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on Statelessness

Oral Histories of Statelessness

Interview with Judith Solomon

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Interview by Jordana Silverstein

Q: I'm Jordana Silverstein. I am speaking with Judy Solomon, in September, 2022. Judy, tell me where and when you were born.

A: I was born in Budapest, 20th August, 1942.

Q: Tell me about your parents.

A: My mother was also born in Budapest. My father was born just out of Budapest, in a place called Ujpest. It was sort of part of Budapest. My mother was a furrier and my father studied at a Yeshiva, but his mother was very poor and he was the youngest of four children. He ended up going to learn textile dyeing, but he didn't get very far, because the war interfered and –

Q: Yeah, sure. Did you have siblings?

A: No, no siblings.

Q: You were the only child.

A: Only child, yeah.

Q: When did you leave Hungary?

A: We left Hungary when I was about two years old, but before that, when my parents married. They got married in 1938. As people in Budapest were becoming restless and my father had to go off to *zwangs-arbeit*, the forced labour, and they used to tease me that they don't know how I managed to be born because he wasn't home very much. He was home when I was born, and then I didn't see him virtually until we were ready to leave. I actually found out only recently that he was imprisoned. He had an aunt, his sister that I used to visit in Hungary. She told me that he was on the border, near Russia but I don't know what county or whereabouts. It's really hard to find out. I've been trying to find out for family tree. We ended up in the ghetto. My mother's mother was with us all the time. She lived with us, because my mother was also the youngest out of 12 siblings.

Q: Yeah wow.

A: She managed to get papers from the Raoul Wallenberg's office. So we were about to leave. She had organised that we would go by truck semi-legally, because we had this paper, but we didn't know how – who will accept it, as such. The day before we left, my father turned up from forced labour. We didn't know whether he would be back, but his sister – one of his sisters stayed behind in Hungary. She didn't want to leave because my other grandmother was not well, she wasn't mobile. Even though my mother's mother was older, she was very lively and – anyway, so she came with us and we left Hungary. [coughs] sorry.

Q: That's all right.

A: We left Hungary on a truck and I remember being on the truck. I remember driving at night time. I remember being told to be quiet. I cannot make noises. It was one of those army trucks with tarpaulin and two benches. My grandmother and I sat in the back, and my parents next to us. We were stopped. No idea who stopped the truck, but they got everybody off the truck except my grandmother and I. They said we could stay there. Some of the people didn't get back on the truck. I don't know why. No one ever mentioned it. I was too young if they did mention it, I don't know, but I remember being on the truck. I remember being stopped. I remember people coming. That they didn't all get on. Then we ended up in Germany in a DP camp. The second time we were stopped was by American soldiers and we ended up in a place called Leipheim in Germany, not far from München, Munich and we were there for three and a half years.

Q: This, it's towards, at the end of the war that you're on this –

A: I was born in '42, so it was after that that they took all the Hungarian Jewish people. Technically, as far as history is concerned. The Jews in Hungary should never have been taken if the Allies would have stopped everybody, then the Hungarian Jews would not have been taken away, because that was really towards the end of the war when they took everybody away then, to camps.

Q: Were you close to your grandmothers?

A: Not my father's grandmother. Once we left I didn't know her very well

Q: Didn't see her.

A: Well of course my parents were, and I knew of her, but I didn't see her again, I wasn't very close to her, because there was not that contact. I became very close to one of my father's sisters. When my parents passed away, I used to go and visit her every year in Hungary.

Q: So she stayed in Hungary?

A: She stayed.

Q: Did you have other family stay?

A: My father was one of four, so one brother and two sisters. His brother ended up, after the war, in England, and I'm quite close to my cousin. We email and visit when we can. One sided visit. He has never been to Australia, but we've been lots of times to London. And my father's two sisters had no children. One of them was married, the other one fell in love with someone non-Jewish, shall I say?

Q: Yep

A: And because of the situation, they were very Orthodox, it was out of the question. She remained single, but my older aunt, my father's older sister, as I said, she married. Unfortunately, she couldn't have any children because during the war she was one of the ones who helped kids to get on the train and get out of Budapest, and she was caught. Don't

know whether it was Germans or whether it was the Hungarian government. I know she was imprisoned and there is no nice way I can say it, they mistreated and abused her in prison, but all I can say is she was not able to have children after that experience.

A few years before she passed away there was an article written about her and she wouldn't show it to me. The last time I saw her she would not show me the article. "You don't need to read awful things." And I've been trying to trace that article and it's just impossible. It's really been hard. I don't know. I can't find it. She stayed in Budapest with my grandmother.

Q: What about your mum's family?

A: My mum's family, her father married twice. His first wife died and left six children, five boys and one girl, and then he married my grandmother, my mother's mother, who was much younger than him and had another six, 5 girls and one boy. One of them was a twin, but one of the twins passed away. She only lived two years or so. The twin, the other twin came to Australia, and that's why we are here. She was my mother's second older sister. That sister came here. The older sister didn't live in Hungary. She lived in Vienna. She lived in Bucharest. She lived in Vilna. She had a beautician's school in Vienna. Not in Vienna, in Berlin, sorry. I apologise. In Berlin she had a school, and she was very friendly with a lot of journalists, and she decided to go to Israel, not quite sure what year it was. Israel was still Palestine.

She had to get out of Europe, because she was wanted for espionage. She smuggled herself in, I don't know how, but I know that she came to say goodbye to my grandmother. We were still in Hungary at the time, and then she virtually escaped again and went with her husband to Israel. So she lived there. So we went to Israel from Germany and she was there already for a few years. She lived in Haifa, we lived in Haifa. Then my mother had a brother. Somehow or other he ended up in the same camp as us. We don't know how, or I don't know from where, but he decided that he and his wife, he had a daughter, they went back to live in Budapest when my parents said, "You're silly doing that. Come to Israel with us, or to America, wherever we were going to be." Another aunt was in Algiers. She lived in Algiers, and then when my aunt, Juci, the oldest one, went to Israel, she also went to Israel. So when we arrived, we had the two sisters there already. She was single, and – sorry, I'm going all over the place.

Q: No, you're fine.

A: She ended up marrying someone that we knew from camp, from the DP camp. He lost all his family, so he married my aunt. They emigrated to Sydney after their wedding. I don't know how happy she was really. I don't remember her being extremely happy. I don't know if he abused her. On hindsight, when I think of it, because she had bruises all the time. She kept on saying she fell but I think she was abused by him. I never heard my parents say anything, but I do remember when we came here, by then I was 16. I didn't live with them. I ended up living with my other aunt who had a house, because they had an apartment. I know that she wasn't abused while my parents lived with them, she didn't have any bruises and she never fell anywhere or anytime. Because you know, it didn't make sense at the time. Didn't even think of it.

That's the five of them.

The older brother, my mother's oldest brother ended up in – at the time, it was Tehran. He was an engineer and he dealt with a lot of the pipes and oils and whatever, and he got to know the Shah very well, and he became very, very wealthy. No children. He had a wife who used to come to Hungary, and I think she died on one of her trips in Hungary, and then one day in Israel, this man turns up at our doorstep with a tiny little bag, about the size of your bag, and that's all he could do. It was either just escaping with the clothes he wore or he would've been killed. He escaped and of course, he left all his money and whatever, but he used to send my grandmother money and that. My mother didn't actually meet him because she was the youngest and he was the oldest. He had already gone, and the first time she met him was when he turned up at our doorstep.

They corresponded, so she knew of him. But yep. Two of them were killed during the war, with their families. One of them ended up coming here also. He had a daughter, who had two kids, my cousins who live in Sydney now. My aunt that I lived with had one son only and he had and his wife had one son only too, this grandson we're very close with, cousins, and they have two boys. Trying to think. I think that's it, really. No, there was one more brother. He was killed, but his daughter ended up in America. She married a man who heard her play the violin and he took her to America, because he was American, and she gave concerts in America. He bought her a Stradivarius, which was just amazing. Unfortunately, when she passed away, the violin disappeared like a lot of other things disappeared. We were told we could virtually trace it, because they're all numbered and there's not many of them, but I haven't tried tracing it yet. Her carer obviously took it or whatever.

Q: What an extraordinary family, and just so spread out.

A: Very diverse, and the brother who came here, his daughter was going to be in the Olympics in athletics, throwing shotput, but of course, no Jews were allowed to go into the Olympics at the time.

Q: Yeah sure. So you were in the DP camp for about three years?

A: Three, three and a half years.

Q: Do you remember the DP camp?

A: Yes. I remember the gates. I remember our barrack was right near the gates, so I used to go and play there. My Father studied English in Hungary before. So when we got to the DP camp, it came in very handy, because it was an American DP and because he spoke Hungarian and Yiddish, they asked him if he would help with the administration, so he helped with running the camp. So he organised the soccer team, because he was a mad soccer player, and they used to play against other DP camps in Germany around the area. On one of these occasions, he used to referee, and on one of these occasions, someone from the other team came and said to him that he didn't like the way he called a particular shot and started to

abuse my father, so my father gave him a punch apparently, and knocked a couple of his teeth out, because he had a ring, which David has today.

Ok, I'll tell you about the ring after. So, this guy ended up being taken away, and when he got better and he was all right, he came looking for my father. What they did – because it wasn't a very big camp – he came to our place, but we said, "No, he's not here." He ended up sleeping in different places in the camp, so this guy wouldn't find him. But I remember my Father running – soccer was his life really. He really loved it. Later on in life, when we came here, he went to matches in Sydney, I don't know if Melbourne had it, but there was a team called Hakoah, and then it changed its name to City something or other. But he was banned from going there. His doctor banned him from going there because he had a heart attack and he got himself so worked up there, so he wasn't allowed to go. But what I remember, I remember our barrack. I remember our room, where we lived for – four of us lived in this room. It was probably no – smaller than this room. It was more square, but smaller than this room. And – Sorry.

Q: No, you're right.

A: I remember we had mattresses one on top of the other, and every night we just took them out. There was a little table, and there was the cupboard on one corner. We got a Primus and my mother cooked on that, and my grandmother cooked. But we had to go to the bathroom, it was a communal bathroom outside. We had a window overlooking the garden and the gates. And we were up on the second floor, because it was two story barracks. And it was long, I don't know how long but – I have a picture of it. I do – I can see the room inside, and I used to go down and speak to the guards. They had – there were different – I think on hindsight, it must have been United Nations guards because sometimes there were Russian soldiers, sometimes American. They were different and they used to teach me different words in Russian. Opposite the gate there was a field and they used to take me across because there were flowers, and they used to take me across there and I'd pick flowers and bring it back for my mother and grandmother. We weren't really allowed to go out the gate.

Q: But they would take you out.

A: But they would do that for me, yeah. We were talking about our kids. My daughter has a bike. She goes to work on a bike in Brisbane. I really don't like it, but – and we were talking about it and our grandchildren asked me whether I had ever been on a bike, on a motorbike, and I said I remembered just the once. This man in the camp was a friend of my parents and he had a motorbike. I don't know how. It was unusual to have a thing like that at camp, but he had one and he used to take me for a ride around the camp, and one day, he took me out of the camp. They allowed him to go out of the camp and we went not very far from where the camp was, but it ended up in an unused airport. There was a run, an airport. I remember him telling me that this is where aeroplanes land. And he used to drive around and make wheelies, and I sat in the front. You know that petrol, that round?

I sat in the front and he was at the back of me. The kids were saying today that you would simply die. I would've been three or four when this happened, and he took me for a ride. Today, they went through all the things that – first of all, it's too dangerous to sit there. Did I have a hat on? Hat? Don't be silly. He didn't have a hat. He had glasses on. I remember he

had glasses on. The safety. Would he abuse me? The things that they came up with. Thank goodness we didn't know any of these things.

My father and the American organisation in camp had – whenever it was a Yomtov, they organised parcels. We used to get parcels from America, and then my parents were the ones who distributed it. Yomtov time was always – they built out the – outside the main building where they had the administration, they built a sort of a platform and I remember every time we got parcels, people would line up and we would distribute there.

Not my grandmother, but my parents were. And then, we were supposed to – because my father was working there, the people said, “You can come to America. We can organise your green card.” Well, it wasn't green card. Whatever it was. The immigration at the time. My father said, “No, we need to go to Israel.” [gets teary] Sorry, sorry. [pause]

Q: No, that's all right. You thinking about your father?

A: Mm. [pause] Um. So we had to wait for papers, that we could go to Israel. As it happened my grandmother got her papers before us. She was 81 when she went the same way as we did. We stopped in Marseilles. We went from Leipheim to Marseilles. I don't remember whether we went by train or truck. That I don't remember. I remember being in Marseilles. We stayed in some sort of a villa which was right on the waterfront. But anyway, going back to my grandmother, she ended up leaving. She was 81. We had to tell them she was 75, because they thought 81 was too old. She was diabetic and she was a big lady. So she had to do the same route as us and then take a ship from Marseilles, whenever it was. She arrived in Israel safely and everyone was wondering how she managed to do that. Such an amazing lady. She went on the same type of ship as we did.

We had to sleep in between slats, like they had, where you just slid in, and once you slid in, you couldn't get out until the whole lot came out because there was not much room and you couldn't move around or turn over. I remember sleeping, but not very often. We used to – my parents, three of us, we used to find a little place at the top of the outside on the ship and we would sit there rather than sleep in there, because it was just really too difficult. I can't imagine her. But once again, it was not discussed or anything like that. But I know she lived with my Aunt Juci, my mother's older sister, when she arrived there. So when we arrived in Israel, we had to go to Attlit. The ship stopped outside the three-mile limit and we were brought in by little boats at night time. We landed in a place called Attlit and I know we stayed in these huge aeroplane type of barracks, like hangers.

You know the round, metal buildings, and in there, there were the army beds and everyone had a curtain in between or didn't have a curtain if you didn't have enough material. So, that's where we stayed when we arrived. Then, a few weeks or a few months later – I don't know how long we stayed there, but I know that my aunt came and I was able to – I was allowed to – with a lot of paperwork, I remember doing that and I was allowed to go with her, to stay with her until my parents were processed and they were allowed out as well, out of Attlit. So I have been trying to find out from Israel when did we land? What ship did we arrive in? Every department I ring, I've rung, I've filled out umpteen forms on the – what's its name? On the computer. I've made a donation of some real photos, because they want original photos, and I've asked Yad Vashem, “Ok I've given you all this, can you please just

find out two things for me?” What do you think they come back with? “If you tell us the ship, we can tell you the date. If you tell us the date, we can tell you the ship.”

Q: We can tell you the –

A: It’s not a joke. This is what’s been happening. It’s hopeless. Talk about migration, we came from Israel to Australia by plane. Because we immigrated by plane, the department of immigration in Australia has not listed people coming in by plane. So I paid taxes. I was naturalised. I went to school here. There is no record of our family arriving in Australia. The only thing they have here is – you know how – you may not know, but when you travel, you used to have to fill out these forms, like immigration forms.

Q: Like the landing cards.

A: Landing cards. They’ve got those. They sent me a copy of these. But if you look up immigration and you look up our name, we don’t exist.

Q: Yeah. The National Archives will have your naturalisation file. You can put in a request if you can’t find it.

A: Well, I’ve lost it. I’ve got a copy of it, but I’ve lost it. We’ve lost all our certificates. We moved around and it was in a tube and it got lost.

Q: Sure. They’ll have the originals as well. I’m happy to help you figure that out, if that’s helpful.

A: I have a form that I have to fill out and they’ll send it to me. It’s at a cost. I don’t remember how much it is. To get a birth certificate reprinted, for my husband, \$100. To get my immigration, I don’t remember how much they said it was to get that.

Q: Do you know what year you arrived in Israel, or you don’t know?

A: No.

Q: Don’t even know the year.

A: I think it was ’48. I know it was just after, so it would’ve been ’47 or ’48. I think it was just after Israel became Israel.

Q: Yeah, if the ship is docking and you have to come in at night, it must’ve still –

A: It was still under the British mandate, and therefore it was not – even when it became Israel, the British still didn’t like to have people landing there. I remember that. I remember climbing down the rope from the ship into the boat. Little motorboat.

Q: You said earlier, to take you back, you had to say that your grandmother was 75. Who did you have to say that – which authorities was that to?

A: Good question. I have no idea. I know my parents used to say that they had to tell them that she was 75.

Q: Sure. So you were registered with the United Nations when you were in the DP camp, or do you remember –

A: It was an American DP camp.

Q: Did you have papers when you were there? Do you remember? Are there copies still of the papers you had?

A: I've got some information from, is it Bad Arles, where all the records are in Germany? They sent me – so when we arrived there, they've got copies of us going there, arriving there.

Q: That's all right. I don't need to see them.

A: I've got some. I can show them.

Q: You've been able to get copies?

A: I've got some of – yes.

Q: Is this through the ITS, the International Tracing Service?

A: Yes. I don't know. So she would've gone there through UNRRA. UNRRA was a big help. It was very, very big then. Very different to what it is today, obviously. It evolved into something. But they were very helpful. They were the ones who organised things, apparently.

Q: Yeah. Do you remember that, or that's –

A: No I don't. It's just my parents' hearsay. They're the ones who organised parcels to come. Some of these parcels, there used to be chocolate. If we got a block of chocolate, my parents would give me a little block every Friday. That was my big treat.

Q: This is in the DP camp?

A: In the DP camp. I remember thinking that if I ever get out of here, I'm going to be a chocoholic, and I am.

Q: And you are.

A: I am. Yeah, little things, and in Israel too. You know because I was very scrawny when I arrived there. My aunt took me to the doctor and they said, "well if I get vitamin 12 injections then. That'll help." So once a week, I had to go and have a needle and my big treat was in summer time, I could go with my aunt to a chocolate shop and I could pick whatever chocolate I want, and I remember picking out Smarties. Different coloured Smarties, that was my big treat. And in winter time, they used to sell in Haifa, corn on the cob in one of these half tins. They had corn on the cob and boiling water. That was my treat, to get corn in winter.

Q: Yeah wow. Do you remember the food in the DP camp?

A: No. I know that my parents, as far as I was concerned, there was nothing happening. They protected me really well – the only hardship I remember is that I had to be quiet on the truck, driving, because it would stop sometimes at night time, it would stop sometimes during the day, and we stopped in a castle and I've got – there weren't many kids. There were only very few children on the truck, but when we stopped at this castle, they gave me a little packet of pictures of the castle itself. Somewhere in Germany. I haven't – it's in my – that's the family tree. I'm doing things like that. One day I'll find out exactly where this castle was, because I know it was somewhere in Germany. We drove from Hungary somehow or other through Germany. And I don't know how long it took from Budapest to Leipheim, but I remember having to stop. Otherwise, I don't remember hardship.

I remember learning how to peel potatoes in Marseilles, because there were a lot of displaced people there going in different directions, waiting for their ship to come. I don't remember timeline, how long we stayed there, but I know I –

Q: Peeled potatoes.

A: Constantly potato peeling. Constantly.

Q: So you were there for at least a little bit of time?

A: Yes. I must've been. I don't know how long. Food in Ger – in Leipheim, I don't really remember that. I know that my father was privileged because he was working and he got a lot of extra things. Don't know.

Q: And you said before about your father's ring. That it was significant?

A: Sorry?

Q: The ring, tell me about the ring.

A: Oh, the ring. So well he kept – he got this ring. I don't know even know how he got it, because I know they didn't have wedding rings and they had to buy wedding rings in Israel. Somehow or other he kept this ring that my mother apparently gave him when they got married and had his initials on it. But how he managed to keep it, I don't know. He also kept that little candle up there with him at forced labour, because they couldn't light candles for shabbat, but he had it there for Friday night, as a symbol for it, he said. I don't know how he managed to do either of those. So when he passed away, my mother got the jeweller to change the BB to DS. My husband wears it.

Q: Yeah wow.

A: I don't know – so no idea how they managed to do that.

Q: That's incredible. How long were you in Israel for?

A: In Israel, we were 10 years, nearly 10 years. We lived in Haifa.

Q: Why Haifa?

A: That's where my aunt was, and she organised an apartment for us, which happened to be on the French – do you know Haifa?

Q: Not really.

A: Okay. So Haifa is a hill, and at the top of it, there's the Carmel. The French quarters, the French Carmel is halfway, and my aunt managed to get a house. Here, we would call it a semi. It was like half a house, and we had two bedrooms and one big lounge room, where we had the dining room, and seats, kitchen and bathroom. And the owners of it were Arabs who lived there next door, in Haifa. They had the options of leaving, but they didn't. They stayed there, and this belonged to them. And they had three – no, they had five sons. No, one, two, three, they had four sons and a daughter. Two of the sons, before it became Israel because of the – they had gone to Lebanon, because they had family there. And when it became Israel, they could not come back anymore. But later on, Israel had organised every Christmas, it was a ballot. People could come – could go and visit relatives in Lebanon and in Syria.

And they could go through the Old City of Jerusalem as one of those – I think it was Mandelbaum, I don't know. Don't remember. But they were allowed to – they had to drive to Israel, to Jerusalem and then go across the border, they were allowed to do that for a couple of weeks to spend time with the families, and then come back. But it was like a ballot system. I remember it. Two of their sons had gone and could not come back. There was no mailing system between Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. You couldn't do that, but they had relatives in America, so they sent letters to America, and then they forwarded it to the boys. And, the daughter was a teacher and the older son who still lived there, he was an engineer, and the younger one was only a few years older than I was. And if I ever had a problem with schooling, I'd go across, go next door and they would help me. They were great neighbours, really. It was a beautiful garden. They had chickens, in the back. I used to have to climb up. I used to help them take the eggs, and on one of these – tiny little ladder, and I fell and broke my arm on one of my adventures up there, and there used to be wolves that came to take the chickens. Even though it was surrounded and there was mesh. We don't know how, but they used to come and take it, used to come and take the chickens. Interesting times. I used to have a turtle.

Q: Yeah?

A: Part of the garden had a little, like a fence around it, a brick wall around it, so I kept a turtle there for a long, long time.

Q: Yeah. Wow. Did you become an Israeli citizen? Did your families become citizens there?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: What was the process like for that?

A: Can't tell you. I don't know. I think all you had to do was just be there at the time. I don't think there was any process. When I came here, I had to be at school two years before I could be naturalised. My parents had to wait five years to be naturalised.

Q: Sure.

A: But in Israel, I think just being there, just, you became a citizen. To be honest, I don't know if my parents had to do something. I don't know.

Q: Do you remember the –

A: This was in the 50s, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Yeah, you're going from being stateless to being a citizen somewhere.

A: Absolutely

Q: Do you remember that, what it felt like?

A: I know, um – just a moment.

Q: Take your time.

A: I remember it was very important for my parents to go to Israel, to belong to a country where you're not going to be outed, you won't be discriminated against. They used to say that we were born in Budapest, but we are not Hungarians. Because they really treated the Jewish people awful. They weren't the exception. But on the whole, they just said we're just geographically born there.

Q: Is that what they said when you lived there, or that was later, looking back?

A: I remember them talking about it even when we lived in Israel. They said you know, "You were born in Budapest, but geographically only, you're Jewish first and that's it." So it was so important to go to somewhere, to go to Israel, and to belong there. I tell the kids even here now that they should be so proud to sing the anthem. It's so important, because, they don't know what it's like not to be accepted by a country. Even when we came to Australia, they had the white paper, the system, and we had to wait a while to get here, to come here. We came here because my father couldn't find a job in Israel. It was really hard to make a living. My parents had friends who were doctors and lawyers and people like them had to go out and do the roads. They're the ones who built the roads where we lived. Because there was no one else to do it, and my father ended up having to work – he worked on the boats.

He became a purser there and he used to be away, sometimes three months depending on where the ship was. When the ship went to America, it was three months. When it went to Europe, it was only six to eight weeks. And he used to go to Holland sometimes and bring back butter, which was wonderful. Used to bring fruit. On one of the occasions, I took an apple to school and the teacher saw my apple and she said, "Before you bite, hold on." She took the apple very gently and took it around the class and showed everybody. "This is what a real apple looks like."

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah. And I remember it was just such an awful, awful feeling. She gave it back to me. I didn't eat it, of course, until I got back home. I never, ever took another piece of fruit.

Q: Gosh.

A: It was just so awful to think that I had this fruit and nobody else could possibly have such an item. Because any fruit that was grown in Israel was exported. They needed money. You really only bought what was left over. Today, you wouldn't eat it. You wouldn't touch it, I suppose. It was just an awful feeling, a very hurtful feeling.

Q: What was school like?

A: School life was good. I don't remember ever feeling that it wasn't good. A lot of kids there who couldn't speak to each other, because of the language barriers. Hebrew was not spoken so much then. Not a lot of people knew Hebrew. The first year I was in a public school, and then my parents put me in the convent, because I could – first of all, it was a very good school. It was a French convent. It taught all the languages and I could go to school and not have to cross the road. Where we lived, we lived on French Carmel. I'll tell you about it in a minute. So I had to run down the stairs and turn to the right, and the convent was sort of at the end of the street. And we used to have to come home at lunch time, one o'clock lunch, and then go back by – 12 o'clock lunch, had to be back before 1:30 for the afternoon session. The Israeli school, the public school, communication was really very hard, but it wasn't just me.

Everybody there spoke different languages and I have a school photo. I had a lovely teacher there. I have good memories of that. It was nice. But then when I went to the convent, there were not a lot of Jewish kids. There was mass, of course, once a month. We didn't have to go. We didn't have to do the Catholic, the scripture. We learnt Hebrew, English, French and Arabic, and I didn't have to do Arabic. I could speak it to the kids. We learnt science in French, history in English. So it was really multicultural. There were a lot of kids there from diplomats who boarded, because it was a boarding school as well. I had a lot of friends who were consulates kids who used to travel around the world, or the parents did and where possible, they sometimes went to other countries. They only stayed in Haifa a couple of years or so. Yeah I have very good memories. It was lovely.

I was just telling Elli, actually, yesterday about sports, because she said, "You're not sporty." I said, "No. I'm hopeless at sport." "Didn't you do any sport when you were little?" I said, "The only sport I remember doing in Israel was we did rounders, which is like –" I had to explain to her what that was. The teacher came from – I don't even know from where. She came and she taught us how to do that, but otherwise it was no sport at the convent. But they were nice nuns. I remember the head mistress. We had a very – one of them was very tough. She taught needlework and she taught – what subject was it? I think she taught the science, and I remember having a test, a science test and I had just broken my arm. It was sore sometimes, even when they took the plaster off. I said, "I can't write." She said, "All right. You have a broken arm. You can't write." So, I thought, I'll sew. Show her that I'm sincere about this. Took the sewing out. "If you can sew, you can do your exam." The things we remember.

Q: What languages did you speak, do you speak?

A: Now?

Q: Yeah. Or then.

A: Then I spoke Hungarian and German at home, and English and French at school. Yeah. We had to do science in French. I remember we had a French book.

Q: And so, you'd speak to your parents in both Hungarian and German? Was there one favoured over the other?

A: No. Four of us would sit in Germany. I remember there was this tiny little table, and we would have my parents in Hungarian and my grandmother would say something in German, because she understood, but she just couldn't speak it. It was too hard for her. Then I would answer her in German in the middle of a conversation. It was really very easy to do that. And at school, also was very – we picked up the language. The nuns all spoke French and English. If you want to have a conversation, that's what you did, and there were a lot of Arabic kids.

Q: You spoke with them?

A: A lot of them, we were friends and went to each other's home and that. Some of the kids, if they came from Syria, they spoke French. They were all – Lebanon and Syria, they all spoke French as well as Arabic. Oh it was really not a problem to pick up these languages.

Q: And you learnt English when you came to Australia, or you were already –

A: No, I learnt English at the convent. When I came here, I spoke English, and nobody understood me because it's not Australian, it was English. I used to say with a plum in my mouth. I learnt English, not American, I learnt English.

Q: Was it – yeah, when you came here could you understand people? It was a very different Australian accent.

A: Of course, it was English. It was English. For instance, my aunt, one of my aunts who married this friend of my parents from Leipzig. She lived at King's Cross in Sydney. So when she sent us letters, she used to say 'Kings' and put an X on it for King's Cross. I had no idea. The first time I went by myself on the tram here, I asked, "I'd like to go to King's X." And of course, everybody looked at me as if I was nuts. "You mean King's Cross?" "Yes. Okay." It was funny.

Q: Yeah, you moved here so that your dad could have proper work? Did your mum also –

A: My grandmother passed away when she was 91, and then we came here. So we lived in Israel nearly 10 years, and then just the three of us came to Australia. My mother worked as a seamstress. My father worked – he didn't do anything with textiles, because he couldn't finish it. He knew a bit about it, but he didn't – and in Israel there was nowhere to work with textiles at the time when we were there. So when we came here, he worked at David Jones, at

the store and he worked in the men's department. And then he became a traveller for – and he represented a couple of shirt manufacturers, and he was a salesman for that.

Q: And at David Jones he sold clothes, or what was he –

A: He sold – he was in the shirt department. But he was only there for a few years, and then he became an agent for a few shirt manufacturers. My parents also had a kiosk in the middle of one of the arcades in Sydney, selling sandwiches. Before that, they worked – my cousin had this idea that he could have – you know how they have the sushi train now? So he brought that in because – they had it as a family overseas already, many, many years ago. So he wanted to introduce that concept. My father ran this coffee shop with food with a little train going around where people could pick at it. But that didn't work out very well and then my cousin let someone else run it. That's another story, but he ended up running a cafeteria. In Sydney, there was a store called Snows. I don't know if you know? It disappeared, but it was a big store like Myers. Not as big as Myers, but it was a big store.

Q: That kind of thing.

A: Yeah. And it was in Liverpool St in Sydney. How well do you know Sydney?

Q: A little bit, but not very well.

A: All right. It was towards the railway. He ran this cafeteria for quite a few years, and then they had the sandwich shop and then he went on – my mother stopped working and he became the agent for the shirts and –

Q: So you first lived in Sydney when you –

A: Yes. We lived in Sydney. We've only been here nine years. Nine years in October.

Q: What brought your parents to Sydney?

A: [overtalk]Our son. We have three children. Lisa is 55, Michael is 53, and Antonia is 52. So the two girls – at the moment, live in Brisbane, and our son was here, and there was nobody in Sydney. They came and they said – the kids said to us that we really should live in a city where, if anything happens, they can look after us. Michael's wife Ren said she's not moving anywhere. She's staying with her family here. This was a safe place to come. Brisbane, I'm happy to go Brisbane. It's a beautiful climate and all that, but I cannot tolerate the climate all the time. And there's not that Yiddishkeit. We keep Shabbat and we can't really do that in Brisbane. If we lived somewhere near the Shul, it's a long way from where the kids are. It's pointless. So we came here. He's got little kids, whereas our Lisa has – okay, so this – we're going [chuckles] – Lisa married – all three kids went to Moriah College. Lisa ended up marrying a boy who was two years older than her at school. Mind you, she knew him at school but didn't meet until later. They married and they had two kids. They have a son and a daughter. He's 26 and she just turned 24, and live in Sydney. They divorced when the kids had their bar mitzvah bat mitzvah, and they live with their father, because she wasn't well enough to look after them, so they live in – here comes noise.

Q: Hello.

A: Hello, you can come in. It's all right.

Other male voice: We'll be quiet

Q: That's ok [continued conversation as they come into the apartment, around 1:02:50]

A: They divorced and the kid stayed with her husband. They were with her for a while, but then ended. Then she remarried, divorced after three and a half years, but they remained very good friends. She and her second ex-husband live in Brisbane separately, but they see each other. They go away for weekends. They have dinners together, but they just can't live together. They're divorced properly and all that. Younger daughter had two children in Sydney, two girls, and then her husband got head hunted to a company and they went to live in Brisbane. The company was bought by America. They destroyed the company. They got rid of all the management, including him. He was one of the managers. And then after 20 years, they divorced as well, five years ago. They have a 24-year-old and an 18-year-old. The 18-year-old is just finishing HSC this year, and the other one is the one I told you about who's doing her PhD.

Q: How did you and your husband meet?

A: Oh, We met in Sydney. I was still at school. And one of my friends rang one day. "Come, there's a Shul at the Great Synagogue. There's a dance at the Great Synagogue." And I said, "I really don't want to go." [talks to her granddaughter who is looking in from the other room] Come and say hello. Come on. Come and say hello.

Q: That's alright

A: She knows Safta as well. All right. When you're ready. When you feel like it. [Etc] She talked me into going and we went. Another friend came up. Two of us were just standing there, so another friend came up, said "There's a couple of boys who would like to meet the two of you." So I said, "Well," typical, "If they want to meet us, they should come to us. I'm not going to go over there." It was literally the other corner of the hall.

Q: Yeah, that's great. Yep.

A: So, both boys came over. My friend, my girl friend and the other boy just didn't click, but we clicked and that's it.

Q: So how old were you?

A: That was 1960, so I was 18.

Q: How old was he?

A: He's a year older than I am, but he finished school. He left school after third year, intermediate at the time. I did my Leaving.

Q: What school did you go to?

A: Randwick High.

Q: So you lived around there?

A: No, we lived in Bellevue Hill. But that was when you didn't have a choice. When I first came here, they said I should go to Crown St. Crown St was automatically Sydney High. This particular year that I finished school, rather, when I was supposed to do – today would be year 11 and 12. You automatically were sent to Sydney High, but this particular year they decided that Randwick School needs year 11 and 12, and we were the first year 11 and 12s, so I went to Randwick. Two buses.

Q: Gosh.

A: It was fine.

Q: Why did your parents, I guess, pick Bellevue Hill to live in?

A: They just managed – they just got an apartment there. Just paid the rent. You didn't have to pay any key money or anything like that. My aunt, I think, found it.

Q: Sure. Did she live nearby?

A: No, they lived in Vacluse. They had lived in Maroubra, but they bought a house and they renovated it, and they moved in there before we came. They had a spare room and that's why I stayed with them in Vacluse, Towns Road. My other aunt lived at the Cross where my parents lived. We sort of lived apart for a few months, and we saw each other all the time, but yeah.

Q: How come you lived with your aunt?

A: Because the aunt at the Cross didn't have enough room for me as well. My parents had a room, where they stayed with them, but I stayed with my other aunt and they had my cousin who was young, was the same – well, younger than I was, two years. They thought I'd have company at least, which I did.

Q: Yeah. Was it hard to make friends when you arrived?

A: Very hard. It was impossible. It was just awful. Really awful coming here. I hated coming here. I had just, just become a teenager, going out to movies with friends, with a group. It was just a really lovely time in Israel. My parents just didn't want necessarily for me to go into the army.

Q: Did that play a role in why you left?

A: I think it must have. I was not part of that conversation really. I don't think there was – I didn't have the choice of – One day they just said, "This is what we're doing. Just be very quiet about it. Don't tell people." Because, people did silly things to hinder other people. For instance, I had collected stamps from the first day that we were there, and it was a beautiful stamp collection. I had not only the stamp, but also the first day cover. It was a big, big thing

there. For birthday, that's what I wanted always, to buy the next stamps. It was really quite valuable. One of my parents' friends said, "You can't take the stamps out of Israel. It's actual money you're taking out." And they, my parents, not knowing what to do, we don't want to hinder. They had a lot of trouble getting the papers to come into Australia. They didn't want anything to stop us, so we ended up selling the stamps.

I don't know how much money they got for it, but I know it was quite a valuable collection of 10 years of Israeli. They said, "Just don't tell anybody that we're leaving. We're leaving -" I don't even know how many – they only gave me a few weeks' notice in fact. I had to say goodbye to my friends all the last minute. Couldn't tell them that I'm going.

Q: Yeah. That would've been really hard.

A: It first of all, it was really hard because I only had those few weeks and I didn't have very much time to say goodbye to them. I corresponded with a lot of them when I came here, but you lose touch after a while. You evolve. You get busy and whatever. I actually tried – I saw – when David and I went back to Israel a few times, I tried to see my friend, the one friend that I kept in touch with, but we lost touch and she couldn't make it on those days. You know, family commitments. So we sort of lost touch. But coming to Australia, it was very hard. It was really hard. I was 15 and a half and it was just – I did not – I didn't go anywhere for a long time. Eventually, I ended up going to Betar and I made friends there. I made friends at school, but couldn't see them on the weekend. They had different agendas to me, and we didn't live near Randwick.

There was no transport to get from Bellevue Hill. To get anywhere by bus was hard. By the time you get there, it's like two hours, you've got to go back again. It was hard. When I met David, I went to his family, to his friends – I suppose the detriment of my – I kept some of those friends. We're still in touch with them. Yeah, maybe there's three that I'm still in touch with from school, and that time. One of them ended up going out with a friend of David's and they had a son in Perth, so they moved to Perth when we moved here, or a year apart, and she was just here. We're very close with them. We speak every week.

Q: That's nice.

A: I'm trying to think. There's another one I speak to maybe two, three times a year. Yeah. But it was really, really hard. The one I speak to every two or three months, she was really very kind to me. I met her at Crown St, and I started school halfway through second year when I came here. Second year high school. She used to invite me – she lived in Strathfield and had to catch a train to school, and then a bus. I don't know how it worked out, but I think the aim was that you got to Sydney High and if you were a good enough student to get that far to go to Sydney High, that was a very prestigious school, it was really a big thing. Anyway, she used to come there. When we all ended up in Randwick and not Sydney High, she went locally. She didn't come.

We kept in touch, but not – but she invited me for weekends, because she was involved with the Strathfield school, ah Shul, and they sometimes had dances or different activities, and it was very foreign for my parents to allow me to sleep out somewhere. It was just not done. Didn't the first year, but the second year, third year, they allowed me to go there a couple of

times, under duress. A couple of times in Israel, there were school outings where we had to go by train and I don't even know. Excursions and things, I was never allowed to go.

Q: How come?

A: I think they were over protective. They didn't allow me to wander very far by myself.

Q: Were many other parents like that, do you think?

A: I don't know. I don't know really, but I think they were, on hindsight, very overprotective.

Q: Has that passed down to you?

A: Sorry?

Q: Are you overprotective of your kids and grandkids?

A: Yeah, probably. Maybe not as much. I don't know. You'd have to ask them, I guess.

Q: That's true. Sorry!

A: I suppose on hindsight, I was very much involved in the kids' schooling. I was on the P&F. I was secretary, treasurer. I never did president or anything like that. Bnai Brith I did presidency, but that's different. Yeah, they knew I was there if they needed. Tuck shop, they knew every day to come to tuck shop and bring friends.

Q: You'd be on the tuck shop quite regularly?

A: Well, I wasn't working in the tuck shop so much as I was with the P&F. In Sydney, at Moriah, there was tuck shop and the P&F office was next door. Because I was secretary, treasurer, I was there a lot and we ran a uniform shop.

Q: You would run that?

A: I was there a lot. I was there nearly every day.

Q: Did you do paid work?

A: No. The only time I got paid from Moriah was when I did teaching, and I used to do relief teaching. When I did that, then I got paid for it, but otherwise, no.

Q: After you finished high school you went and studied teaching?

A: No. I didn't do teaching until I was a mature student. Until we had Antonia and when she started school I went to teacher's college. When she turned five.

Q: What made you do that then?

A: I wanted to work at something. I had always worked at something. I was a secretary for a long time. I did- Yeah, I worked at David Jones during summer when I could, then I became

the secretary at David Jones for the chief electrician. He was in charge of escalators and lifts and the lights and the cabinet and the showcases. He was very much involved in the building of Brookvale David Jones, there was a big- Brookvale was new then, and so I was secretary here for many years, until I had Lisa, really. From school I went there and then until I had Lisa, my first child. I had odd jobs and I worked for 10 years at the South Head Synagogue. Before I retired, I worked for 10 years at the Jewish Cemetery Trust which was involved with the Rookwood.

Q: What did you do at both of those, at the Synagogue and then the Jewish Cemetery?

A: Secretary, administration. I did teaching, but I didn't – when I finished teaching, the department sent me to the middle of Australia somewhere, because I didn't accept that position because I said I have a husband who works in Sydney. I have three kids who go to school. I said, "I can't go to the middle of Australia, the middle of New South Wales." They said, "Well, you don't go where we send you, you don't get your final papers." I graduated. I've got my graduation, but I didn't get the so-called approval from the government for doing that. I only did part-time work. I did a lot of relief work. Sometimes six weeks, four weeks, day here, day there. I did that not only at Moriah. I did it at a couple of public schools as well. That's the Department of Education for you. No matter how much I tried to change the position, they wouldn't do it.

Q: Gosh. Going back a little bit, you said that it was hard for your parents to get permission to come to Australia. Do you know why? Do you know what was –

A: Well, there was a quota, was the white paper or whatever it's called.

Q: White Australia Policy

A: Yeah

Q: and so that affected you?

A: There was a quota. So we had to wait, I heard that later on, as part of a conversation, it wasn't said to me that we'd applied last year, but we were in Israel for maybe another nine months or so after my grandmother died. Maybe a year. I'm trying to think. Yeah, maybe a year or 18 months or so. I suppose in the long run it's not that long if you think about it. But I know we had to wait for that.

Q: So, they were keen to leave pretty much as soon as your grandmother died?

A: Well, we wouldn't have left her, but she could not have travelled all the way here.

Q: Of course

A: But, it was – my father couldn't work. There was no work in Israel, and he was away a lot. Not much of a life for my mother. It wasn't a family thing. We had my aunts there and her husband. We always had meals together. They used to come and had meals together. My grandmother did the cooking mainly. Lots of funny stories about that. My father brought a fridge from America one year. It was like the show Fiddler on the Roof and Motel gets a –

well, that's how our fridge was. People came to have a look at the fridge. It was unusual. People didn't really have fridges. Before that we had an icebox and I used to go up to half way from where we lived and used to get – had those tongs and bring an ice block down. In summer time, I had to bring two because by the time I got home, half of it would've melted. In summer time, I used to have to collect, bring two home. We used to have milk delivered by an Arab lady, on a donkey. Interesting.

Q: You said moving to Israel was important to your parents, that sense of –

A: It was. Very, very important.

Q: How did they feel about coming to Australia?

A: I know that they were both upset at first, I only gleaned this. There was no – As I said, there was no real conversation, but I know that they didn't want to leave Israel. It was just too hard to be there. They couldn't make it financially. Once my grandmother died, my mother would've been very lonely. My father was away a lot. It's not much of a marriage like that. But no, they didn't want to leave Israel. It was just circumstance. They came here and it was really, really hard for them. My mother didn't speak the language. My father did, but she didn't. She found a job doing finishing. She used to bring those home. I used to thread the needles for her, put them on the couch like that. They worked hard when they came here. It was not very easy for them. It was a lot of family dynamics. What you expect from certain relations, what you get are two different things. I know they found it really hard to be – I certainly found it very hard.

They made friends. They found friends who they knew here from camp. There were three sisters. Two sisters married two brothers and the third sister married another person, so they were friends with them from, because they knew them from Leipheim. And family was someone that we met at other times. They made friends, not – sorry, they saw more of the friends that they made than of the family. One sister, the one who lived at the Cross, we saw her much more than we did the other ones. I moved away from them, and the cousins who lived in North Shore. Well, they lived in Bellevue Hill first, but then a year or so later, they moved. When we moved, they moved, sort of, as it happened. I didn't see much of my first cousins, or second cousins. They were second cousins. We saw them occasionally, certainly Yomtov time. They all used to come to us even though we had the tiniest, two-bedroom tiny flat, but they all came to us rather than we went to them. Because they weren't kosher for one thing, and we're the ones who kept the Yomtovs, not so much them. They relied more on friends.

Q: Yeah. Sure.

A: No. Not sure. It shouldn't have been like that.

Q: No, of course. Yeah.

A: I know it was very tough for them.

Q: Do you think – did they feel Australian at any point, do you think?

A: I think they did. They were Jewish first. Australian, definitely. They were very proud of being naturalised here and making a home here. They always, always encouraged me to be part of the community, to give back to the community. I know they did when they could. I know when my father passed away, we found out how much he did in different areas which we didn't know about. My mother didn't know either.

Q: What sorts of things?

A: He helped the Shul. There was a new Shul set up in Roscoe St, Bondi, and he helped there. He bought two – I don't – some of the Shul's have these big sayings next to the Aron Kodesh. He organised to have those donated to the Shul. We didn't know about it. They went to Roscoe St after – so when we lived in Bellevue Hill, they attended, or my father attended Adass, the Adass Shul, and they then moved from Bellevue Hill to an apartment in Bondi and Roscoe St was a lot closer to him. They didn't have to go up a Bellevue Hill, but it wasn't as bad as the one in Birriga Rd. He couldn't do it. He had a bad heart, but my mother was not the religious one. He was the religious one. When he used to go off to Shul on Shabbat, she'd go to the window and smoke. Yeah, that's the sort of thing that happened, but we kept kosher and, yeah she would go to Shul sometimes, to show support of some sort. He used to go every morning and every afternoon, but she didn't believe in that.

Q: What about you? Do you go to –

A: Yeah, I go to Shul. I enjoy it.

Q: Regularly?

A: Maybe four out of five, four out of six we go on Shabbat. I made him a bit religious, this one. David also grew up not very – they kept the three days but that's about it.

Q: And you have Shabbat dinner every week?

A: No, we don't have the kids every week. First of all, Ren is part of four siblings, so they go to there. Her family are good enough to invite us over Yomtov always, which is really nice. No, the kids come here maybe once a month or so, or we go there once a month. We see them during the week. No, they don't always come on Shabbat. With COVID for the last three years, we couldn't.

Q: Of course.

A: But even before that, probably every three weeks or so they come here.

Q: Do you feel Australian?

A: Yeah. Very much so.

Q: What does that look like for you?

A: I think I would call Israel home. But this is definitely the best place to live in. I wouldn't like to live anywhere else except here, and it's wonderful to be able to have a family here and

the kids. I keep telling them to get up when they have the anthem. They should feel proud of it, because it's so important. I really do, I'm not just saying that. I really believe that. We're very privileged to live here.

Q: You feel that because of the sort of opportunities you've had here?

A: Absolutely. Absolutely. The kids have amazing opportunities here.

Q: But Israel feels like home?

A: Yes.

Q: Why? [pause] Sorry.

A: [pause] I don't know. It just does.

Q: Yeah. It's just a feeling.

A: Yep. My grandmother's buried there. [cries]

Q: Sorry.

A: Yep. I don't know why it does.

Q: Do you have any feelings of connection to Hungary?

A: Nope. I used to go back fairly regularly, but no. When I used to go there, I used to go there for the people, not the country. Even though my aunt used to take me around and drove me here and drove me there, all over the place, I really don't know very much about its history, just what I've read. No, I don't know much. I'm not really interested, you might say. [blows nose]

Q: Yeah. And Germany just feels like a place that you just lived.

A: Certainly, absolutely not. I don't like to go there. My grandmother was born somewhere – she was born in Luckenbach? Anyway, it's just out of Vienna. What is nice is that there's a cousin here from my grandmother's side and he and his parents came to Sydney, and then he left and we rediscovered each other somehow. We corresponded. We met up. It was really quite funny. We met up about six months ago. With COVID we couldn't visit. He came just before – came back from – he lived in America and he lived in Sweden. His daughter came to live here, so he came back to Australia. And it was nice because he's from my grandmother's side and I don't know anybody from my grandfather's side. From his, I don't know what his parents name was, anything. It's so hard to find. It's hard to find out about his family.

Q: Do you remember what it felt like to be stateless?

A: Yes, it was awful. I remember my parents talking about it, that we need to be somewhere where we're going to be at home. So that was Germany for three and a half years, we didn't know where we – certainly, they would never go back to Hungary. That was very clear. We had the option of going to America, and that would've been really easy. I know a lot of

people had to wait because America also had the quota numbers. But because my father worked with them, it was easier. They would've made sure we got papers. We would've just been able to just go there. But no, we had to go to Israel first. Well, not first. We had to go there. There was no choice. And when we came here, it was because it was so hard there. They wanted to make a home very much so. And they were. They were very happy here. Really very happy here, after we got over the relatives

Q: The initial –

A: The initial few years, yes. I know they were happy here. They appreciated the freedom. They appreciated being able to work. They found work when they needed it. My mother gave up work, but she could have worked on. Of course, getting married and having grandchildren here, that was really the best for them. And my father had a brother in London, and they asked us to come and live there. They wouldn't, they came to Australia. Once again, we had the choice of going to England or coming here.

Q: Yeah. And they chose here.

A: We got some lovely reports, more than lovely reports from my cousins and my aunts who lived here and they did very well, so they wanted to come here, anyway. Wouldn't have gone to America because we didn't know anyone there, but England was an option.

Q: Do you remember your naturalisation ceremony? Did you have a ceremony when you –

A: Yes. We had it in – what was it called? Not Rushcutters Bay. It was the Woollahra Council, near Redleaf Pool, and yes, I remember it very much. It was lovely.

Q: Do you remember what happened?

A: I had only been at school for two years and I don't know if my parents organised it or maybe the school did, that I could become – because my parents had to wait five years.

Q: Right. You became a citizen before them?

A: Yes. Two years. After two years of schooling here. There was quite a group of us. The mayor of Woollahra gave – he was all dressed up in his mayoral whatever, presented me with a certificate. It was wonderful. Such a lovely feeling. Now I'm an Australian. I'm accepted. Except for me, I was not accepting yet, but I was accepted in Australia. That was very meaningful then, really.

Q: Can you say a little bit more about – you hadn't yet accepted Australia?

A: I still felt that I didn't belong, even though I had some friends. I had only been here two years. I was still madly writing letters to my friends in Israel who were coming and going. I missed that. I wasn't – I still wasn't – I hadn't met David yet. It was – I wasn't comfortable yet here. It was awkward teenage years. It was awful when I first came here. But I remember the ceremony very clearly. It was lovely.

Q: And you remember feeling –

A: We had afternoon tea. It was. It was a nice feeling to be accepted even though I'm not here, properly here yet. I did not feel at home yet, you might say, but I was accepted. And that was huge. I so remember my parents saying, "You know what a big thing it is to be accepted as a Jewish person in a country that's not like – to be accepted like that." It was really major to them. A big thing.

Q: At a certain point you did start to feel like Australia was home. Do you remember – what was it? Was it a gradual process?

A: It was gradual. It was really an awkward time to come, at 15, 16. It was just really – not only dealing with being a teenager, your body changes, the whole thing, accepting yourself, no matter where you live, I think as a teenager, is hard enough, without being in a country, any country for that matter, a new place, where – at least you know you speak the language at least, which was a huge advantage. Even though I had a funny accent and people would look at me. Because it was English but it was Israeli English. It took me a couple of years to settle. Probably when I started going out with David and finished school already, but I had his group of friends and I had another group of the Betar friends and that, so yeah, it slowly – even going to Betar. It's funny because Betar made me more Australian than Israeli in a way, because they pushed for different things and I just kept on saying, "But I've just come from there and it's not like that." On the rare occasion I opened my mouth, which I didn't, I was looked at. I remember, I can just feel the feeling now. It was just not what they were selling to the kids about Israel, as far as I could see was not 100% correct.

Q: In what way? Do you remember?

A: I don't remember. There were a few issues that they were not – it was very Zionist, which was fine. Which was why I went. But it was very indoctrinating, I can't explain it to you. Some of the points that they said of Israel does this, and you could go there and be on the moshav or you could go to kibbutz and you could do this. It was unrealistic because on the kibbutz was really, really hard work, and I don't think that it's wonderful to go to kibbutz and you can take oranges off a tree. And I remember going to some kibbutzim before I left and my aunt who lived there made sure that I went places, because she didn't travel around so much then in Israel. Never went to Jerusalem because you couldn't. It was too dangerous at the time. [knock on door and answers and speaks to the window cleaner and then to her granddaughter, around 1:44:10] Before Yomtov, B'nai B'rith organises for a gentleman to come and do the windows.

Q: Very nice.

A: They do outside, and if we want to, then we pay for him to come to do the inside. We always do Rosh Hashanah.

Q: Lovely. That's so nice.

A: Forgot about.

Q: That's all right. Yeah, I won't keep you too much longer. Yes, we were talking about Betar and –

A: It made me appreciate coming here, what they were pointing out about Israel, how hard it was, I realised really. They made me realise more how hard life was in Israel, how privileged we were in Australia.

Q: Is there – you’ve always been very involved, as well as religion, in the Jewish community activities?

A: Tried to be. In Sydney we were more involved that we are here. I think by the time we got here we had enough of committees. No, we were involved with JNF. We still do that. We collect.

Q: Collect money?

A: Yeah. UIA, in Sydney there’s JCA as well. JCA is a Joint Communal – [talks to granddaughter who comes into the room for a biscuit]

Q: JCA.

A: JCA collects money –

Q: Money for all the organisations, yep.

A: And then divides it up according to needs. Whereas, in Melbourne you don’t have, everyone’s individual. Well it was like that in Sydney until –

Q: This happened. Yeah.

A: This joint committee was organised. In school, we were involved – school, we were in B’nai B’rith for 50-odd years on all levels, on different committees and that. Yeah, we’ve been involved in the community.

Q: Have you also been involved in non-Jewish organisations, or you mainly –

A: Not so much. I used to make a donation to non-Jewish – a cancer clinic, unbeknownst then, already, still – our daughter, our elder daughter Lisa in Brisbane had breast cancer. Being involved with B’nai B’rith you always, every year we not only had an Israeli project, we always made sure that we have a local, non-Jewish project. Every year, it was one of our things, that when we were involved, a non-Jewish local organisation had to benefit, we always did that because we both took turns in our B’nai B’rith group. We made sure that

Q: Yeah, sure. Is there – just going back and thinking about a sense of being Australian and belonging and thinking of this is home. When did you become aware or did you become aware of a longer Aboriginal history of this place?

A: Probably through B’nai B’rith, we had speakers come.

Q: It’s not something that was really talked about when you were at school.

A: Not at school I don’t remember, here no. In Sydney, we used to go out to – we were aware of the Aboriginal people. We used to go to a place, La Perouse. I don’t know if you know

where the jail is and there used to be an Aboriginal community there and we used to go and just look around. They had markets and things and we'd often just the two of us, would go there. I used to avoid one particular section because they had those snakes that I'm allergic to. I have a phobia about them. And we went to Alice Springs on holidays with another couple, and David had to go there a few times on business, so he used to see the community there. But to be honest, otherwise, not really. B'nai B'rith I think there were a few times when we had made donations to certain aspects of their, the community, but otherwise nup, can't say we've been involved or anything like that, nup.

Q: And in terms of being stateless, is that something you talk about with other people who have been stateless? Do you ever share your stories and talk about it with friends?

A: We've made friends here with one particular couple and she has a very similar background to us except that her parents actually went to Auschwitz, so I can say that we were nowhere near it. My father was the one who suffered the most of where he was, not that I ever knew or anything. They never made me feel that there's a war going on. I wouldn't have known that if it wasn't for – I was protected by them, really.

Q: Even when you were in the ghetto there wasn't a sense of –

A: In the ghetto I was protected to a point. I had a dummy which got lost between the apartment that we were in and – because we had to move to a protected – my mother said, "The cat took it."

Q: You were very young as well.

A: I was

Q: You were a toddler.

A: There was no hassle. It was hearsay. I don't remember that bit. But I do remember, I have a certain image in my mind of my mother and grandmother sitting in the corner. My mother used to go with my aunt, sometimes with my aunt, sometimes by herself, to collect money, sorry to collect food for people in the ghetto, because people would just sit there and they had what they had. She was one of those people that, no one's going to keep me down. I'm going to go out and if we need food, we need food. She's going to get some. A few times she was stopped and on one particular time she swapped me over, because I was always with her. She never left, let me be. She wouldn't leave me with my grandmother because it was too hard for her to look after me in the ghetto. It was a very privileged place, a very small, squashy place. I know the building because I was told where it was. I've got a picture of it.

I've gone past it a few times, but I don't have memories of the ghetto, but I do have memories of our apartment where we lived before the ghetto. Anyway, she moved me over and the yellow star was covered. And a soldier came. [Conversation with the window cleaner – 1:53:25] She was stopped by a soldier and he said, "Show me your papers." Of course, he saw the child, "Where's your star? Why aren't you showing it?" And she said, "I have to change because she's heavy." Because she carried me. I was little. And he apparently looked at me and he just said, "Well, lucky for you I have a little child like this at home, and you can

continue.” He could’ve just – so there were a few incidents like that. My aunt, not my mother, my aunt told me stories that they – I had a pram, apparently, a dolls pram that they all bought. I was the only child so I was thoroughly spoilt apparently. And I had this doll’s pram which was very, very expensive for a dolls pram, and the soldier wanted it for his child.

Because they used to take me to go and get food and because they could put food in the pram, so they said, “Okay. For food.” So, they gave my pram away but they got a lot of food for everybody. If my aunt was with my mother, she’d always split it and they’d take some home. I know that she always divided it up, because my grandmother used to say, “Your mother always gives away food.” That was a standard thing. I gathered that she used to do that, because my aunt also told me that whenever they went, they always divided with people. [1:55:25 brief conversation with husband about him leaving the house to go “lollypopping”] There were lots of little stories like that.

Q: Do your children feel a connection with Israel or with Hungary?

A: Not with Hungary, no.

Q: Yeah. With Israel?

A: Not like me. I don’t think it’s as strong with them. No. No. They’ve been to Israel lots of times, individually as well as family before. [calls out to window cleaner] They’ve gone after school, they’ve gone by themselves, but I don’t think they have the same. I also feel – David will agree with me that, even though all three of them went through Moriah College, I think they were turned off completely, which is such a shame.

Q: Yeah. It can happen.

A: There’s no guarantees. You try. They have their basics. They’re now over 21. They can do what they like with it, I guess. Sometimes I get disappointed, but what can you do. They’re good people and that’s the main thing.

Q: Is there anything else that you wanted to share with me, about being stateless or about your migration journey? The label ‘stateless’, does that feel like a useful label for you? Do you think about yourself as having been stateless?

A: No. I was during Germany, but then we went to Israel. No, not now. Not anymore, but I understand people who come here and I feel bad for them – sorry, I don’t mean that.

Q: No, I know what you mean. Not in a patronising way.

A: Exactly, not feeling patronising, but it’s – I think the world evolves and we’ve got to help where we can, really. Because I understand exactly how they must feel. It’s just, it’s hard. Where do you begin with that, really, with people like that? I think we were talking in the kitchen. It’s so much more different now because each community that comes, people from Asia that come here, their community is there already established and I think it might be a bit easier in that respect and harder because they do get involved with their community and don’t know how wonderful Australia is, or they don’t identify so much with Australia. I don’t know. That’s how it seems to us. We’ve often talked about that. We had –

Q: You feel like – sorry.

A: Sorry. We had a lady – the caretakers left and we had a lady who came here instead and she came from Iran. She was one of the people who were for seven years on Manus Island, which is horrendous when you think about it. Seven years to be like that is just awful. She came here. We were really happy because the committee couldn't find anyone – you'd think that's how they got her to come here is through going through the government department. I don't know. They wouldn't say anything. That's how she implied that that's how she got the job. We were really, really happy for her, because it's one less who has to go through all this process of not knowing where you are. It must be just awful. Really awful. It's worse than awful. It's just devastating. It's mentally abusing. I so remember coming here, being 15, 16, and not having my place and I doubt a person who has to look after their family how devastatingly hard it must be.

Q: You feel that connection?

A: Yes, I really feel –

Q: You've been through it.

A: [conversation with window cleaner 2:01:05] Unfortunately, it didn't work out. She was not suited for the job. She was very nice. It gave her at least a footing because she got to know the area, but she wasn't suited for the job. While we were happy that she got the opportunity, it was really all the wrong place for her. It made her realise that it wasn't impossible to find work in Australia. I think looking back, if she looks back at her employment, lets hope that she doesn't generalise and feels like that, because it was just not a nice way of dealing with her when she had to leave. She got employed by Jewish Care.

Q: That's a shame.

A: Yeah it was, it's a really, really bad shame. Nothing we could do about it. David and I could do nothing. She rang a few times, but we really couldn't do anything to help her. It was a shame. It must be devastating to live like that. [2:03:00 talk from window cleaner]

Q: Yeah, absolutely. Anything else that you would like to say?

A: I don't know. What are some more of your questions?

Q: I mean these are – there's all the questions. We've been speaking for two hours.

A: Oh really, my gosh.

Q: It's flown. Yeah it's very quick

A: Sorry. I hope I didn't speak too much

Q: No, no, no.

A: I hope I was alright.

Q: No. I think your story is so important and yeah, you've shared such important insights into what stateless – what it can feel like and what migration can feel like, and what's involved.

A: I remember that more than anything being happy when we arrived in Israel. I know my parents were extremely happy to be there, but it didn't work because it was too lonely for both of them.

Q: The sense of being somewhere where they belonged was big for them.

A: That was huge. It was really huge. I know that was. I'm not just saying it. You pick that up, you know you feel comfortable. You know how you feel, I know they were really happy to be there, not only for my two aunts that were there. But they were at home. We didn't lock the doors ever. You knew it was fine. We didn't lock the doors when we came to Australia at first.

Q: Yeah. It felt like a community?

A: Yes. There was no hassle. In Sydney we didn't lock the front door. We lived in an apartment. We didn't have to lock the door at all. But here now, in Melbourne, we had to put gates on in the front, the last couple of years.

Q: Yeah? It's felt unsafe?

A: We've had a couple of people that have come in here, like squatting. One lady was really sad, she had her two bags with her. She's coming in and we said – we happened to be just outside the front door. "Who do you know?" "You know, in apartment –" she picked a number. "You couldn't possibly". We ended up calling the police. They said, "Yeah, all right. We'll be there shortly." Then she left here. She walked down the street and we waited and watched her to see that she's all right, because we didn't think that she was all right. She had an odd accent. And the police just didn't come. We don't know what happened to her. It's awful. I was so upset about her, really. Really lost. I don't think she was lost. She just didn't know where she was. She wanted – she didn't have anywhere to go and she thought she'd be able to come in here.

Q: That's very hard.

A: And the police, the people who were supposed to come and help.

Q: Didn't.

A: Nope.

Q: I guess, you seem quite engaged by these broader social questions. Is this a big part of your life and your sense of how you make yourself at home, is by thinking about these kinds of ways in which people interact?

A: We talk about it with our friends as well. It's there. You just can't close your eyes to it. I don't think it's right to just close your eyes to it. It's very much there, really. And we were

like that. I don't just mean my family. So many of our community. I don't think we can – we shouldn't close our eyes to it.

Q: Are many of your friends – were many of your friends migrants?

A: Here?

Q: Yep

A: [conversation with granddaughter 2:08:07] One is. The other the parents – yeah, they're second generation. A couple of them they were born, they came here when they were one or two or something.

Q: Sydney, there's more of a Hungarian Jewish community, here –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Were the –

A: It's different to Polish.

Q: Yeah. Were your parents involved in that Hungarian Jewish community or did they just think of themselves as Jewish rather than Hungarian Jewish?

A: Yes, yes, absolutely. They were not Hungarian. They were Jewish first. Most of their friends were Hungarian speaking people. My mother spoke English but very broken, not very good.

Q: So, she would speak to her friends mostly in Hungarian.

A: Yes, yes. We spoke Hungarian all the time.

Q: And is for you, being Jewish is the first thing?

A: Yes, definitely, and then Australian.

Q: Then Australian. Then Israeli?

A: I identify with the country very much. No, I don't call myself Israeli. No. No, I can't. In fact, I'm subscribed to some news and I get the Israeli news in the morning. No matter if I get annoyed or David and I talk about, because he reads it and I read about the politics. We can't, I don't think we can comment. We have no right to comment. We don't live there. The little that we support it is nothing compared to their life, we have no say. I get angry with people who think, "Oh, they should do this, this and this." Do you want to go and live there? No. What else?

[2:10:29 conversation with window cleaner as he leaves]

A: Sorry

Q: No not at all, that's fine.

A: And what else?

Q: I think, yeah, maybe let's leave it at that. I think it's been wonderful to meet and to talk and I've learned so much.

A: I did all the talking, I'm so sorry.

Q: No, that's the point.

A: I'm so sorry.

Q: I think your story and your insights are really interesting and helpful and I think a lot of people will learn from hearing your story.

A: They will? What will they learn?

Q: I think they'll learn about what migration feels like and what statelessness – what it means and what it feels like. The feelings that we have between generations. How much is at stake, I guess, in where we fit into the world. Does that feel like what you talked about?

A: The fact that our daughters went to live interstate, I know that Antonia identifies – she knows what it's like not to have any friends and not to know anybody. They're both girls, because of that I think they know – not stateless, but they know what it's like moving one place to the other and how hard it is. I know she found the first couple of years hard. They both did actually. But she had two little kids, whereas Lisa didn't. I think they might've understood some of what it was like.

Q: Have you shared your story with them before, or with other people?

A: Michael and Ren had organised – I don't know if you've heard of this company, it's an American company where they send you a question every week and you have to answer it.

Q: Right. No, I've never heard of it.

A: I've got the book. Do you want to see it?

Q: No, that's all right. So, you did that.

A: Yes, I did that, and that virtually says what I've told you today in a way. It covers –

Q: And then you gave them all a copy of that? They all got a copy?

A: They organised it, so they got a copy. We got a hard cover and I think they got a hard cover, each child, they organised it. I think Ren was behind it. She's the one who finds these unusual presents everywhere.

Q: That's lovely.

A: Yes it's really such a clever idea to do. We could put photos in there. It's good. It's a good system really.

Q: That's great. It's wonderful.

A: In fact, we told one of our friends and they've got it done as well. I think they organised it themselves to do so.

Q: That's great.

A: It's a good project. Good idea to do so. Otherwise, I've written down, for each of our granddaughters, for their bat mitzvah we did a little book and it's got all the recipes of every Yomtov, what the Yomtavs that we have, and in front of it there's a few pages of just my background.

Q: Very nice. That's lovely.

A: They get it by osmosis. The guilt comes free of charge.

Q: That's a great note to end on, I think.

A: Pardon?

Q: I think that's a lovely note to end on. Is that a yeah, we'll end it there? Does that sound good?

A: It's up to you. I think I better do something with her. I promised biscuits.

Q: Sure. Thank you so much, Judy.

A: No, thank you. It was nice to see you, meet you.

Q: I'll stop recording now.