square synagogue for your life and the life of your family?

For me personally, it's not really the religious side of it, it has been my educator in a lot of ways, intellectual as well, especially, I think. We always move in and out of the synagogue, it's the children, we were very much connected with the synagogue while our children were young, because we wanted to give them that reason... and I suppose to a certain extent we have moved away from that and now they have got grandchildren, there is a recycling of it.

What role do you think Belsize Square played for the whole German-Jewish refugee experience in Britain?

I am not sure whether I can answer that, but I think it's played a very big role in British-Jewish history, because it brought something over which no-one had ever known. A certain type of service, like nobody knew over here, it's not West London, it's not St John's Wood. I remember when Mariner first came to the synagogue and I discussed it with him and I think it's such a bridge because many of the United Synagogue members, who are perhaps not quite happy, and who can't make the jump from the United to a Reform, but they can come, and they have come, to our synagogue. As long as we had the Singer prayer book it was something they knew about, something familiar to them, but even so, when they come to our service, it is still a familiar type of service to them, not so strange as the other [progressive services]. I went last Saturday to the liberal synagogue in Wembley, there was a baby blessing there, and of course it is a completely strange service to me.

So, you think Belsize Square is somewhere in the middle?

Yes, it certainly is.

Do you think Belsize Square was stigmatised as a refugee community?

Oh definitely, certainly at the beginning. In fact, I recently met somebody from the Liberal Synagogue, who I had not seen him for many years, and he said: 'do you still have your sermons in German'? Yes, it was definitely classified as a German or foreign synagogue for many years and possibly to a certain extent still is. But obviously, with a rabbi whose first language is English and an ever-increasing English membership, how many people are there now who were not born in this country? The children of these refugees were born here and we get lots of additional members, we have now a predominantly English congregation. Robin says it in his book as well, I brought together Schiller and Shakespeare and Goethe and so forth. I organised lots of evenings and Friday nights, until perhaps ten or twelve years ago, where we recited Heine and Goethe and everything in German. We couldn't possibly do that now.

Do you think the young generation is interested in the Jewish heritage of the parents and grandparents?

I think that depends much on the family. Certainly as regards to my children, they are, but then you see they were brought up with a grandmother who spoke German to them. That's changed a lot. Actually, I was talking to my daughter along similar lines, for some reason, our grandchildren, they call the other grandparents, Nanna and Grandpa, because they had already heard other grandchildren who do that, they had already taken on that name so it wasn't available for us anymore. We are now *Omi* and *Opi*. My daughter said, well, I have to explain to my children why you will be called *Omi* and *Opi*. When I was young, everybody else's grandparents were called *Omi* and *Opi*, but it's all changed.

When I attended the recent lecture about the Jews of Germany, mainly older members came to the event.

That's something we have talked about before. When you have got a revue, it's packed, when you've got a dance, it's packed, when you have got any light entertainment, but if you have these study sessions, or if you were to put on a Shakespeare, nobody would come anymore. That's the change in the membership - that's something I regret. I am not a *Spielverderber* [spoilsport], and I think I showed that with the Phoenix, I like to encourage the lighter side. But we need to have both. I did the skit on Shakespeare, you know, you can make fun of it, but who should know what it is based on. There were a number of people, they used to come to me, and I had prepared a sheet for them with the chapter and verse, which the sketch was based on.

I guess one could say it is a sign of assimilation?

Yes. It's something that I regret and that I miss. Sometimes I think I am an old fogey and all that.

Is there anything else you want to mention?

The intellectual side. I haven't really talked to you about the Lichtensterns. Hanni and Paul, Paul has died since, Hanni is about 85 or something like that. She was a wonderful singer. And she was a great one for Yiddish songs. She was interned on the Isle of Man where she met the last love of Kafka. She was an expert on Yiddish songs and they got on very well, she got all her knowledge on Yiddish songs from her. Paul was a great pianist. Both of them started off the children's choir in the synagogue which has played a very important part in the synagogue's history. And they led all the children's services, for the High Holidays. They also did performances, one thing I recall was the *Persian Mikado*, which was the Purim story. We did that any number of times, over a number of years.

It goes back so far in the past now and people don't remember other people, and I hope you will mention these names, because they really did a lot for the synagogue. Sue Strauss then took over from Hanni when she retired and we did *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. That was also well done, we had fantastic costumes and lighting. I think you should do something that is worthwhile, and I think if something is worthwhile doing then it's worth doing it well. Joseph is quite a light play but we had marvellous costumes and lighting, and God knows what.

You didn't tell me about your wedding yet?

Lillian and I met in the Phoenix. Yes, we got married in 1961. And we couldn't have a long honeymoon because we were rehearsing this play *Project M* and had to be back by the next weekend. Because where would a person like me go on honeymoon? To Stratford-on-Avon. We went to this hotel and each room's got the name of a Shakespeare play, we always disagree about which room we had, I said it was *The Taming of the Shrew* and Lillian said *Much Ado About Nothing*. [laughter] But actually it was *Pericles*. We got married in the synagogue with Kokotek and Dollinger, they married us.

Where there many other marriages?

The Phoenix was like a marriage bureau, a great number of people got married, unfortunately, quite a number of them weren't successful, but that's the way of things.

Was there pressure, a communal concern that people should marry, or was it just a side effect?

Everyone got married, you didn't live together and if you lived together, you wouldn't tell anybody.

No, I mean get married to other refugee children.

No. You see, the people in the Phoenix weren't all refugee children. At one time we had a hundred people, of course, there were lots of school friends they brought in, they weren't necessarily refugees. It wasn't like they had to marry refugees.

No pressure to carry on this identity?

No, and I don't think, certainly the children didn't want to carry on the identity. I told you about myself - I didn't want to own up to this. I never told anyone that I wasn't born in this country. So, these young people, they were somehow ashamed of their parents. Robin also writes in his book, he didn't want to have his father there because of his accent and things like that. People always want to be like other people, they don't want to be particularly special, different. So, it was the opposite effect. It's the parents who were the refugees, the children were born in this country, they wanted to be like everyone else, just because her or his parents were also refugees, didn't mean anything.

I will show you some of the photos now if you have got time.

Yes, I have got time. Thank you very much for the interview.