



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Peter McMullin Centre
on Statelessness

Oral Histories of Statelessness

Interview with Adrian Factor

31 October 2023

Interview with Adrian Factor, 31 October 2023

Interviewed by Jordana Silverstein

Q: So I'm Jordana Silverstein here with Adrian Factor in Melbourne, on the 31st of October 2023. And Andy, you were starting to say before, what is it like being stateless?

A: What is?

Q: What is it like being stateless?

A: In many ways it saved my family, including myself, of course, our lives. After the First World War, a lot of young Orthodox Jewish men tried to evade military service in Poland. So quite a number of those people arrived in Germany. Germany was at that time I think, according to my late father, were grateful – the Germans were quite grateful to accept any males who they had lost during the war. And who left businesses, farms particularly. And the young generation in Poland of the Orthodox families took advantage of that and crossed into Germany. They were given all sorts of possibilities to establish themselves, which included my father. And it was simply a sort of selfish movement of the young people, because they just – they wanted to evade military service. And when they arrived in Germany, there were plenty of opportunities to establish themselves, and they were given all sorts of possibilities to establish themselves in businesses, in farms.

Don't forget there were a lot of young German women who were looking for men and quite a number married German girls. I'm speaking of the years after 1918. Now, what actually happened then was that I think, if I am not mistaken, that my father told me at that time we had permission to stay in our little town a certain time, which might have been six months, it might have been 12 months, which was renewed. And we established ourselves as stateless persons. My father preferred to become a stateless person because he did get, I remember, an instruction from the Polish government to either turn up or lose his nationality as a Polish citizen. So he became of course a stateless person. He lost his Polish nationality. Like so many others that lived in Germany at the time. Now, I remember very vividly that my father tried to attain German nationality. But he couldn't get it because I don't think they – I think they did this to him. He had to stay in Germany I think over 20 years or something like that to apply for it.

Now, I tell you, while a stateless person, my father had – and of course it included all our family – how it saved our lives. At Kristallnacht, I was arrested together with my father. I was only a boy of 14, and my father was then sent to Buchenwald concentration camp, where he was detained for six weeks. Now, when all the Polish citizens in Germany were also arrested and were shifted by train back to Poland, when the policeman came to our door to arrest my father and me again, shift us to Poland, he looked at our passports and the passport of my father was of course stateless. It had a black stripe across the front cover. Now, the policeman, being typical German, could not understand what that meant. He was instructed to arrest Polish citizens to be shifted back to Poland, which they did. And our little town which consisted of about ten Jewish families, all of them were loaded onto trains and shifted back to Poland. But the policeman could not understand how a person could be stateless. So he left us alone. So we were actually saved from being shifted back to Poland.

Quite a number of young Jewish men escaped from Poland to Germany after the First World War. As I stated before, who were trying to evade military service. Now, if they had been – all those had been sent back, were immediately arrested by the Poles, because they accused them of having evaded military service. Quite a number of my father's friends, which I remember, were in that category. The reason also why young Jewish persons escaped from Poland originally was that they had become interested in culture. Which Germany was very vibrant in. And if I remember, quite a number of Polish young men did very well in the arts and in any sort of studies that they were interested in, and made names for themselves. So you had this category of people who were shifted back to Poland. In other words, the culture which they escaped from, including Orthodoxy, which they escaped from, as I said, and were lumped back into a society which became very strange to them.

Those people were all stateless. And what happened to those people I'm not quite sure, but I do know that a lot did not survive the war. As apropos what I really wanted to find out was, young people including my father had a taste for culture. German culture particularly. We mustn't forget that Poland was occupied by the Germans during the First World War, and they were very popular in teaching Polish Jews what was going on in Germany in the field of culture, in music, in poetry. And so many of them had a good knowledge of what was going on in Germany in the 1920s. So I would like to say that our lives were saved by the fact that a German could not understand – a German policeman could not understand that there is such a thing as a person without a nationality. And that was the beginning of our experience in Germany as Jews.

Q: Gosh. And you remember – it's an incredible story. You remember this passport with the black line?

A: Yes, I remember. I think we still have passports here. I think I've got even my passport with a stripe across.

Q: Did you have to – was it your old passport and they had to take it in and they put the stripe on it? Or was it –

A: Yes. Well, we left Germany, we were very fortunate. We were related – are still related to the Max Factor of Hollywood, who before he died in his will had a caveat saying that any of the family of the Factor family should be helped out of Germany.

Q: Yeah right, that's incredible. You're cousins with him?

A: Max Factor is a great, great uncle of mine.

Q: Ah, yeah right. And do you remember – so being stateless saved your life, but do you remember what it felt like to be stateless, before this moment? Before that?

A: Well, it saved our lives and we were grateful, but it didn't save us from being expelled from Germany. When my father came out of the concentration camp of Buchenwald, we were given two weeks to leave, irrespective of what hindrance there were. We were simply told to be on a train at a particular date.

Q: And so you got on that train and you left Germany. Is that when you came to Australia?

A: No, we had visas for France, which again, the Factors are Hollywood people, they procured for us. We stayed in France for – on a stateless passport, for about eight months, nine months. And in France at the end of a certain time, nine months I think, the war started. We had the German planes across ours. The stateless passport was actually accepted as soon as we left Germany, because we were not the only ones. You see, there were quite a number of Polish young men in Germany, I remember, who were friends of ours even in our little town, who absolutely adored German culture. And many of them had stateless passports. Because I do remember during their visits, it was often discussed. And because it meant they did not quite know what that meant, if we decided to leave Germany.

And my father tried to obtain German nationality, which he was refused. And of course, he tried to wipe out his past, which contained a stateless passport. So I was 14, so I was – I had a sister, which I still have. Sorry. And I had a brother. And I was the only one, at 14 I was required to obtain a passport. And the passport was issued to me in Germany with a stripe across. So I was included in with all the incidents that occurred afterwards, together with my father.

Q: Right. But so do you know why your siblings didn't have to get this passport?

A: It was difficult – I didn't understand.

Q: Sorry. Do you know why your brother and sister didn't have to get this stateless passport?

A: They were underage.

Q: How old were they?

A: My brother was a year – exactly a year younger than I am, and my sister seven years younger than I am. So I will say that the stripe across our passport saved our lives, because otherwise we would have been shifted to Poland. And I don't think we would have survived the war.

Q: Do you remember what it felt like to go and get that passport? To go to the office, the passport office?

A: At the time, in fact to go to France, we weren't the only ones that applied, that had visas for France. And so it was not difficult to obtain a passport when you're stateless. But the permission to stay in France was only at a six months level.

Q: Sure. And so you went and got this stateless passport in order to go to France?

A: Absolutely. It was easy for us to have a stateless passport. If we would have had a German passport, after I was born in Germany or my brothers and sisters were born in Germany, it would have been almost impossible.

Q: Sure, yeah. And so tell me more about your parents? Tell me more about your mother?

A: My mother also came as a 13 year old girl to Germany. And –

[Siri interrupts]

Q: It's all right. Siri was listening to us.

A: I hope it wasn't recorded.

Q: That's fine.

A: Is it okay?

Q: Of course, of course.

A: So anyway, my mother came as a 13 year old girl to Germany, together with my grandfather. A very religious man. But again, he left Poland because certain reasons, he was obliged to stay. He didn't want to. So he settled in a town called Plöwen. And a very religious man. I must say, at that time the Germans were quite – good to the Jewish community, allowed school and allowed holidays to be attended to. My father was not that religious. But strangely enough, he lived in a little tiny town called Falkenstein. Only ten Jewish families lived there. And because we were surrounded by a German community, my father did everything possible to keep our Jewishness. So all holidays were observed, we had a kosher home, and we got on very well with our neighbours.

Q: You got on very well with both Jewish and non-Jewish neighbours?

A: And non-Jewish neighbours, yes.

Q: And what did your parents do for work? What job did they do?

A: My father established a factory of ladies underwear. It was quite – how shall I put it? It was going well. We made a good living out of it. And the only break we had from being sort of enclaved was when other Jewish people came from other towns to visit us. Jewish people.

Q: So was there a synagogue in your town?

A: What we call a shtiebel.

Q: A shtiebel.

A: Yes, and I must say, the older Jewish community was religious. Oddly enough, most of them escaped the restrictive Jewish atmosphere under which they were brought up in Poland. And in Germany, because we were surrounded by non-Jewish people, we tried to keep every bit of Jewishness by observing all the Jewish holidays. We even had a cheder. And the pre-Hitler era was – we had a lot of freedom and understanding from the non-Jewish community.

Q: Are you still religious now? Now, in Australia, are you still religious? Like you used to be?

A: I'm a traditional. Yes, I try and observe the holidays if I can. But I am not as strict as I was when I was in Germany.

Q: And what sort of people were your parents? What was your mum like as a mother?

A: My father was a doer. And he established a beautiful business in Germany. And my mother was very clever. And she tells me – I still remember her telling me where she was brought up in Poland, she also wanted to free herself from the strict Jewish laws that were observed in the little town where she was born. She stood under the window of this school, and made notes, because she was not allowed to go to a public school. But I might tell you, my father was made a member of a school, joined a school in advanced learning, which the way he could – he got into that school, he tells me, that a student, a prospective student, did not want to enter that school. So he took that person's name. And it was a progressive school and he learned a great deal.

Q: Right. And you were stateless, but did you feel German when you were a kid?

A: Yes. I have to say that until Hitler came, until the age of nine or ten, I felt very, very German. And I might tell you that to this day, my friends point out to me how German I still am. I still fold up my pyjamas. My shoes have to be absolutely straight. And I go to bed, the bed has to be made no matter what, in the morning. It has to be. That's German, I tell you. Very German. And everything has to be accurate. Yes. 0.9 is 0.9. Not 0.8. Then apropos this, I became – this was a culture shock for me when I came to Australia. Absolutely. Sorry, sorry, I should have – I don't know where it is now. I should have taken out my passport to show you.

Q: That's okay.

A: But it was a culture shock to come to Australia. It'll be right, it'll do the job. It doesn't look too good but it'll be okay. That sort of thing. Yes. So I can tell you I never forget, the attitude of the Australian, very homely and very convincingly making statements that I just couldn't take. You know, really. Do you know at school we were not allowed to enter the classroom in Germany, we show our fingernails. And the back of the collar. Shoes had to be polished. And we were let into the classroom. And in the classroom we had our seats allotted. Fingers clasped, right through the lesson, except when we wanted to answer a question. Now this is the sort of military training I had already in Germany before Hitler came. So it was very rigid, I must say. Very.

Q: And so how old were you when you came to Australia?

A: I was 14. And the story goes of course, as I want to tell you, I was very good at drawing. I still preserved most of them. And I applied to Myers for a position, and the manager received me, he looked at my sketches and he said, "They are very, very good. But we have no position for you." On the way out, the secretary said to me, "Mr Factor, when something comes up, we'll let you know." And the manager sprang up and he said, "Factor, are you related to Max Factor?" Don't forget, Max Factor had a store in Bourke Street, at Myers. You follow?

Q: Yep.

A: He said, “Of course we have a position for you.”

Q: That’s great.

A: So I stayed with Myers. In the Christmas windows, in 1940, Christmas, I was working in the windows at Myers. But it was my stay there was short-lived, because at the end of the year, I got an instruction from the government, join the army. So I was with the Australian army for three and a half years. But as soon as I came out, I did my matric in English, because I have wanted to join the university and the conservatorium of Melbourne. So that was required. I wrote an essay, and I was passed, and I did three years at the university.

Q: And so –

A: But I know you're referring mainly to people who are stateless, yes? Well, I can tell you that in Germany, most of the young people lost their Polish nationality. Because they did not want to go back after, because of the antisemitism. And one of the things – and also there was a trend in Germany of young people to refuse to be clamped down by the Orthodox way of life. You see they already – I mean, there were people like musicians, like Jascha Heifetz were already playing in Lodz. And there was a Jewish theatre that had modern stories to tell. And so forth. And there was a way – they wanted to absorb that culture. And the way they could absorb it very nicely and solidly was in Germany. And because most of them – all of them spoke Yiddish, so adapted well to the German ways.

Q: And so just going back, your time at Myers and the Christmas – did you design the Christmas window?

A: Yes?

Q: Did you design the Christmas window? Did you make them up?

A: No, I helped. I was only an apprentice then.

Q: You helped to set it up?

A: I helped to set up the figures and – but they were not as extensive as now. They were much more primitive. Yes. And I enjoyed that very much. And it’s what your name is, you know, really whenever I got a reference, it would be Mr Adrian Factor, da-da-da. I also know his relations of Hollywood. You follow? So it was very biased. I’ve got some there, I laugh when they see them now. It’s very strange now. And I keep – you can see that I’ve got there, on the table, I go through all my archives now. From my school drawings, to when I was already a professional musician.

And then I became – I had a choice. My father told me, “I don’t mind you becoming a musician, but you must promise me to also study another profession.” So I did a course in commercial art, and my father said to me, “Okay, now that you have another profession, you can become a musician.” And I did most of this in the 70s and 80s, I did all the operas that came out. The operas and the musicals. And any of the American artists who came out from

England. Shirley Bassey. I played with all of them. It was a very interesting occupation. But now I'm more or less handicapped, because of my eyes.

Q: Your eyes? You can't see so well?

A: No. I was a professional reader. We used to get the scores, say from La Boheme or whatever it may be, in the morning. One reading, three hours. After lunch, dress rehearsal. So we had another chance to read. And in the evening we used to perform.

Q: Wow. What instrument did you play?

A: Violin.

Q: Violin?

A: Yes.

Q: In an orchestra?

A: Yes. In Her Majesties and the Princess mainly. Yeah. But I also did a lot of chamber music. A lot of chamber music. That time has gone. I'm trying to console myself, just to remember. It's also nice to remember what I did.

Q: Yeah. You enjoyed playing music?

A: Very much, otherwise I wouldn't have. It's a very tough game. Very, very tough. But I loved it. Yeah, I loved it.

Q: What did you love about it?

A: Well, emotionally – let me put it this way. It goes through all the emotions. When we go through life, whether it is an earnest one, whether it's a happy one or something, it's expressed in music. And that I loved. And on the violin particularly. Why is it a Jewish instrument?

Q: Yeah?

A: You know why?

Q: Because it's a minor? No, why is it a Jewish instrument?

A: Because it's easy to carry. You can't carry a piano on your back.

Q: No, you can't. Yes, so how old were you when you started learning violin?

A: I was six. My father – and that violin you'll find now at the museum.

Q: Your violin?

A: My first violin. I gave to the museum.

Q: To the Holocaust Museum?

A: Yeah.

Q: That you brought it here from Germany?

A: I brought it here. I brought that here from Germany, yes. And mainly my violin and my atlas. Two things I brought.

Q: Why your atlas? Why did you bring that?

A: Because the atlas reminded me very much of – that I did not know what Australia was like. And I've told you before I think I may have mentioned it, three pictures of Australia, you're going to change wild animals. And this is why my father fitted us out with tropic helmets and safari jackets when we came here, when we come he said, "We'll get the spears or the guns in Australia."

Q: Wow.

A: We did not know anything about Australia. So yeah, it was a very strange period, I must say. But in France, I had beautiful teachers. Lovely teachers for the violin. And there I learned a lot of technical work. And when I came to Australia, I was more or less equipped to be able to do serious studies.

Q: Yeah. And –

A: But coming back to the passports, it's strange, when I was told that you were interested in people that were stateless. Don't forget, when we were in Germany, when we had no nationality, when our passports were marked stateless, we all lived in the hope, before Hitler came, that we would become German citizens. And so strange as it may seem, but the passports of no nationality saved our lives. Because if not that, or if they would have been a cluey policeman, we would have been shifted to Poland. And we would have been – you know, when Hitler came, we would have been eliminated.

Q: And if you had German citizenship too, that would also not have been so good.

A: Of course. I mean, we hoped – I know my father was always, he went to Berlin to the consulate, the Polish consulate. And he said, "I want to – if you like, I will stay a Polish citizen." Yet to allow him to apply for German dual citizenship. But it didn't work.

Q: And so then in Australia, how old were you when you had to join the army?

A: I was 18. And of course we were very guarded as what you might call friendly enemy aliens.

Q: That was going to be my next question. Yeah, so you weren't an Australian citizen.

A: Of course I wasn't an Australian citizen yet. And we were – as strange as it may seem. But there was already antisemitism in the [army], particularly from – we had right wing

Italians who were with Mussolini. And we had some of the Greeks were very much, as it may sound strange, but they're very right wing. And so we had sort of clustered together in tents of Polish Jews mainly or Hungarian Jews, yes, Romanian Jews. And all – they were all ages up to I think 45. And I was the youngest. And even in the camp, I still had a quartet. Yes, I still played chamber music.

Q: Where was the army camp?

A: In Tocumwal, was the army camp.

Q: And so you had a chamber quartet there?

A: Yes, I had a chamber quartet, and then the captain heard once he – not that he knew much about music. He said, "Can you play Ave Maria?" Schubert. I said, "Yes, I can play it for you." And I played it for him. He said, "You're part of the mess, officer's mess." Which was cleaning up.

Q: Sure.

A: Yes. And emptying the flycatchers, do all sorts of things, and making the captain's bed. That was a big thing for me. And so I had to play Ave Maria every lunchtime for him. And I got so sick of it. I said, "Can I play something else?" He says, "No." He says, "That's a good tune."

Q: And so you spent your whole army experience –

A: Three and a half years.

Q: The whole time was in Tocumwal?

A: Yes. Mostly on – there were a few months shifted back to Melbourne. And that was near the end of the war.

Q: And did your brother have to join the army as well?

A: No, he was a year younger.

Q: Too young?

A: He did – he was in a factory making blankets. So he was excused.

Q: And when you finished in the army, I know other people who were enemy aliens didn't get the same entitlements as citizens and were very unhappy about that. Was that your experience as well?

A: Yes, that's my experience too. Yes. But they made us fill out all sorts of forms, what sort of a house would you like to live in, but nothing ever happened of this. Oy, nup, nup. You know, promises.

Q: Yeah. So were you – I know I’ve seen other people protested and wrote letters saying, “I’m entitled to these things.”

A: Yeah, of course.

Q: Did you do any of that?

A: No. I only got a badge. A badge, yes, I did get a badge.

Q: Yeah? What sort of badge?

A: For – I was in the army, an army badge.

Q: Right. And that was all you got? No other entitlements?

A: I don’t really – that’s what I told you –

Q: That’s what you remember.

A: – does it ever fit into what you have to do?

Q: Yes, absolutely.

A: I hope so.

Q: Yeah, no, it’s very helpful.

A: Good. And have you got a family? Are you still studying that now?

Q: Me? So I work as a researcher at the university.

A: Yes. On?

Q: So on histories of statelessness.

A: On statelessness.

Q: At the moment. But I’ve also – yeah.

A: Yes. But I might tell you, sometimes it was – if it fits your –

Q: Yeah, please.

A: I have to tell you that the statelessness was always – what do I call it? Like a needle in our arm. It was always something that it was sort of – it didn’t fit. We always wanted to be somewhere. And my father tried so hard to get German citizenship. With that passport. But the stripe, I can still see it. I’ve got it inside somewhere.

Q: That’s okay. Yeah. Do you remember getting Australian citizenship?

A: Yes, I did. When I was in the army, I was still stateless. I got citizenship approximately after I was here – two years after I was out of the army, I got Australian citizenship. But oddly enough, I might tell you, I still had the longing to go back to Germany. After the war. When the war finished, I was 22. And at the time I remember together with my brother, I spoke the local tongue, which even the Germans don't understand, it's a Saxon. Sort of a way to speak, the street language. So, is there any –

Q: And so do you remember how it felt to become an Australian citizen?

A: Of course.

Q: And to get that Australian passport?

A: I was very, very happy. I was very happy, yes.

Q: Was there a –

A: I was very happy. For once I could sort of express my name properly, Adrian. Because my name in France was Andre. But the Aussies wouldn't have it. That's not an Aussie name, that's not a real name. So they named me Andy.

Q: Right. Of course, of course. Do you remember getting the Australian passport?

A: I was elated. The first time we got it. Before we went overseas, I applied for an Australian passport. It was absolutely beautiful really to belong. Because don't forget, when you've got a stateless passport, you're nowhere. And you don't know what regulations will become enforced, which will single you out either way. You know, to your advantage or disadvantage. But I note even now, it is difficult to get an Australian passport. It's very difficult. My carers tell me, they've already been here for years, and they want to apply and they're stuck. Can't I make you a cup of coffee or a cup of tea?

Q: I'm absolutely fine.

A: Are you sure?

Q: I'm sure. But we've been talking –

A: So you are a daughter of Rae?

Q: I'm Rae's daughter. Yeah.

A: So I see. Any other – I know she's got another –

Q: She's got another son.

A: Another son.

Q: Yes. And he has two kids.

A: She's a lovely woman.

Q: She is.

A: She's so nice to me. Yes, I must say. It's beautiful.

Q: Yeah. You're involved in the Holocaust Museum?

A: Yes.

Q: How long have you been involved?

A: About four years now. Four years, yes.

Q: Four? Yeah. What made you get involved?

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: What made you become involved? What prompted you –

A: I'll tell you. My father – I mean, I was together with my father imprisoned.

Q: In Buchenwald?

A: Yeah. And the circumstances – and I must say, he was still very humorous to me, with me. Told me jokes, whilst we were incarcerated. And then one day, the door opened of the prison, of the cell. And I was called out and I was put into a room which looked like a surgery. And the doctor examined me, and he said to me, "I will mark you unfit." That meant I would not be sent to a concentration camp. My father wasn't that lucky. And of course I found out later that the doctor used to be in the same soccer team with my father. So he knew if he marked me unfit, I would not have to go to a concentration camp. Why I bring this up in connection, but I saw the face of my father, the last time I saw my father. He was so upset. I will tell the world one day. But for 80 years, we never spoke about it with each other.

My father was of course in Buchenwald, and he saw some terrible things. I mean, the only bit came up when he already was in his 80s. One day he opened up. They had to witness hangings. And the beatings that they had in that concentration camp. So for 80 years he did not want to speak about it. But then suddenly he opened up. So my father said to me, "You know, the world should know what happened." And that made me think. And then I said to myself, "Right, Holocaust is the place to tell young people." And I always leave a message with them to make sure that there is no distinction. People, we are all the same. We are human beings. There's only one race, the human race. Not different races. I hope something is left with them.

Q: I'm sure.

A: That I have to tell them. But as a 14 year old boy, I think I have suffered in my young days. To sit for six years in a classroom, alone on a bench, isolated. The seat was only reserved for students who misbehaved. Whenever they were sitting next to me. That alone, that feeling, you know, of isolation, all the same in the morning, when the teacher said, "Right, undress. We go to the swimming pool." And I was left alone. You know, on the seat.

And no physical activity. It was a terrible feeling, as a ten year old boy, or 15, even 14. And also the day I was called up to the front – that was my final year. Where I was standing, was made to stand on a box. The teacher took a cane, and pointed at my nose.

Q: Oh gosh.

A: “Typical Jewish features.” But I do remember, what upset me more than anything else was looking at the classroom, my class roommates, and they believed it. That was the worst thing that happened to me.

Q: Yeah, that’s terrible.

A: Yeah.

Q: That’s really terrible.

A: Yes. Your name is Jordana?

Q: It is. Yeah.

A: At which university are you?

Q: At the University of Melbourne.

A: This is where I studied.

Q: Yeah. Did you study at VCA?

A: Yeah, I did. Is it still there, the hall – what is it called? Where the exams were.

Q: The Wilson Hall?

A: Wilson Hall.

Q: Yes. Did you do your exams there?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was that like? To be on campus then?

A: I always feared it – I always had a fear. Like anything else when you walk into an examination room now –

Q: Yes, absolutely.

A: – suddenly everything – you don’t know anything. Yes.

Q: Absolutely.

A: But there’s the conservatorium in the front there.

Q: Yes. Oh, so that's where you were?

A: Yeah.

Q: The conservatorium there?

A: That's where I had my studies, yes.

Q: Were they good teachers?

A: Yes. And I remember I had some good times there. Very good times.

Q: And I'm aware we've been talking for an hour. You might be a bit tired?

A: It's all right. It's okay. Is there anything I can help you with?

Q: Yeah. I guess do you remember when you got your passport and you travelled on the Australian passport, do you remember – where was the first place you went, when you – after you got an Australian passport?

A: I remember that. We went for lunch. And we enjoyed – and I opened every page and looked at it. It was like sunshine coming. It was beautiful. An Australian passport, for once I had it. It's beautiful.

Q: Did your whole family get one at the same time?

A: Yes. Right all at the same time. So then we, yes. But you know, I must tell you a funny one. When I got the passport, oddly that you do bring this up, I put a kangaroo in my lapel, because we went overseas. And in London, I wanted some direction. I can't even remember what I was – whether it was Oxford Street, I'm not quite sure. But I'll tell you, I went up to a policeman. And I asked him directions. He was very courteous. And then he said – he looked at my kangaroo, and then said to me, "Where do you come from?" And I said, "I come from Australia." And he said, "Where do you really come from?" You know what that means. You can never hide your identity. I mean, I know I still have a certain German accent, whenever I speak. And I'm very much aware of it. But the accent doesn't matter, as long as you speak properly.

Q: Yeah. You've had lots of these moments of people telling you you're different?

A: Of course. Yes. Some say I've got an English accent. Some say I have a northern English accent. Something like that. All right. But you know, I'm now – I teach my carers English. They bring their pads and whenever they make a mistake speaking, I pull them up and I tell them, "That's not what you say. How will you say it?" And it gives me great pleasure after all, I mean – mind you, the German language can sound very beautiful too. Except it was distorted by Hitler with the screaming and distorting of the words. But I will tell you who was a good speaker. Goebbels. He was an excellent speaker. He was a propagandist. And he was – on the computer, I have his last speech before Germany collapsed. And I can tell you, I'm very impressed with the way he still holds out for Germany. Yeah.

Q: And so I guess with this project on statelessness, do you talk about being stateless much? Is that something –

A: We did. In fact, quite often with my father. It's a strange feeling when you say you are stateless. Because you don't want to say it. And whenever the subject came up I was asked, "What were you originally?" And I say, "I was stateless." A strange feeling comes up, because it holds bad memories for me. You follow?

Q: Yes.

A: But at the same time I must say, it saved our lives. Because at that time all the ten families who had passports were shifted to Poland. And most of the young Jewish men were in our town, still held their Polish passports. Maybe one day a law will come out to sort of tell those people that I have no passport, no nationality on the passports. We'll accept you back into Poland. And wanted to come back to Poland. But I mean, the life in Poland at that time was very, very bad. I mean, even for a town like Lodz, which is the second largest city in Poland, the life – some people died of hunger before the Germans came in. After the First World War. After the Second World War – yeah.

Q: Was there a stigma attached to being stateless?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Was it seen as a negative thing?

A: That's true, yes.

Q: Did you feel that? Or –

A: So you are researching people – yes.

Q: Yes.

A: Well, I can tell you, I have all my family was – I mean, myself and my parents, we were stateless. Also stateless was an uncle of mine who lived with us. And I would say that most of the people of the ten families that lived with us at the time, were stateless. And the reason for that was simply economics that were tough and their taste for culture. And they used to go – I know that the young men from our stateless people who would go to Leipzig or Dresden or Berlin, when there was an artist coming. A great violinist, a great pianist, yes. They would – and my uncle would come back and sing opera. "Oh, I've just heard in Leipzig a company." And so they were hungry for culture. And also there were a lot of openings for people who came from Germany, whether they were stateless or still had passports to Germany, there were thousands and thousands of widows. And they had properties, they had farms, they had businesses. Their husbands got killed in the war. So they took their place.

Q: Yeah, gosh, a hard life for many people.

A: Yeah. So there you are.

Q: And so does Australia feel like home to you?

A: Like?

Q: Home. Does this feel like home?

A: It does. It does. But I still have a lot of memories from my childhood. Yes. Nice memories from my childhood. But Australia is my home. I don't want to live anywhere else. Well, at my age I don't think I should make any plans.

Q: Yes. And have you been back to Germany?

A: I've been back to Germany. And it was very strange. First of all, they received us with open arms. Now, I walked with my brother into a shop, trying to get some writing paper. And the woman who served, listened to us, and I spoke to my brother. And then the woman said, "Where are you from?" And we said, "We come from Australia." And the woman laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed. Because I was speaking with my brother the local –

Q: Sure.

A: And she could swear that we come from the next village. To the day that he died about five or six years ago, whenever we were invited, we were accused of isolating ourselves. My brother and myself. Because we talked in what they called 'voglandisch'. So you follow?

Q: Yeah.

A: I would like to order you some –

Q: No, no, no. I'm totally fine. I've got water. I'm all good.

A: I hope I didn't bore you.

Q: You haven't bored me at all. It's been very interesting. I've learnt a lot. Shall we leave it at that? Is that your feeling?

A: What's this?

Q: Are you feeling finished? Or –

A: Yes, I think that I have – unless you have something special to ask me. Please do.

Q: I guess maybe I'll just ask you about your family now. Do you have children now?

A: Yes, I have two daughters. Yes. And your mother knows them very well.

Q: Yeah. And you have grandkids?

A: Yes. I have five grandkids.

Q: And do you see them all much?

A: Oh yes, they come and see me. Of course they come and see me. But I don't – I tell them not to study music.

Q: Not to study music?

A: Not to study.

Q: How come?

A: It's too hard.

Q: It's too hard?

A: It's too difficult. It really is very difficult. You have to be able to read very quickly, and expressively. I've been the leader of a number of local chamber music or ensembles, which was my early – the area which I loved very much. But now I am like – I am relying on my memory. And I practise my violin daily.

Q: You still practise daily?

A: Yes. Daily. Yes. And new works, I just pull out. That's the one I'm going to do. With this.

Q: Ah a magnifying [glass].

A: Yeah.

Q: And then you can see it.

A: Yeah.

Q: Wow, so you're still learning new pieces.

A: Yes. Never finish. My god is Bach. Bach daily. Great composer. Nothing wrong with Beethoven or Mozart, but still –

Q: But Bach is your favourite?

A: Yes, he's my favourite. What he could do he writes for a violin of four strings. He imitates whole orchestras.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: Yes. But that's what it is.

Q: Is there any last things that you want to tell me about statelessness and about your experience of it?

A: Statelessness, it's a fearful way to lead a life, when you are stateless. You can always – when you have a nationality, you can always go to the consulate. You can ask advice. And they can help you, a consulate, I know it from my carers. They go to Canberra, they go to

Sydney or Melbourne, where they're situated. They have problems, and the consulate will help them. When you are stateless person you have nowhere to go. You are at the mercy of the – whoever is in charge in your life, you can't complain to anybody. You know, in Germany it was the same. Except you see, this was the difference. We all hoped to become German citizens. And my mother and my father told me always how nice it would be to become a German citizen. But it didn't work out. And that black stripe – I've got it in front of me. Yeah, that black stripe in front of the passport, stateless. That is the insecurity that comes with being stateless. That's why it's now, you can have a dual state –

Q: Dual citizenship?

A: Citizenship. And that helps either way, if this doesn't work, this might work. And that's just the insecurity. In your thesis, whatever you do, you should really – this is one of the most important things. A stateless person is never secure. It doesn't matter in what country you live. If you're stateless, you're in limbo.

Q: Yeah. Is that a good place to finish our conversation?

A: We should – and particularly as Jewish people, we should appreciate actually – I don't know whether today that the letter of the six ex-prime ministers, have you read it?

Q: Yeah, I saw it. Yeah.

A: Yes, yes. To live in a country like this as Jews is very comforting. I mean, six – except Keating. Keating did not participate. But they are luring him out. They want him to say something. But this was a very interesting – I have a very good friend who comes here nearly every second or third day. And he reads me a report of journalists who are making statements, yes. And it's amazing, absolutely amazing, that most of the journalists are of course defending Israel. That this should be affecting Australia so much is uncanny. I can't understand it. You know, in Yiddish we say, ek velt. You know what that means? Ek velt. The end of the earth. That you live in this country, where we're sort of isolated – we're not isolated anymore.

Q: Yes.

A: So that is the message I give, let us hope that this conflict will be resolved with Israel. It's a difficult topic to deal with. But it has to be faced. Has to be faced. So you are – Wilson Hall. I was in there –

Q: Do you speak Yiddish as well?

A: Yes.

Q: You speak Yiddish and German and English?

A: Yeah. It says – yeah. There's a linkage. But not really quite so – because the words in typical Yiddish can't be then translated into German. It's a beautiful language.

Q: Yiddish?

A: Yes. I used to do Yiddish plays at the Kadimah in Carlton.

Q: Sure. I live just near there.

A: Huh?

Q: I live quite close to the old Kadimah.

A: Yes. But the old – how come, what is the old Kadimah?

Q: In Carlton. That building. I live near there. I live in Brunswick.

A: I see. But that is a Greek –

Q: It's a Greek centre now.

A: A Greek centre. I did all the musicals there.

Q: Oh wow.

A: I did the musicals there. And I did – so many functions that I attended. And I belonged to the Kadimah youth organisation.

Q: Oh wow.

A: And then we had writers coming in and personalities that we entertained. And I can tell you, it was a beautiful centre. And you wouldn't remember Giligich?

Q: I know the name, yeah.

A: The name. Who taught us English.

Q: Yes.

A: He said 'the', and we said 'gee'. And he said 'the'. "No," he said, "you never do it." He taught us English, Mr Giligich, in the place next door was a big house. And we were taught English when we came to Australia. You see, when I came to Australia, I did not speak a word. Not a word. I spoke reasonably fluent French, but I did not speak any English. You know how I learnt my English?

Q: How?

A: Through the comics.

Q: Yeah sure. And so you lived in Carlton when you arrived?

A: We lived in Carlton. I lived in Carlton for 11, 12 years.

Q: What street?

A: Richardson Street. Wilson Street. 39 Wilson Street, at the corner of Richardson Street. And it was such a beautiful time. You know, in Carlton, you had mansions. You could walk next door, you got a cup of tea. Doesn't exist anymore. We all had our tourists. But we got on. And everybody helped each other. And we had a Yiddish theatre. Jacob Weislitz and Rokhl Holtzer, who came from the Lodz, no from the Warsaw theatre. This was very warm-hearted. It was very good.

Q: What was the youth group like?

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: The Kadimah youth group that you were in, what did you do as part of it? What did you do in the youth –

A: In there –

Q: In the youth group?

A: In the youth group?

Q: Yeah. What activities did you do?

A: We got writers, mainly writers who wrote – the writer, How Beautiful Are Thy Feet.

Q: I don't know, sorry.

A: One, we always had writers coming. And we had them mainly upstairs. And a very warm, close relationship with writers and Yosl Bergner. Do you know him?

Q: Yeah. The artist. [Adrian points to a painting on his wall] Ah, beautiful.

A: Yeah, he was a friend of mine. Yeah.

Q: It's beautiful.

A: Yes. We grew up together.

Q: Wow.

A: In Carlton. He was even in the army with me.

Q: Sure.

A: And until the Bundists came in, the Bundists, because we were – well, leftists, let me put it this way. You know, at that time, it was in for young people to be Bundists. Yes. And we used to walk, you know Lygon Street?

Q: Yeah.

A: Friday night or Saturday night, with a red banner, we used to walk down and sing songs. Socialist songs. And I can tell you, I had about – I was carrying a flag, a red flag. And I had people following me, maybe 30 people, 40 people. And we sang revolutionary songs, yes. And I kept on doing and I looked back, and suddenly I discovered there were not only half of the people which normally followed me, and the next time I looked back, there were only about three people. Where were they? You know where they were?

Q: Where?

A: Their parents bought them cars. They made them partners in their business. Finished with socialism.

Q: But you stayed with it? Or, when did you finish?

A: No, I ended. I was chased by mine. Yes. No, I was too involved with music afterwards.

Q: Did you stay – so you were in the Bund?

A: Bund? No. No, I wasn't in the Bund.

Q: No, you were never in the Bund.

A: But the Bundists came, and they threw us out from the Kadimah.

Q: From the Kadimah.

A: So in the meantime I leave politics alone.

Q: Fair enough.

A: Don't want to be associated with it.

Q: Yeah. And still again – still don't want to be?

A: No

Q: Yeah.

A: Jordana, I really feel very, very guilty.

Q: Please don't feel guilty. No, no, no. This has been very interesting and helpful. Thank you.

A: Will it help?

Q: It's very helpful. Thank you.

A: Well, maybe you get a few sentences out of it.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. And very interesting to hear your story. And thank you so much for talking with me.

A: It's my pleasure.

Q: No, it's absolutely my pleasure and honour to hear your story.

A: And oh, your mother is such a lovely woman.

Q: Yeah?

A: She arranged me every Friday, every Friday I speak to her. It's very interesting.

Q: That's nice. That's so nice. Okay.

A: All right, Jordana.

Q: I'll press stop.

A: What is this here? Is this still connected?

Q: Yeah, that's the microphone. So I'll press stop.

A: Did you record all this?

Q: I've been recording. Yes, yes.

A: Oh, maybe I'm – oh, did the wrong thing.

Q: You didn't – no, no. You did the perfect thing. I'll stop the recording now.