

# REMINISCENCE THEATRE ARCHIVE OF PAM SCHWIETZER

## INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BILD

TAPE 108 Jewish Project

TITLE ON TAPE: DAVID BILD (M MONNICKENDAM)

Marjorie        This is an interview between David Bild and Marjorie Monnickendam on the 8th of February 1987. David, first of all tell me about your parents.

David Bild     My mother came from Poland and my Father came from Russia, before the nineteen hundreds. They met ... my Father met my Mother when she was working in her Father's butcher shop. They fell in love and they were married about 1911.

My Father had many varied occupations. He had a restaurant. He had a clothing factory. He was a poultry dealer. And he was a fruiterer. But I think that his main occupation was owning a restaurant in the heart of the East End.

I was born in 1926, and my Mother was quite old: she was fifty years of age when I was born. We lived in No. 11 Leyton St, which is right in the heart of Petticoat Lane. It actually runs parallel with Middlesex Street and Bell Lane.

M        And what was the place like?

D        We had quite a large house. There was a shop, with kitchens at the back. There were, I believe, six large rooms and three floors.

M        Who had the shop?

D        My Father. I remember as a boy suddenly he came back with an American soda fountain. It was the first restaurant in the East End, which had an American soda fountain. I remember going ... the house had a cellar and in the cellar were the syrups that were drawn up to the soda fountain, which was on the front of the shop. Also on the Sunday morning, at Petticoat Lane Market he would have a stall outside the shop.

M        What sort of things did he have on the stall?

D Oh there was several things, sandwiches.

M What language did he speak at home?

D Only English, my parents could speak Yiddish, but they would never speak Yiddish in the home. Obviously most people in the East End spoke Yiddish and when I used to walk around I think I spoke and could understand a little of the words. Although, as I grew older, I didn't want to speak Yiddish. It didn't worry me; I didn't like the sound of Yiddish at the time. I'm very sorry about that because I think I lost out quite a lot as I've grown older.

M Tell me about your name.

D My name is David Bild. But my Grandfather when he came to England, when he landed, at the emigration depot, when they asked for his name, his name was David Solomon Bild. When his friends heard this they said, "Bild doesn't sound very Jewish". And so, he dropped the name "Bild" and called himself David Solomon. So my father, who's name was Nathan, Nathan Solomon and he had three other brothers and two sisters, but the older brother who was quite old when he came to England kept the name of Bild. And as I grew up I had cousins and uncles and Aunts called Solomon but I also had an uncle called Bild. And when I asked why there was a difference between the two brothers names, I was told the story of what had happened when my Grandfather came to England. I liked the name Bild, and as it was my real family name, at the first opportunity I changed my name from David Solomon back to David Bild, after my Grandfather.

M Were you a very frumm family?

D Yes, quite frumm, yes. We were quite religious at home. Sabbaths my parents came home, Sabbaths candles were lit. We weren't allowed as children to do anything that we should not have done at the time! I remember at about the age of five going to the Synagogue with my Father on the Yom Tovim. We used to walk from Leyton Street to the Synagogue, which was a great synagogue in Filbert St, Ashkenazi Synagogue. I can recall walking along Commercial Rd. Tremendous atmosphere because obviously everything is closed especially for Pesach, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

Then when I became older, when my Father then, for a period, worked for a clothing manufacturer - a very famous firm, which was called Ellis and Goldstein - they had to work on a Saturday morning. Although most of the people who worked there were Jewish and

my Father said, "Well of course, simply because I am going to work it doesn't mean to say that you have to stop going to the Synagogue. So I used to go to Dukes Place School. At the time I loved to go ... I loved the services, I loved to hear him singing. I used to go on my own on a Saturday morning and on the Shabbats on Friday night.

I can picture the preparation for Pesach, the first Seder night. We always had two Seder nights, when we had a sort of nanny who would do the cooking. I've got three sisters and a brother.

At that time we had two maids in the house. Family were invited and there always about twenty people sitting around the table for the Passover. I picture my Father sitting at the table with a white cushion. Every Seder night, before we would get going, the family started giggling. My Father would get cross and then we would see a little smile coming up on his face. He would then laugh with us and then we would get down to the serious business of conducting the Seder service.

M        So what was it like in the East End?

D        I was very happy. There was a lot of poverty in the East End. There were people who appeared to be quite comfortable. The four or five streets that were situated where I was born and lived were Cobb St, Laden St, Bell Lane, Stripe Street, Wentworth Stree, Middlesex St. This was the area that I lived in. Most people knew me as a child running around. At one period, when my Father used to travel in to the country to buy poultry, because also my Mother was a poultry dealer who had a stall in Golson St. And in Golson St most of the stalls were stalls for selling poultry. I think I should tell you that my Grandfather - my mother's father - was the first main kosher butcher in the East End.

M        What was his name?

D        My Grandfathers name was Simon, and he died at 102. I remember having to go on a walk with my mother, on Shabbats. My Grandfather lived at the back of the London Hospital and when we entered the little house he would be sitting in his chair with a bottle of whisky! As I walked in he would say, "Read!" And I had to read. But he was a (...) because I remember going to the house that my Mother went to on the (...) and he would be walking along with a (...) on his head.

I think I should tell you my impressions of the East End. On Sabbath morning I would look out of the window and see the water cart filling up with water on the corner. And the visions were of absolutely empty streets because on Sabbath morning there was no traffic, no sounds. Everybody seemed to respect the Sabbath, whether they went to the synagogue or not - was another matter. On Friday, which was very busy with the stalls - most of the stalls were poultry in (... St) and in Leyton St. Yet the remarkable thing was that on Saturday morning it was spotlessly clean. Everything had been cleaned away, the water cart came round, and there were no smells.

M Did the water cart wash the street then?

D Yes, it would wash the street and that would be something ... I would be fascinated ... there would be a plastic hose going in to the hydrant. And it would fill up the old fashioned water cart with a large barrel at the back and it would go on and wash the streets. And that would be my first impression of the Sabbath morning. Prior to the festivals there would be a tremendous hubbub, preparing for Ymtov, even for the Sabbath, but on the festivals they would be working, most of them day and night, up to about four or five o'clock in the morning, preparing and selling poultry. And these were the sounds I heard. All of the stalls would have (...), gaslights, and they would be open all night. There was also a fishmonger who sold fresh fish in Wentworth129 St. I can't remember some of the names of the shops but I remember seeing the open lorries coming with a tank, and seeing the fish swimming about.

M Oh the live fish?

D Live fish, you could see the fish swimming in the shops. Also when my Father had a restaurant the lorry drivers, who would bring up lorries with sacks of cockles and whelks. And they would come along and tell me " come along and listen to the sounds of the whelks from the sacks". And I used to go along and hear the squeaking, they used to squeak. They would be for the (...) at the end of Gold St, near Whitechapel. But they would stop at our restaurant for tea.

I can also remember on Sunday morning, which was so busy, with Petticoat Lane and there would be Prince Honolulu. The famous character who was dressed up like an Indian Chief, he would come in to my Father's shop and was quite a character. Then I remember my Father, having been on one of his travels to the country, came back with a baby goat. And you know the story of the Kid for two farthings? Well, there I was at about seven or eight walking around the East End with a baby nanny goat on a piece of string ... I may have been

the instigator of that story. I was walking around the East End and I remember feeding the goat with a baby's bottle. That was one of my memories of that period.

I remember on Sundays there was one grocery shop, which would be open to two o'clock. So whenever it was sort of a family gathering and they would ring up and say they were coming, we did have a phone actually, so we were living quite comfortably, and when the part of the family with the "Bilds" would, because they were much older cousins than me; I was one of the youngest cousins of the family, when they were coming to visit my parents I would then be instructed to go in to the grocery shop, which was in (...) Lane and buy whatever was necessary, the so called usual ... about two pounds, which was a lot of money in those days. That would buy cream cheese, soft cheese, Dutch cheese, pickled herrings, and bagels, the usual things.

M Did you go to Cheder?

D Yes, well I'll tell you what happened with my schooling. At two and half to three during that period I went to the infant's section of The Jewish Free School, which was situated just off Commercial St. One of the entrances was in (... St) and I was there until I was eight. I didn't go to Cheder, but of course I was being taught the (...) at home, so I could read a little bit of Hebrew even when I was about three or four. I remember at eight walking the class from the class from the infant's school - we then going in to the junior school of the main building in Bell Lane - and I remember walking with the class, probably about twenty, from the infant's school from Wentworth St in to Bell Lane and all the stallholders looking ... this was a new class walking in to the main school, I felt very very proud. Because then I was going to enter the school where my two older sisters and my brother was. And then I was in the junior section until I was eleven. There were two exams, one exam was the preliminary exam, and then you sat for the final exam.

M How old were you when you took those exams?

D Eleven.

M Both of them?

D One was when I was ten, and one when I was eleven. There was also a trade scholarship for those who were fairly skilled with their hands but the master didn't think they would be academic. So therefore if you took a trade scholarship you could then go to a technical school. But I was advised not to do that. Although I was very good at

engineering and metal work I was told (...) the final. I couldn't sit the final because I had diphtheria and I was in the Tollington hospital for about seven weeks. But because of my resolve I was allowed to go in to the central section of The Jewish Free School.

Really the Jewish Free School was probably the first comprehensive school in the World. You stayed in the junior section until eleven. If you didn't pass the eleven-plus you then stayed on in what they called the senior section. But if you did well at the examination you then went on to the central section. Now that was split between two: the technical section and the commercial section. So those who they felt would do better at commercial subjects learned languages and studied English subjects. Those like myself who were in the technical section concentrated more on mathematics, engineering and woodwork. And then you could matriculate from the central section and you could go on to University. So the standard was quite high.

D I just want to talk about the masters. I found that all the masters were concerned about the children's welfare, they were very understanding and kind and sympathetic. And I remember once fighting in the playground and one of the masters coming up to me and saying "don't you think we Jews have enough trouble in the world without two Jews fighting each other". And I thought, at the time, I was very young, and I thought how profound that was and I was very sorry for fighting and I realised what he had meant.

D Now of course in the Jewish Free School, from the junior section onwards we used to have one hours religious education in the morning and then also on Sunday mornings we had two hours. We were given special tickets so that when certain activities took place in the school, such as film shows, one had to have a number of these tickets to prove that we had attended the school. Also from about the age of eight my parents sent me to a Cheder rabbi but he lived just off Goldstein Street, a block of tenements and he had a class of about eight or nine boys sitting around a very large square table but of course all we would do (...) and there was no translation other than when it came to Pesach. For the (...) I knew in Yiddish but I didn't know the translation in English. Then he taught me my Barmitzvah, which I started probably at the age of nine or ten and in fact like the play that was on television a few years ago, "Barmitzvah Boy" I could also stand on my head and sing. The (...) blindfolded, standing on my head.

I started from the age of nine or ten and carried on until I was thirteen. In fact my Father was so concerned whether I would be proficient in my Barmitzvah presentation that during the lunch break at school the rabbi used to come round and I used to have another half an hour of Hebrew. In fact I used to practise (...) when I was about twelve and the neighbours

across the road used to listen and tell me that I was improving all the time. Now the Barmitzvah would have taken place in Philpot but I was thirteen in July and the second world war broke out in September. And because of the uncertainty my Father arranged my Barmitzvah in Great Garden St. Now that particular week - is normally read or sung by the Rabbi but, maybe as a special concession, maybe because the war was coming along and maybe because he thought I could do it so well I was allowed to sing in Great Yarmouth St. So really and truly I had had through The Jewish Free School and through the Rabbi I was well versed in reading Hebrew but unfortunately a lot of time was wasted not teaching me the translation. Again because of the War, the uncertainty was in the house – about thirty or forty people. Of course most of the presents, unfortunately, were fountain pens.

D I want to continue with the Jewish free school because I joined the Jewish (...) which my father objected because you have a small uniform: a cap and a white band and a belt. And my father hated uniforms, soldiers, and the army. I wasn't allowed to have guns, toy guns. And he was very unhappy that I joined but because my friend (289) I wanted to go as well. And then I joined the Boys Brigade. There was also ... that was based at (292) House just off Aldgate. And then I also joined the cubs and they were based in The Jewish Free School itself, they were the cubs' section in The Jewish Free School. Now because they were from the Jewish Free School when war broke out the school was evacuated. I remember ... actually we actually travelled on Sabbath! The school was evacuated on a Saturday.

M Where did you go to?

D The East End was ... our parents lined the East End ... the school marched from Bell Lane through Middlesex St to Liverpool St. And I can see the faces of the mothers and the fathers and the older boys crying as the children with their little packs walking ... and our gas masks lying across the (307). And we walked to, marched to, Liverpool St station. We didn't know where we going. I finally landed at a village called (310) in Cambridgeshire. And I remember sitting in a village hall, a school hall, and as the householders of the village stood up a name of a child would be allocated to them. And I was allocated to a husband and wife. They had no children but they had a small farm holding. And there was another boy from, he lived just off Brick Lane, but he didn't stay as long as I did. He went back to London. And I stayed about seven weeks. I enjoyed it there because I was allowed to go in to the ... they had pigs. And they had orchards, I could have as many apples as I liked. I did enjoy it there. And I remember the woman saying to me, "What would you like to have, especially for weekends?" And I said, "Well I always have chicken on a Friday night." So

she cooked a chicken - I think it was the most terrible chicken I have ever known - but ... she was trying to be kind to me. Well very shortly within a seven-week period there were air raid warnings on that part of the country. And when my father heard this he said, "well if they've not had any bombings in London it's just as safe in London." So he came and took me back to London.

I want to go back to The Jewish Free School. Because first of all they had excellent facilities for engineering and really the standard there was as high as today. And I was very good at engineering and technical drawing although I was thirteen. And the metal work master - Mr Zelee was, I believe, the only non-Jewish teacher in the school and he was very concerned about my education in this field. And he said to me that he would keep me under his wing and eventually he would then apply for me for a job. He wanted me to go in to aircraft engineering. But unfortunately because the war broke out that interrupted everything. That's why I say that schooling was really very difficult for me; it really did interrupt my education. He did say to me, he said, "you know when you are ready to leave school and get a job, I'm going to write the letter because if the letter is written from the Jewish Free School (even in those days) you will not get a job." There was so much anti-Semitism. So he said, "If I write a letter in my name, then I won't mention that you are from The Jewish Free School. Because that will make it difficult for you to get a job."

Also we had constructed a model railway, which, because I was so good at engineering, I was the train driver. Quite a large model railway. It used to run all the way around the school playground, quite a long track. That was one of my jobs to do. Now also the school had an evening class. And I used to want to go back to the engineering department even after half past seven and this Mr Zelee said, "no I'm very sorry but you are much too young to come to our engineering class." At the age of about twelve and a half he egged me in for a (374) cup, which was an engineering cup for all the schools in London. Now most of those entries were from young men of about sixteen and I was only twelve and a half, thirteen. And he said, "Well look, you won't win it this year because you have not had the experience. But I just want you to try it and see what it's like because you're going to win it next year, when you're fourteen. Unfortunately the war broke and it didn't happen and I had to go to a technical college in I think it was the Deptford area. Where there were all these young men, they all soared above me, they were all nearly about six foot, and I was a little boy of about twelve and half, thirteen. And this was quite an experience.

D And then of course when I had returned to London it wasn't very long before the bombs started and the Blitz. And on the corner of Stripe St and Middlesex Street was a large factory, built in the basement ... where many of us went along to shelter. And the first



night of the blitz I remember I could hear the crashing of the bombs coming down. And then there was a tremendous crash and in the morning after all clear, I went up and looked in to Wentworth St and told me, had hit the block of flats. And the rubble, it was a slope, it went from one side to the other, you couldn't actually pass through the road and I did hear cries from under the rubble. And that really was the beginning of the Blitz. And we couldn't get back in to (406) St because two doors away another bomb had fallen, according to the papers, just by the front door, the whole house was gutted and burnt out. So we couldn't get back to the house. And all the doors had been blown open and we had ... I had a spaniel and she had had pups and the door had blown open and she had run away and we never saw her after that, we don't know where she went.

M Did she take her pups with her?

D One small pup had been left.

When the school would close for Sabbath, usually about two o'clock on a Friday my Mother or the nanny we had would give me sandwiches. I always went to the Town and I used to love to sit and see the ships come in, unload, and Tower Bridge open up ... during the day every twenty minutes or half an hour. And the sounds and the smells of that period. I loved the to sit on the (425). It was my treasure place to go to when the school closed at two o'clock.

D After the first blitz my Father... we went off to (433) and I remember the first few days we slept in a large hall because obviously now there was a new wave of refugees from London. And my Father went to Luton. And because at the time he worked for (440) as (440) opened a factory up in Luton for their workers, to take them away from the bombing in London. And, because he had a restaurant, all his friends said, "You know there is nowhere to have kosher food in Luton, why don't you open a restaurant in Luton?" Which he did do and when he found a shop with a house above he sent for all - some were in Aylesbury, some were with friends - and he opened a restaurant.

Prior to that, I missed out one important point. When we came back, when I'd come back from Stoke Newington to London, there was a lull, there was a bombing. And when the bombing started he sent me to Reading. He sent me to a family called (461) who his parents had stayed with during the First World War, with the Grandfather. And when he went to visit the family and they said that one of the sons had a spare room, they would put me up, and also my youngest sister lived in a house next door. Then I was about fourteen. The schools that were evacuated to Reading were, there was a school from Putney but that

was on the level of a secondary school and I went to the classes there but at fourteen I had been already been through the work they would have gone through at sixteen. And Mr (473) came with me to the education officer in Reading and I was then allowed to attend the Reading Centre School.

When I went to see the headmaster he asked me what school I had come from, even in those days I was only fourteen, I was very aware of the fact that I was Jewish and from a Jewish school but I did say I'd come from the Jewish Free School. He made no comment and he said, "Well now I'm going to place you in the second year class. He entered the classroom and immediately the whole class stood up, immediately, and there was a teacher about six feet something. And he addressed the class and said, "I have a young evacuee from London. He's away from his parents. I want you to be kind to him and befriend him". And then he said, "He comes from one of the most famous schools in the World." And I then became six foot tall. And afterwards he told me that he knew the headmaster, Dr Bernstein, at The Jewish Free School. So all the things you have read and heard about the Jewish Free School are absolutely true. It was probably the first and greatest school in the World.

I stayed in Reading for about a year. I enjoyed it. Of course the engineering section was very small and I gained because I completed in a year what they would have done in two or three years. And then I had to learn shorthand, French, Latin (which I had done at The Jewish Free school) but I had to catch up, I was two years behind, but I did quite well. And then again the air raids started and there were air raid warnings in Reading and when my Father got to hear about this and he said, "well if they are having air raids in Reading then you might as well come back to London." So I came back to London and then of course to Wales and on to Luton. In Luton my father decided that at 14 there was no point in more schooling and I went to work for an engineering firm.

M      So what was your first job like?

D      Oh I loved it because I was working with tools and doing metalwork and in fact I was so good that some of the older boys there of sixteen or seventeen were jealous because at fourteen I was doing some of the work that they couldn't do.

M      Did you have an apprenticeship there?

D      No, I was just an employee.

One of the strange things in our family: my mother, who during the blitz kept her poultry stall in (534 St) and she used to travel back to London from Luton on a Monday and we never saw her till Friday night. And she was very tiny, quite a short woman. And she was very brave, she used to shelter in the basement of (541 building). And she had no fears. We used to very cross and worried about her and then she would come trotting along on a Friday afternoon back to Luton. She was probably braver than all the family put together.

M Who kept house while your mother was away, during the week?

D Well Sadie, the nanny who came to our family when she was sixteen, and I was her favourite because when she came to the house my Mother, I was born just when she entered the house and she saw at sixteen her first little baby and she did really pamper me.

M Was she Jewish?

D Yes, she was Jewish, she was an orphan, and we kept contact until she died. In fact it was a sad case because her family had been very unkind to her. And it was my family, we were the ones who became next of kin and we buried her and settled her estate for her.

Can I come back to the sounds of the East End? I remember standing outside a concert hall just in Bishops gate, off Liverpool Street, just by the corner of Middlesex Street, at lunchtime, listening to classical music. Of course my family were not interested in classical music, although we did have a gramophone. I didn't hear classical music in the home. But as I listened to outside I began to appreciate it and in time I learned to play the violin. But my sisters were up in arms because I thought I was doing very well and they thought it sounded terrible. And my Rabbi was fantastic. He used to play the violin, it was just like "Fiddler on the Roof", he was really quite remarkable.

M He didn't play classical music?

D No. When he saw the violin he said, "Ah I see you're learning to play the violin, I'll play for you." And his hands were fascinating, you know sometimes when you see people's hands you get mesmerised and I was mesmerised by his hands. He was quite something ... although he was a very poor rabbi, he had to earn his few shillings by teaching boys like myself.

Sounds of the East End I remember the horse drawn carts, walking along the cobblestones of Middlesex Street. And in the rain slipping, falling down. And I used to think, "What a pity this horse is hurting himself." And the drivers would get sacks and put them under the hoofs of the horses and help them to stand up. It used to take quite a time actually sometimes for them to get up from the ground. It may be there were two horses side by side, one would fall and the other would be standing there motionless. And these were the things that would come through Middlesex Street, during the weekend, not on Sundays of course because then there was the market.

The sounds were five days a week, six days a week. But on a Sabbath absolutely quiet, unbelievable. In fact, one Sabbath morning I had a cold and my mother said, "Well I don't think you should go to Sabbath." And there I was, outside the house, playing with the ball and a man came past and said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself playing with a ball, you should be in schul." And there was I, who had always gone to schul every Saturday morning, feeling very sorry for myself.

As young boys we used to have to provide our own entertainment. And I used to build what we called our wooden scooters. Get lots of wood, two large ball bearings, and we made our own scooters and had great fun racing in the streets and being told off for it. And then we played - of course there were no parks for cricket and then the traffic was not as it is today. And we'd have our two orange boxes for wickets and we played our cricket. And one would be standing on guard because there was the policeman on the beat - the stereotype policeman, about six feet tall and about sixteen stone - and the word would go round, "He's coming!" And I would run to my house, heart pounding away, "oh I hope he didn't see me, because he'll tell my Father." We were worried about being caught playing cricket in the street.

M      Were you not allowed to play cricket in the street?

D      There was a danger of breaking windows. And of course I remember one of the tricks was tying a piece of string to one of the doorknockers and pulling it and running away. And being afraid of being caught this was a very terrible for a boy, to happen in the street. And of course if we were caught our parents were told and there would be no excuses, we would get told off.

And even in school when, occasionally I would say I was innocent, the fools talking at the back of the class, and the master would say "I don't know which one was talking but to be

fair I am going to cane the four of you." And so we would all get the cane, but I would never go home and tell my parents because they'd say, "Right well if you got the cane, then you got the cane for something. So that would be either be another telling off, though my parents, my Father, never hit me. He would tell me off but he would never hit me. He was very concerned that I didn't waste my time reading comics. He used to say, "Now look, you have the library in Commercial St, use it. So I used to go along to the children's library and take out books. So he was very concerned with, education, there were always books in the house.

After the blitz we didn't return to the East End. After Luton my father went to a house in Golders Green, a very large house that was owned by Rosen the bakers. And this was about 1944. And he wanted my father to buy it, he said he could have it for three thousand pounds, complete with furniture and carpets and fittings. And my Father said, "Well if he doesn't want this house because of its bombed, why should I take on the responsibility." We were very young but we felt it would have been worthwhile and the house is probably worth about £40,000 now. So all the family came to live (except my brother, he was married and had a child, he remained in Luton) but my other three sisters we lived together in Gresham Gardens and I went to work for an engineering firm.

A Jewish engineering firm. He wasn't an engineer he was a dress manufacturer but to keep out of the army if you changed your manufacturing from dresses to engineering then that enabled you to be out of the army. So this is the firm I went to work for and we made precision gun sights and parts for stem guns and parts for the Spitfire. I remember one period when there was a demand, a shortage of parts for the Spitfire and we were asked to work right through the night to get the orders through. And my friend and I (we were then about sixteen, seventeen, we are still friends today, great friends) well we worked through the night and we phoned up the policeman station and told them to phone up my family to tell my family that I wouldn't be coming home because I had to work through the night. Of course unfortunately there was a heavy air raid and when I got home in the morning my Father when he saw me was really really furious. He said you know there was a knock on the door; there was a policeman standing there and I thought, "you were the only one not home, so something terrible has happened." And I felt very very sorry. I know it was important to them to do what I did, to get the parts out, but the anguish I must have caused, I don't think it was really worth it.

M      So what about your friends?

D Well nowadays children say that they are bored after they have about twenty games, television, radio, billiards. And yet we didn't have that. At Pesach I remember we had shoes if we were lucky and we would use the box to put holes in and we put numbers on the holes. And we'd buy nuts and you'd see the beginning of "business", the Jewish people in business, because one boy would have the box and he would allow you to throw your nuts. If your nuts got in to one of the holes and the number was two he would give you two nuts or whatever. This is how, I'm sure, all our Jewish businessmen started at business! And you would see this happening all along the streets in the East End.

Another thing I remember, especially when the weather was nice and warm ... people sitting outside the doors. I don't recall ever my parents blocking and barring up the house. I don't remember ever anybody saying that somebody had entered the house and stolen anything. I can also remember ... very important, on Friday every house appeared to be clean. No matter how poor people were, the doorsteps were all clean. There were always ... I think people the Sabbath cloth on the table. Every house you would see the light of the candles burning. But again, going back to children playing, I say we played our cricket, we played with nuts, we had our scooters ... to be presented with a torch and then to walk along all the quiet alleyways shining the torch would be fun. This would be one of our activities. And well I probably would have maybe sixpence a month to go to Woolworths, which was over on the corner of Aldgate and Commercial St. And that would be a special treat to go in to Woolworths and buy something for sixpence.

M Did you ever go to the cinema as a child?

D Yes. Yes I remember going to just off Aldgate and it was a penny for the picture, to see a cowboy film. I think that was called the fleapit. I remember going to Mayfair in Brick Lane and the ushers they would come round ... if anybody wanted a glass of water they would bring a glass of water round, people would take their sandwiches and have their sandwiches and sit for a second viewing of the film. There was another cinema in Brick Lane but at the Shoreditch end. I believe it was called the Luxor and I remember seeing cowboy films there. And always then there was the Roxy ... my older sister would take me on the tram, for a penny and then you would see also there would be either an organ or a light concert.

There were other theatres I believe in Shoreditch. I remember one in Shoreditch... I can vaguely remember going there. But as a child not so much to the cinema ... basically we found ways of amusing ourselves within the confines of our four or five streets. I do remember the lane, it was very narrow lane when I was quite young, I remember they

widened it, and I used to lean over this rope and watch them digging. And I still smell the tar. We were told if we stood by the tar it would help us get rid of colds. And I remember them digging up the skull of a cow or a bull. Now whether this was quite old or not, I don't know, but I remember seeing the men widen the lane. It was a very old narrow road and I think there was also a boxing pavilion. Of course I was probably too young to remember those days.

Also another recollection I have, which is very sad, was a Sunday when Oswald Mosley was trying to walk through the East End. And we were told we must not leave the house. I was probably about eleven. It was a great excitement. And I could hear the sounds... we were probably about half a mile away from Aldgate. But I do remember looking out of the window and then seeing quite young men, obviously members of the Mosley party, running as quickly as they could, probably to get back into Liverpool Street or Bishops gate, and I can remember the frightened look on their faces as they ran through our streets. And then by late afternoon came my brothers friend, one of them had his head bound. Whether it was because of the police or Mosley, I don't know. But it was quite an event because it was really the destruction of Mosley's party. I also, although as a child I don't remember seeing graffiti or anything written on walls but I do remember seeing signs such as "boycott German goods" and the sound of the newspaper seller saying "Hitler is a monster".

M Do you remember any anti-Semitism?

D No, hardly any anti-Semitism at all. Not where we lived. My parents who, because they were, my mother was in poultry, most of them were non-Jewish. In fact when one of the ladies I mentioned before (we had two girls from Wales - who, obviously they didn't get a lot of money, they came to London and looked after the home and they did things in the shop, they helped in the shop). When one, her name was Mary, got married, she married one of the puckers who worked for my Mother. And we had a large house, they had one of the rooms at the top of the house, my father gave her a room to live in. And when she had a baby, a baby-girl, I remember when the baby - she was about two - for Passover the baby-sitting on my Father's lap during the service.

So it was like there was no such thing as ... obviously we were called the unusual (109). But I think they were just names to describe the person rather than to be anti-Christian or anti-Semitic. I think that when as a child, because of the lack of education, the lack of understanding in different religions, I was always used to walk past the church quickly. I was frightened of the church. This was wrong, it should never have been. But I didn't actually come across any, because we were closeted, we lived in a ghetto, in all of the four

or five streets I have mentioned I would say that ninety percent of the people were Jewish. And as a child I would walk along in safety, there was no ... my friends didn't worry when I walked along.

There was a boundary. I wasn't allowed to cross Liverpool St. And I couldn't cross Commercial Street. That was my boundary. I wasn't allowed to cross that until I was about twelve or thirteen.

M Well what happened to the engineering, after all you're not an engineer now?

D Ah yes, well that is a long story. When I worked in engineering (I mentioned about my friend who worked in (122), the firm that ... the Jewish person who changed from dress making to engineering) I volunteered for the Air Force when I was eighteen. I remember going for an interview in St Johns Wood. But by then there was no shortage of pilots, whether trained or being trained, there was a reservoir, they had enough. And because I was in engineering I was not allowed to be called up because they thought this was more important. So I wasn't allowed to join the forces until I was nineteen. And my father was very upset, this was something he always feared, that his youngest son would have to go in to the army. And by then he'd had heart trouble so he didn't feel able to see me off from Waterloo Station. But my second sister, my middle sister, took me to the station and when I got in the carriage my sister said goodbye to me and was crying and there was a woman sitting opposite and she started crying as well, so that didn't help matters.

Anyway I remember reaching Manchester and meeting four of my fellow young men, who had all been called up. So we waited as long as possible before we entered the barracks, which was (144). And I was there for eight weeks. We learned to march and drill. Also we had aptitude tests to see what sort of work they would want you to do in the army. Well I, because of my skills in engineering, I wanted to go in to the Royal Engineers. And of course like the army if you were a cook you became a clerk and if you were a clerk you'd become a cook! And so when I saw my name on the noticeboard I was sent to the royal artillery regiment in Somerset. I wasn't very happy and when I objected they said when you get to (153). Every Monday morning for eight weeks I reported to the adjutant saying I wanted a transfer and every day they said, "I'm very sorry you can't transfer at the moment." And so I had to stay in the Royal Artillery.

We did an eight-week course, learning trigonometry because although I had gone to the Jewish Free Central School because of the war breaking out we didn't get trigonometry. So I had to start this course. On that course there were fellows who had come from Grammar



school and I had to catch up with them and do trigonometry, surveying and gunnery. We were told that if we failed this course we would become gunners. I had no intention of becoming a gunner so I decided that the best thing to do was to do as well as I could. There were ten subjects and I got a hundred out of a hundred. The adjutant who, when we were on the end of the course we went up to see him, came up to me and said, "Well, I know you always wanted to go in to the Royal Artillery but you did very well, you got a hundred out a hundred."

M So you had to stay?

D Well I did, I couldn't get out of it. Then I became a technical assistant for the Royal Artillery. And from there I went on embarkation leave and that was the last time I ever saw my father because he died... I went to Norfolk, by then the war with Germany was over but the war with Japan was still on. There was a possibility of either going to Japan or going to Italy. Fortunately we went to Italy. I was then sent to the senior regiment of the British Army, the first Royal Artillery, and I was the only Jewish boy in the regiment.

M What did you eat there? Did you eat meat, pork while you were in the Army?

D Oh yes, Jewish boys were given a dispensation. I didn't like it but we had to eat. Some of the camps, some of the food was better than the others. So I arrived in Italy and I was in Italy for three years. It was a very happy time.

M How did the others treat you?

D When I was first called up in the army I realised there was anti-Semitism and to avoid this I joined the boxing class! Now I thought, well, let them think I'm a boxer. I knew about boxing from before and so I joined the boxing class and at my weight - I was a flyweight - and a rather complete soul, I had to fight for the regiment. And in the ... when it came to the tournament, for southwest England, I was one of the boxers for the regiment. And there were nine bouts and we lost the first four and I was the fifth bout. And I won my bout. And I won the fight and I've still got this little card that I was a boxer for the regiment. And that seemed to avoid any complications with anti-Semitism because they felt I could look after myself. And so I think that was an advantageous thing to do .

D Now you wanted to know how I became involved with the clothing trade. Well when I arrived in Italy with the regiment, I was always very good at drawing, and when they realised I was an artist they made me the regimental sign-writer. My job was to keep all the

vehicles painted up. I used to paint lovely – all the fellows bought their vehicles to me in my paint shop in – we were stationed in a barracks in (223) in Northern Italy - and I would make the vehicles look like community police vehicles because they all the nuts were painted white, and the ( ) were trimmed up red. And in fact there was the victory procession in (228) and I was told I had to go to (as 228) as regimental sign-writer to touch up any vehicles that might get scratched. So I painted the whole regiment - there were three batteries of Sherman tanks, twenty-five pounders - and I painted all the sevens, what I called the artistic seven - and when all the tanks were lined up, my four tanks stood out as being different from all the others. And the colonel came past and said, "I can't have this" and I had to repaint the sevens.

So I went with the regiment to Trieste as a sign-writer. Also because I was artistic I was allowed to have an office in the regiment and whereas most of them had to do duties on a Saturday morning I was allowed to draw. And I used to draw life drawings. In fact the officers used to bring me their photographs and I used to draw their girlfriends for them. And in the rear room on our walls were all the drawings, I used to do drawings and pin them up. I found a very good medium. As a specialist with the Royal Artillery and doing surveying we used to use a sort of canvas (there was a map with grids marked on it) and the back was like a canvas and was a very good medium for drawing on. In fact when I knew I was getting demobbed I sent my drawings to the Royal London Art College asking whether they felt although I had never had any art training, whether they thought I had any possibilities in art. And I had a letter back from the principal saying, "Yes we think you have possibilities, we would like to give you a correspondence course." I didn't think that was suitable, I just wanted to know whether they felt I could apply for a job in some sort of art.

I was demobbed in 1948 and I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do and within the second day of being demobbed one of my friends, who I had met in Italy, a Jewish fellow (he had founded a Jewish club) he came to me on the second day and said, "I've founded a Jewish club, come along and meet some friends." And I met my wife; on the second day I was demobbed. I had intended really to go back to Palestine because I knew there was going to be a fight between the Jews and the Arabs and that was my intention. But it didn't materialise because I met my wife and we married. And we've got two children and two grandchildren.

Well I decided, because of my background, I'd grown up in clothing factories and because my father's wish had always been that I work in the design and pattern cutting section. And I had wanted no part of the clothing trade. And because I was artistic someone said "Well why not do pattern cutting?" And I went to the tailor and cutting academy in Gerard Street.

My mother now, we had very little money, I kept savings from being demobbed and now I had a young lady and I had to think about the future, so I did this course in the (288 academy) which normally takes a year, but I could only afford six months. So I could only do the course in six months, which I did. And at the end of the course I had a diploma and I went to work for number of clothing firms and eventually I went to work for a very small high class manufacturer in the West End, we did very high class clothing and I worked as the assistant to the (294). And within about a week of my joining he left and I was left more or less holding the baby and I had to learn the trade very quickly.

M Who were they? Were they Jewish?

D They were Jewish, yes I won't tell you about them because I don't think you want to hear my views... I handled the most beautiful cloths and I learned, and there were some French designers and we bought their designs. I learned quite lot about the clothing trade. And I then became an art designer and patter maker, and that's my role now.

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