

Sorry. OK.

OK.

Yeah.

Hang on.

Yeah.

I don't see you.

Oh.

Oh, now I do. Now I see you. OK.

Good.

So here we are. We're back again. And remind me how long you were working from about the fall of 1946 till your release in--

June. June 1948.

OK. So that would have been also not quite two years. Is that correct?

Yeah, that's correct. Yeah.

OK. And did you know that your release date would be June 1948, or did it come as a surprise?

Came as a surprise. But it sort of-- it sort of became more and more likely. It wasn't a kind of a complete surprise, because I mean, the scare, the bomb scare in London for the unexploded bombs obviously was based on a number of sites that were well known, or were well known. And once these sites had been dealt with, then the more they'd been dealt with, the less it became an issue anymore, and the press weren't all that concerned anymore.

And all that sort of thing came together. Because I mean, the whole-- the whole bomb disposal squad was being moved to out of London then to the South, away from the big buildings. Because there was only a kind of catch up need anymore for new discoveries, not the real thing.

And then the prisoners of war had been also long enough there. Most prisoners from elsewhere, German prisoners had come back or were coming back at that time. And when you came to that release camp near Hanover in Germany, you saw crowds or masses of people coming from all countries, from Russia, as well as from France, as well as from England. So it became a miracle, yes.

So while you're still a prisoner in Britain, a POW, what kind of contact do you have to your various family members? Whether it's your father, your stepmother, any aunts, or uncles, or cousin, or sisters, or brother-- or stepbrothers, or anything like that? What kind of contact do you have with them?

Well, only letters, of course. And you could say-- I mean, with our freedom of course there was no problem sending private letters. I mean, we got paid. I got a pound, a pound a week, was it? Yeah. And the rest of the people got 10 shillings a week. So you get enough money to do that kind of thing.

And the other thing, of course was sending gift parcels to Germany. Each prisoner was allowed to send a gift parcel up to five pounds in weight once a month. And as the prisoners of war became settled in and had little aside jobs and the

families in Germany were hard up, and some of these people were even harder up because they were being driven from what now-- from the East, from Poland, from Russia, from Yugoslavia, from Hungary, the Germans back to Germany. Czechoslovakia, particularly, too.

So one of the great things for all of the German prisoner of war to do was to get as much food parcels or anything, clothes parcels, too. And then but the rule was only one per person, per month. And it was left for us camp leader people to somehow deal with any excess, to find-- to confuse the British soldiers who were dealing at the post office with these things, so that people could get in any extra parcel they had been able to put together.

But these parcels were never checked or opened by anybody. I mean, they just went. That was one of the big issues during the [? camp. ?] I mean, going to the East End and buy illegal shoes and all that kind of thing was standard practice.

Buying shoes was illegal?

Well, because clothing was completely rationed in England.

Oh.

And we prisoners of war certainly didn't have any ration cards of any kind.

What had happened? Speaking of all of the areas that Germany had either taken over or had German populations in the East, and I believe the Konigsberg region, Prussia would have been one of them.

Yes.

Also Silesia in Poland, and you mentioned Sudetenland. That reminded me of your family in Sudetenland. So what happened with them? Were they also some of those who--

Were driven out, yes.

Did they?

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

So what happened to the family? Where did they go?

Well, the family, the Kluger family, with whom I'd been, Ernst Brasser, the guy from Prague we've talked about, his mother was belonged to the Gruber family from Lindau in Lake Constance. And the Grubers built a huge-- grandfather Gruber was one of those traders who actually for much of his life lived Geneva-- in Genoa in Italy, [?Eastern?] oriental trade.

He became very rich. And he got this huge area just opposite Lindau on the mainland. And Lindau is on an island. And built a huge castle there, or Schloss. A big house. And of course that's where the whole Kluger family ended up. And Ernst Brasse being the lawyer and clever guy he was, in the early postwar years having a good friendship with the new mayor of Lindau, managed to sell the whole huge park with a swimming pool and everything, for \$1 million D Mark to the city of Lindau and get the play-- what do you call it?

What do you call it? The play for money.

Gambling?

Gambling. Yeah, he got a gambling club going as well there, an international, which was also a great success story. You know, they fell on their feet. that definitely. And my whole family, the kids, [INAUDIBLE] kids are all now living in

that area. They live on that estate, but have their own house, which is on the city's park now. The park there.

But let's say all the factories that the Kluger family owned, the textile factories and things like that, what happened to those?

Just fell to pieces. The Czechs didn't couldn't deal with them. To some extent, they were being obviously victimized. People would take out some part of it. I mean, when Rivka and I went on our wedding trip to Czechoslovakia, on our way I wanted to show her all the places I'd been, I'd been there.

It was just the Prague Spring, they called it, when the Czech government had resisted or voted itself away from Russian dominance, which only lasted a few months or a year. But that was happening to be just at the time when we would be married. So we went into Czechoslovakia and--

That's 1968. 1968 is Prague Spring. '67, '68.

Yeah. Our wedding was in August 1967. So you know. So that was the time. And we could visit the areas, but the factories were just ruins. I mean, the German side really seemed to be only-- been vacated obviously by the Germans who had been driven out. But the main body of Czech people didn't move in.

It was only people from Slovakia-- [? Gesindel, ?] as they called it-- who had sort of use for, but not really made anything of these properties.

Well, the difficulty also was in the postwar years that there was no private ownership. So they couldn't become-- they couldn't take the factory over, own it, run it, do whatever.

Exactly, exactly. And the communist government had plenty of other things to worry about. I mean, in particular dominated by Russian people. You know, I think it was just a complete failure to take advantage of the situation, yeah.

So the Kluger relatives all move towards Lindau and take advantage of Ernst Brasse's connections and family wealth and so on, and find new lives there. Is that mostly-- can I make that--

That is exactly what happened. And it was astonishing. I mean, Ernst Brasse knows the [INAUDIBLE] who was a factory owner where my two younger sisters-- my two sisters were during the war years. I mean, he was also kicked out.

But all he'd ever done was to run a factory business in Czechoslovakia. But before long, he was a bank branch bank manager in Austria. And survived.

OK. So did any of your family also end up in Britain during the time you were a POW there?

Not while I was a POW. But my brother and my cousin followed on when I-- you know, after I'd settled in Britain. [INAUDIBLE] after 1949.

OK. I have a note here that you meet your Aunt Bertha at some point.

Yes. I was thinking of talking about it now. I mean, that was again, something. She'd written all these books as I told you. You know, she was-- hundreds of books she published during her lifetime, in the interwar years.

And came to [PLACE NAME] and stayed with us during the summer, dictating a new novel to some secretary she brought with her. And of course, one of the secretary then married Uncle uh-- him.

Uncle Heinrich.

And so how-- Uncle Heinrich, remind me again of his relation to you? He is--

He married this American secretary that Aunt Bertha brought with her in her later years. And he was sent during-- when Austria became part of Germany, being an inventor himself, technically highly advanced inventor, and he was developing small [?weapons?] for the German army.

And after the collapse of Germany, the Americans shipped him a lot with other German scientists back to the States, particularly in his case, with his American wife, he settled down in America for the rest of his life.

And our family got relief parcels during the worst years from them in regular sequence. So it all worked out somehow.

And Aunt Bertha was now divorced from him, yes?

No. She wasn't married to him at all.

Oh, I see. I misunderstood. I thought she had been married-- so how was she related--

No. It was the secretary.

The secretary married him. OK.

Yeah. The secretary marries him. No. Aunt Bertha Ruck was married to another writer. But she didn't take his name because she was famous in her own right. As she said, her husband was who wrote worthwhile, important novels, where as she was writing all kind of--

But [INAUDIBLE].

How do I spell her last name, Ruck? How do I spell that?

R-U-C-K.

OK.

She was a real Welsh woman.

OK.

Black, black, black hair. But I wrote her a card when we sort of settled down in Fulham. And to her pre-war address in [PLACE NAME] and in Wales. And I promptly got a card back saying, I'll be in London on the 7th of June. Meet me at the-- I can't think. A little cafe or a big cafe in Piccadilly.

So I went to my commanding officer and said, would he give me a pass out to go on a Wednesday afternoon to Piccadilly? And he said, it's a pleasure. So I went out with my [INAUDIBLE] prisoner of war uniform with this pass. And of course, I felt a little bit awkward coming to this posh restaurant cafe.

And well, I thought if I entered as a prisoner of war, they might kick me out straight away. But I went in. And I sort of looked around. And I could see her right at the other end of the restaurant. And she could see me. And she just jumped up, came along and embraced me.

And the rest of the restaurant obviously looked on amused. But you know, that was that. That was the end of it. So I joined her and her guests there. Then we went on afterwards to Hampstead to one of the other people [INAUDIBLE] friends. And had a nice evening and afternoon and evening. And I went back to my prisoner of war camp.

And then of course, I met every time she came up to town. We met.

She had two sons. Those two sons-- I mean, she had-- she was a bit of a unusual type of woman. Her two sons were

licensed air pilots before they were allowed to sit for their driving license.

And another thing she did-- throughout the year, she would always have a dive into the sea, regardless of winter, summer.

Remind me again how was she related to your family. This is the connection that--

Only because she came-- thanks to my mother. She came as a paying guest.

OK. Well, I have very quickly-- this is one of the reasons I wanted to know her last name. I've just looked her up and Wikipedia has an entry for her. And let me see if the entry that they have matches what you knew about her.

Her name was--

I've got a Wikipedia entry too. [INAUDIBLE] the same.

It probably is. Amy Roberta Ruck, Mrs. Oliver Onions was born in 1878--

[INAUDIBLE].

And died in 1978. So as 100 years old.

Yeah.

And she was born in Murree, Punjab, British India. Of one of eight children.

[INAUDIBLE].

And she married a fellow novelist, George Oliver Onions and had two sons, Arthur and William.

Yeah. I met them both.

OK. So that's interesting. And then it talks a little bit about her writing career.

Yeah.

And so on. She was widowed in 1971. So this was your Aunt Bertha who had been one of your mother's paying guests. I see.

Yes. And then of course, she wasn't just my mother's paying guest. She became a family friend. And until we left Austria, she would come every year to write her next book, and to have a social life with us. You know.

And of course, my dad and [?Telle?] were fluent in verbal English anyway.

OK.

So they could talk quite easily.

I had read in some of my notes that, was there a relative who wanted to ask your help for helping either [?Bertel?] or someone else leave prison, or leave a POW camp? Does that ring a bell at all? While you yourself are a prisoner of war.

No, I think the thing that you probably mention is my Uncle Georg who was imprisoned by Austria both before the war-- before this [? last war, ?] and certainly after the wars as well.

And I can't-- my memory. I was I think around about the mid 50s. I was asked-- I was walking along Piccadilly. And a gentleman approached me and said, was I Helmut Schweitzer.

And he said, I'm coming from [INAUDIBLE] who is the great film producer? Whose name as usually, escapes me. I can't-- who produced all these wonderful pictures of movies. He was the first movie producers of these mass enormous movies. And then he obviously went on to the United States in the end.

And at that time he was in England and producing his movies in England, which was at that time in those post-war years, was as good as the American film producing areas.

And anyway, he said he had a passport for Uncle Georg to-- a British passport for him. Would I take it to him and give it to him in Liechtenstein, [INAUDIBLE]

And I sort of attempted to do it. Then I decided, no, I can't do it. Because I would have been totally responsible for him if anything. You know, it was obviously a false passport. And so I said, no, that's not [INAUDIBLE].

And so Uncle Georg himself never mentioned anything to me, nor did my dad. Whether it was a fake thing or not, I don't know.

OK. So if I understand this correctly, this is long after your release. This is when you're living in Britain.

[INAUDIBLE] a father of two children working for the John Lewis Partnership. And Uncle Georg obviously, having been released from prison, that contact with his old friend or colleague or whatever he was-- I don't know what Uncle Georg was doing in the '20s in Austria.

I mean, he was always a bit of a mystery. [INAUDIBLE].

1920s? Are you saying 1920s, 1930s or 1940s in Austria?

No, no. [INAUDIBLE] 1920s, early '30s, because what's his name went to the United States around about 1930. This producer, this Hungarian. World famous. [? I can't seem to-- ?]

OK. But at any rate, Uncle Georg is released after the war from prison. From because of whatever Nazi activities he had been involved in.

But he was also in prison in 1936, when [PERSONAL NAME] was killed. You know, he was part of a Nazi movement. And obviously, it was a Nazi guy who shot [PERSONAL NAME].

So he was involved. But the family sort of stood aside and he never talked about it.

But to bring this to that moment, it is that after the war, he's released. He's living in Liechtenstein. You don't necessarily [INAUDIBLE]

No, he's not. He's not living in Liechtenstein. I think Liechtenstein was simply picked [INAUDIBLE] that it wasn't Austria. And it wasn't England. You know, it was somewhere else.

And this man, out of the blue, approaches you.

Yes.

Asks who you were, and then wants to hand a passport to you to give to your Uncle Georg.

Yes.

And you ostensibly meet Uncle Georg in Liechtenstein. And you think, well, maybe I'll do it. And then you decide you won't. And that the passport is most likely a false passport.

Yeah.

That's correct?

That's what-- I mean, the guy never said that. But I couldn't imagine that it could be a genuine passport.

So I took this out of the sequence by remembering this thing. I took it out of the chronology we were talking about.

Yeah.

Let's go back to one part of what you were saying. And that was your education. Did you finish a certain course at the LSE? Did you get a certificate? Did you get a degree?

Yeah.

What happened?

[INAUDIBLE] that is of course, after I came back, after my release. When I was married to Sheila. And I got my Ph.D in economics from the LSE. My first degree.

So let's go back to when you are released. You are released. There is fewer and fewer bombs that need to have teams to help diffuse them in London. They're moving out of town.

And in June, 1948, is it-- that you are released from your prisoner of war status.

Yeah.

What happens then?

Well, I mean, I had my by then-- my admission to the London School of Economics for the Michaelmas terms, 1949-- no, '48. Michaelmas terms '48.

So I reckoned I'd be released to Germany, meet up with the whole family again, and then come back in October-- beginning of October, Michaelmas term, and start my study and marry Sheila.

That sounded-- that was quite sort of straightforward. But of course, I had then the problem, being a released German prisoner of war from England, wanting to emigrate as an Austrian citizen from occupied American part of Germany, which the Americans just failed to do, to accept. Then--

Were you repatriated to Germany? Did you have to leave Britain?

Yes, oh, yes. I was [INAUDIBLE]. I was the first group of ex-prisoners of war who were paid out in the new German currency, the D-Mark, That was quite an achievement.

By the British?

Because that was-- yeah. That was money that was worth something. Whereas the old German money was already dead completely.

OK. I need to have clarification here. While you are a prisoner, you are paid one pound a week? Once you get released, do you get further moneys?

Yes. Again, something like the pay was one pound in our pocket, and one pound to be paid on release from prisoner of war. So you know, I got two pounds a week. I got the payout there.

But the question really was, if I'd been paid out, if I'd been a week earlier, it was really strictly as close as that. I would have been paid out in the old German money, which was not worth much.

So being I'm coming now back home with D-Marks to my family was quite a triumph. So you leave. You're released from Fulham where your camp is.

No. [INAUDIBLE] we were in Richmond Park then. In between, we were in Richmond Park. I've sort of mentioned it indirectly, but not fully. I mean, the height of our time was in Richmond Park, actually.

How long were you in Richmond park?

About a year.

OK.

I mean, when bomb disposal became so successful, with doubling the man power, and the bombs were coming out, and the press was full of these stories-- [INAUDIBLE] of us really sort of-- there was a [INAUDIBLE] army camp in Richmond Park. You know, much better than the [INAUDIBLE] and Fulham.

And so we moved to that camp. And I was actually, at the time, on the-- I had a special course [INAUDIBLE] foreign office was running-- Wilton Park.

And that was about a month-- six weeks course, Wilton Park, when the move took place. When I came back from that course, the young officer, a British officer, who was looking after prisoners of war, introduced me to the new camp leader.

And who was that?

It was one of the guys-- I mean, one of the German guys who was, in fact, a Sergeant. But he was a-- they had a homosexual relationship.

And so [INAUDIBLE] when after he [? introduced, ?] in the evening, I collected where is a whole group of people. And we sort of cornered them. And we said, well, can you sort of explain the situation?

And the German guy immediately said, no, no, no, no. That's just a joke. Don't worry about it. You know. Because the last thing they wanted to happen was that the then commanding officer would hear about it and make a big issue of it, which he may have, or would have probably done.

And so I was in charge again. It was just one of those episodes.

But during that time, I had a very good outside-- I mean, particularly in Richmond Park-- to sing [INAUDIBLE] a lot of the prisoners was to sing. They could get good jobs from the better families outside Richmond Park.

And coming back from Wilton Park, felt I was sort of behind the times a bit. And there was one request that came through for a gardener for an address just outside the gate of our gate in Richmond Park.

And a family, [PERSONAL NAME]. And so I went to them, Mrs. [PERSONAL NAME] a very nice German woman. And she said, [? yeah, ?] fine. You know, you're in.

They were also escapees from Germany. They weren't Jewish, I think. They had two sons at some London

[INAUDIBLE]. They were obviously well-off people. I mean, their garden was right at the wall of the park.

And the husband was-- I thought he was a drunkard. He was never-- he only occasionally came out in a grumpy sort of way from his office. But only since we've come back to England-- now, unfortunately, I've lost the source again.

I've learned when Hitler came to power first, he had a kind of-- he did get rid of his main leadership of people in 1934, to have them murdered. And this guy-- there was a guy, [PERSONAL NAME] who was an associate of one of these murdered people.

I don't know whether this particular [PERSONAL NAME] was that guy. But he could well have been, from age and from his attitude. It was just mere possible coincidence.

I know when I proudly told the family that I'd been accepted as a scholar for the London School of Economics, he sort of jumped at me and said, what? That socialist rubbish place? You know-- and good luck to you if you really want to [INAUDIBLE].

Are you referring to the SA Brownshirts that were in competition with the SS.

[INAUDIBLE].

And do you think--

[INAUDIBLE] with the Wehrmacht. I mean-- the Brownshirts wanted to become the new Wehrmacht. The German army. And Hitler was forced to make a clear choice, which he had great difficulty in doing. But in the end, it meant that his own [INAUDIBLE] his own fellows had to be killed off.

OK. And you're saying that you suspect that this family was associated with some of them.

Well, because there was this-- I mean, [PERSONAL NAME] most unusual kind of name, isn't it?

Yes, it is. Yeah. What was significant to you about working with them outside in the-- was this one of the few outside contacts you had with people who lived in Britain, or in the area [INAUDIBLE] neighborhood?

Yeah. You know, I had a very good relationship with his wife. I mean, she accepted me as a gardener. But you know, it became more. I was just the sort of house guest who turned up. And I mean, she was, I think, a lonely woman. Because of the peculiar husband [INAUDIBLE] and the boys were going to local schools. So they were there in the evenings.

And one of them, the younger one, was playing Beethoven's sixth symphony every evening. And I suddenly thought, that's really lovely. I ought to do something about it. Why can't I go to the Albert Hall to concert? So I became a frequent concert goer to the Albert Hall, which wasn't all that far away from Richmond Park.

How did you meet Sheila?

Well, through the International Friendship League. That was [INAUDIBLE]. And that of course-- that was-- [INAUDIBLE] is it now-- how did it start?

I don't know how the original contact came. But there was a movement which really was the successor of a pre-war peace movement, the Oxford group, it was also called. And it was this Swiss sort of revolutionary who was preaching peace.

You go to your opponent and you honestly say what your problem is. And he will say his problem. And you sort it out face to face. That was his basic mission.

And what I didn't know until fairly recently is how big that movement had been before the war, before the last war. He

had thousands and thousands of [?mass?] meeting people gathering, particularly in Holland and Scandinavia, Switzerland. Because originally, he came from Switzerland. But he grew up in the United States.

And it was a very big movement for peace. Nevermind the politics. Just peace. You know, by talking and making peace.

And there was a Fulham group, which I joined. You know, basically young professional people. And Sheila's mom was the secretary of that group.

So I became a regular. You know, they were particularly with me, trying to keep public relations from our camp to the outer world. There were certain sort of places like this Fulham [INAUDIBLE] group. And then there was [INAUDIBLE].

Anyway. There was another military-- British army-- what do you call it? Reservists-- no, not reservists. Pensioners. British army pensioners organization, which also had us as guests very often.

So I've felt the obligation--

Veterans? Do you mean like British army veterans?

Veterans, yeah. Yeah. That's right. So the Fulham group-- there was that group. And I felt it was a matter of honor that one of us, at least, would turn up to their weekly meetings.

And it was the same with the [INAUDIBLE] group, which was much more lively, anyway than the army veterans side. So these were my regular weekly kind of dates that I had.

And then when my-- [INAUDIBLE]. Yeah. In March 1948, my 22nd birthday came. They gave me a birthday party.

I was coming to them, wanting to say, to proudly say, I've got a place at the London School of Economics. And instead I was there and [INAUDIBLE] and organized this-- instead of a meeting, a birthday party for me. And she brought her daughter along as well. Sheila. And the rest is history.

Well, you know, it sounds like your prisoner of war years in London provided you an opportunity to really start integrating into British society.

Absolutely.

One way, another way, a third way, a fourth way. So that by the time you are officially released, you have roots already established. The beginning of roots.

Yes.

So you-- Yeah?

My early youth with [? Bertel Ruck ?] and [INAUDIBLE] and a very British-minded grandmother and aunt-- I mean, the English reputation was already great in every way in our home in Austria. And even Hitler, when we were in Germany, always spoke with great respect about England, much more so than about any other country. So in anyway, [? I was ?] preconditioned.

[INAUDIBLE]. So technically, that is, then when you are released, and you do have to return to Germany as opposed to when you told your Belgian captors-- that is, your British captors in Belgium, that no, you don't want-- you're not Austrian. You're German.

In fact is, you have Austrian citizenship in the American zone in Germany. Is that correct?

Well, no. I should have meant when Austria became a state, [INAUDIBLE] obviously it started an embassy in London. And I was a freely moving prisoner of war.

I went along to this newly created Austrian embassy. And I said, look, I'm really an Austrian. Can I have a passport? Because Germany couldn't give me-- wouldn't be able to give me a passport. Because it was completely occupied.

So they said, well, all we need is a [INAUDIBLE] your local town, city, if they can give you a certificate that you've been born in this place, you can have your passport.

So I went to-- I wrote a letter to the mayor of [PLACE NAME] and said, I'm Helmut Schweitzer. And no phones in Austria.

And at the moment in London. Can I have a [INAUDIBLE]. And by return of post? They said, [INAUDIBLE] and [INAUDIBLE]. So I got my Austrian passport. Even as I went as a German prisoner of war to [? ship ?] back to Germany.

[INAUDIBLE] English person [INAUDIBLE] but of course, the English occupation people couldn't quite add up how this German prisoner of war, released, now suddenly comes up as an Austrian citizen wanting to go to England. I mean, that just didn't add up. And that's [INAUDIBLE] who was working for the Americans then came-- [INAUDIBLE] got hold of her and said, you must try and get that organized.

And she did. It took a few months. And I did [INAUDIBLE] I obviously missed the Michaelmas term completely. I only could get across with all the papers in early January, 1949.

So did you ever live in Germany again?

Well, I lived for six months or so. I even had a place at Mainz University. I studied at Mainz University for one term.

What were you studying? What were you studying?

Economics.

But after that, after you returned to Britain, do you ever live in Germany again after that?

Yeah. [INAUDIBLE] in 1971. I worked for the American company ITT conglomerate, covering the German speaking country as an inspector, living first in Frankfurt and then near Stuttgart for about four, five years before we went to South Africa.

OK. So when you're saying Pam, you're referring to your second wife, who is also known as Rivka?

Rivka, yes. I mean, Pam is shall we say, a birth name. Rivka is only a kind of Jewish addition when we married as Jews.

OK. OK. So I would say, if we can, do you have enough energy to keep on going today?

Yes, we can.

Or-- yeah? Because this is the next topic that I would like to cover. Because it really is one of the more unusual parts of your story is how you connect with Judaism, and the process that happens. And I guess the development that happens that kind of bring you and Pam to want to convert to Judaism, and to actually do so. Can we talk about that a little bit?

Yes. It's totally amazing, really, the way it happened. Looking back on it, it looks to me both to Rivka, if you like, as if it was kind of inevitable. Although we didn't really-- we weren't really conscious of it. But somehow, everything, at every turn, things happened the way that they happened. And we were just-- we were facing the choice to say yes or no.

So when did the first turn occur that kind of starts you on this path in this direction? I'll just say briefly, when you go back to England, you marry Sheila. And you have some children. Is that correct?

Yes. We had three children, yes.

And that at some point the marriage does not work. And you divorce.

That's right.

Correct?

Yeah. That's right. But it was, if you like, a friendly divorce. I mean, she just liked the driving teacher who taught her to drive the car. And eventually she joined him. But it didn't work out. She wanted to come back. But then I said no.

So for about four years, I managed with the two older children. She took the youngest child with her. But again, the driving teacher wasn't living all that far away. So for the weekend, I could always pick her up and she used to stay with us.

And particularly her marriage never really worked out properly. So Katherine was more and more with us for quite a while until we moved away from [? Cookham ?] when I was then already married to Pam.

OK. So you married Pam in 1967.

Yes.

And you did say that you live for five or six years in Germany and then go to South Africa. And it is in South Africa where this development happens, or had there been prior steps beforehand?

Well, in South Africa, it gradually-- I mean, Pam grew up in a very difficult, divorced parents kind of circumstances in the East End of London. And she had an unsuccessful marriage there.

Her husband was in fact put into prison because of [INAUDIBLE] he was in a butchery, the family butchery. And they were selling some meat illegally. And of course, when he came up, the boy had to go admit guilt so the parents weren't involved type of thing.

And she had to battle on, on her own. Quite hard times. Anyway-- and it was only Jewish people who really helped her in those days. And so she always had a wish to become Jewish.

When she went to a rabbi and talked about becoming Jewish, he said, you must read these books, and that book. But Pam wasn't kind of a book reader. She wanted something handy, real. So it was something that never came to pass.

But when we were back then in South Africa with the situation that we were very much involved in the Jewish community not the religious community so much, but she was working for Jewish businesses in the clothing industry. I was working for PG Glass, which was one of the original Jewish big companies in Johannesburg.

And we had Jewish neighbors. So the whole thing came up again. And of course, the orthodox synagogue was just around the corner from our house where we lived.

But what was the moment where you're saying, I belong here. This is where I feel at home.

I don't think we knew that we belonged there. We only realized that when we actually joined. But I mean, as far as I'm concerned, it was-- I found out, for instance, that my birthday-- in fact, I realized that on my 22nd birthday in London, that was also the day when Israel became its own free state, which impressed me tremendously at the time. Purely as a brave new state, a Jewish state.

And when we were in Germany, me working for ITT, Pam had decided that her children would all be born in England. And she [?Gretel?] the first girl was born in a hospital just around from where we lived.

And she'd made friends with the nurse there. And so she went back to have our son [? Karl ?] from Germany, to be born there. And then she persuaded the nurse Mary to join us in Stuttgart and look after the two babies.

And as kind of assistant. Because Pam never wanted to be a home kind of mother. She always wanted to be a working mother.

And then one evening there in Markgronigen we were talking. And Mary said, you know, I'm a-- what do you call it? What's the word again? Somebody who is psychic.

A medium?

A medium. I'm definitely a medium. So we said, look, let's have a session then. So we had a session.

And almost at once, who comes, who appears to her [INAUDIBLE] she [? obviously ?] [? explains ?] my mother, my dead mother. My late mother. Who was--

I know you mentioned this earlier.

Yeah.

Way back in the very first part of our interview.

Yeah.

Did Mary know anything of your biography?

Nothing at all. I mean, we never talked about it. And what did my mother talk about? Johannesburg. Johannesburg.

And I got more and more worked up about it. Because that's the last place we wanted to get to. With all the upheaval in South Africa. What on Earth? You know, when I hear this voice coming up [INAUDIBLE].

So eventually, I said, Mary, let's stop it. So had a kind of [INAUDIBLE] Ouija board [INAUDIBLE] OK.

[INAUDIBLE].

Yeah. So you know, at the time, I thought it was just one of those impossible kind of things. Maybe Mary two years later, we were in Johannesburg.

And how did that happen? Had somebody offered you a position there? Did you apply for a position there?

No, no. I mean, my great job at ITT became-- ITT became more and more impossible internationally. They just overreached themselves. Always working on takeovers, always squeezing all the takeovers out of money. And then of course, there was an economic, what do you call it-- a crisis, when oil prices shot up.

And there was kind of financial breakdown. And of course, the ITT shares were then falling along with all the other shares. And ITT, when they took over other businesses, they used to give people shares. And they wouldn't pay cash.

But they would give them shares. ITT shares. And of course, as long as the ITT shares were rising at the stock exchanges, people didn't mind to have a condition that for the first five years, they weren't allowed to sell the shares.

But with the financial disaster then, of course, that didn't apply anymore. Nobody wanted the ITT shares. Because they were losing value all the time.

And that was the beginning of the end of ITT within a short time. OK. It hadn't all happened yet. It was only beginning to happen when towards the end of my time in Germany.

But we had arranged-- my younger sister married into a German family in Namibia. They were conversely the biggest, most richest family in Namibia. They had the only department store in Windhoek.

And I was, of course, had been until I joined ITT, with the John Lewis Partnership as a senior manager. And the son who was running that particular part of the [INAUDIBLE] in Namibia. He came on buying trips, always stopping off with us in England and later in Germany.

He kept saying, no, why don't you come? Take a holiday. And then you can consult me on our shop in Windhoek. And so this thing had gone on.

And then in 1974, or '72-- three. '74, I think. 1974. Just when things with ITT went not from bad to worse, but began to be a possible disaster. I had made it possible to get a job [INAUDIBLE] ITT [INAUDIBLE] in South Africa.

And so the idea was that Mary would take our two babies to her mom in England. And Pam and I would go to Johannesburg and deal with this ITT issue. And then we would take a three month holiday in Namibia with my younger sister, and of course, her cousin-- her husband's brother to look after at the shop.

So all that then sort of materialized. And one thing led to another. And we got hooked for South Africa. The family, the [PERSONAL NAME] family had not only that department store in Windhoek they had also a very large part of the central area of the city, which they were wanting to develop in a big way.

And the guy from Johannesburg, who was developing [INAUDIBLE] kind of business-- he was making a shopping center with a big hotel. And so I got involved with him. And he said, why don't you join me in my property development? It's going great. [INAUDIBLE] building big hotels and shopping centers all over the place. And it was a complete novelty in Southern Africa.

So I jumped the gun and joined him. So that's how we got then to Johannesburg. And he was very helpful to find for us a nice big house, [? good ?] swimming pool in Johannesburg.

But then they did that financial crisis starting with the oil prices become so high, hit also South Africa. So all the financial backing for his developments was stopped by the big banks and insurance companies.

So I suddenly found myself unemployed. With a big house there. And Pam found immediately a job in the clothing industry in Johannesburg. And that's how I joined PG Glass, which eventually became Glass South Africa, a very successful family, Jewish family company.

And we got more and more involved in the Jewish side, both ways. And then Pam had a partner for a time who was the leader of a-- one of those half-- what do you call it? Not seriously-- not orthodox Jewish. [INAUDIBLE] orthodox Jewish synagogue.

You mean like conservative, or reform, or something like that?

Yes. Something that where men and women sat side by side. And it was more like a club.

And [INAUDIBLE] felt that was-- that wasn't the genuine thing. And as I mentioned before, we had the shul synagogue directly down the road from us.

And suddenly, one day, Pam noticed in the-- [INAUDIBLE] something on the radio. And it was in [? The Star, ?] in the

newspaper, about the synagogue opening free telephone access for anybody in trouble at any time of the day-- professional psychological person attending to the problem.

And she phoned up that number. And to just to congratulate them on what a wonderful thing they were doing, which was answered by the [INAUDIBLE] of the shul.

They had a very good talk. And she said, you know, we've been looking for a way. Oh, she said, you must talk to my husband. I will arrange it. And that's how we--

And he was a very straightforward rabbi. Didn't beat around the bush, and said, oh, you think you-- this is your choice. But if you do choose-- if you make the choice, it will be tough for you. The children will have to go to a yeshiva college. Take them out of your existing schools. And you have to come to shul every Friday, Shabbos.

And in no time at all, we were in. And we were met as friends, not as sort of foreign intruders or anything like that. We made friends for life almost straightaway in that shul.

What drew you there? I mean, you were born Catholic. You're not particularly from a practicing family, but not an anti-religious family. Had you-- had anything appealed to you earlier in the tradition you were born into? Or did you have any religious feeling? Or was it a religious impulse, a need for having a faith community, that brought you to that congregation? Can you explain a little bit about how it is that it spoke to you?

In every possible way. I mean, our neighbors and the people in businesses which we knew-- not all of them were religious Jews, but they were all very nice people. The kind of people you feel you trust. Trustworthy.

And then I had already this kind of love for Israel, the way that they'd risen out of nowhere after the war. And coupled with my own birthday by coincidence, maybe.

And we actually-- Rivka and I-- we were then [INAUDIBLE] in 1972, in Germany. Germany had no-- German tourists weren't accepted in Israel until 1972. Suddenly there was an offer for two weeks travel through Israel.

So we applied. Mary took the babies. And again, we had an extraordinary lovely time in Israel with this German group. And everything sort of added to the next all the time. It became almost obvious that we would-- when we went to that not serious kind of shul that was, shall we say, put us off.

But we always felt that orthodox sounded rather formidable. But when Pam talked to rabbis in there, and the rabbi himself, making it all a kind of straightforward issue, just make your mind and mean it, type of attitude, we were in.

And we were accepted everywhere. And Pam was immediately in with the Women's [? Guild. ?] And I got involved with the [?guarding of the?] shul [?so I had to do guard duties?]. But we were among [INAUDIBLE] people. We were friends with almost automatically.

So the extra hardship was, of course, to keep to learn, and learn, and learn, never stop learning. The fact of keeping Shabbos, what a difference it made to our lives. Can't believe.

You know, before that, the weekend was just one rush, rush, rush. And of course the week as well. And now suddenly, you had a complete break. You sat back. You went to shul always with nice people. Hello?

Yeah. I'm here. I'm here. Can you hear me?

I can hear you.

OK.

Except I can't see you.

Can you see me now? Can you see me now?

No. I don't know. Is there anything I can do?

Well, it's interesting, because at my end, now when I'm speaking, I've turned the video off. But I had turned it on before.

And we're coming, I think, close to the end of our interview. But I wanted to ask a few more questions. And let's see if we can keep on going this way.

OK.

And the question is is that did your life in Germany-- did your biography, did the fact that you belonged to the Waffen SS of all things, did that ever make a difference? I mean, did anyone raise any eyebrows when you joined the community? Did you ever share your biography to the same degree that we have right now?

Yes. It's like in every good household or family, the last thing that people were going to ask is any awkward questions about my past. Not even the chief rabbi, or any of the rabbis, would actually probe me on that kind of detail.

And I was obviously also not-- I didn't want to flaunt my Waffen SS thing. It was a problem that I solved, I think, in my way, quite successfully.

But you know, it wasn't something I could sell as a good deed or something like that. Was it?

No. I mean, that's one of the reasons I bring it up. Is because it's ironic. It's very--

[INAUDIBLE].

The fact that I could lead my Waffen SS group away from fighting and killing the Russians, or the Russians killing them, and so on. You know, I felt proud I was able to do that in the circumstances. And I certainly had always intended to stop killing wherever I could.

But you know, it's a kind of tricky, tricky thing to talk about. Isn't it?

Well, of course. Of course. So this is why I wonder.

I was accepted, not only by the people there. I was accepted by two chief rabbis, or three, actually. We were accepted in a family. No questions asked. No awkward questions asked.

And the fact that we were positive and helped [INAUDIBLE] making our contribution at the shul, that's all that counted.

Did this turn in your life make you re-evaluate the events of your earlier life-- the events of your growing up? And did you know more or explore more as to what Germany had done, and what German Jews' experience had been? Or had that already happened before you take the step to actually convert to Judaism?

Well, I mean, I-- certainly, it had its effect on me. But it wasn't part of my daily life. It was something that I would read about. I bought the books that were written and read them.

[? Even in ?] that South African community, where there were-- I met a number of survivors from death camps. And the strange thing was, with all of them, I had especially good relationships, without any explanation, if you like. It was quite amazing.

I am wondering-- did you tell your family back in Germany? And was there any reaction on, let's say, I mean, your family is not just German, but German Austrian [INAUDIBLE] you know. And did you ever share this development

with them? And that you and Pam convert and that your names now are Itzhak and Rivka?

Well--

How did they react, in other words?

They reacted positive, because we have had always good relationships with my family. They sort of said, well, you know, great, but [INAUDIBLE] our friends when they met them. But they weren't automatically following our footsteps, if you like.

I mean, the most difficult thing was always the question of food and meals, and that kind of thing. Which sort of has its moments of problems, [INAUDIBLE].

You know, when they invite you, can they be up to kosher standard. Those were kind of the internal problems that sometimes made the relations difficult. Still do. But [INAUDIBLE].

OK. Did conversion to Judaism mean that you became a religious person? And now I'm looking not at the traditions and the rituals, but the faith aspect.

Yeah. We both did. And the fact that-- I mean, Rivka and I are quite different personalities. I think that's why our marriage is so strong. Because she makes up where I'm not so strong and vice versa.

And it certainly gave us a tremendous uplift. So as far as meeting my parents, we were sort of-- they found us better people to deal with. More friendly, more helpful, [INAUDIBLE].

The relationships-- all our relationships improved, whether they were religious or not.

That's quite something.

It is amazing.

I'm pausing now because in some ways, I'm at a loss for-- I mean, I have more questions. But yours is such an unusual story.

Maybe. Maybe we can talk again. There are probably definitely more stories to be talked about, or more lives to be explored if you like. I mean, certainly for us, what I've said to you is just a few words, which certainly doesn't cover the whole range.

OK. Then I would suggest that maybe we look at this in the following way. That for the purposes of our interview, our official interview, what we talked about over the past several days-- and I think it's been four or five days, for the past two weeks, is we consider it a whole. That we consider this an entire interview.

And if we speak in the future, then as an accretion to it. That is, if there are questions that I think of, and I will get in touch with you. If there are things that you think we talked about so much, but we didn't talk about this, and this is an important aspect of the story, then you get in touch with me. And we set up sort of like a follow up time.

Yeah.

And then we can address those things. But for right now, I would say, do you agree that-- let's say we've kind of come from one end to another, and full circle, when we talk about your life and your growing up years. The Holocaust, and you finding a spiritual home in Orthodox Judaism.

Yeah.

Would you agree that we've kind of covered at least the bases?

Yes. I would say that is roughly so, yes. But obviously, there's a lot more that can be said on every page, if you like.

Yeah. Yeah, true. So then let's do it this way. I will conclude this interview. And there's a few words that I say at the end to do that. And we keep in touch.

And as I say, if there are more questions that I will have, if there are more aspects, or events, or thoughts that you have, we write them down. And then we make another appointment. How does that sound?

Very good, yeah.

OK.

But tell me, what are you actually going to do with what you've got now?

OK. With what we've got now is that-- and I'll say this while I'm still recording so it would be obvious. Is that this interview will be pulled together to become one after all of the several days that we have talked.

And it will be a part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum archives. And our policy now is to put all interviews online so that people could hear them, see them. Your children could. Friends and relatives could from wherever they are. And it would be through our website.

So that is what, when we sent out a release form to you and you sent it back, and you signed it, that is basically what was done. Now if you have any reservations about this interview being shown online, then you must tell me. And we would explore what those reservations are, and then make some adjustments.

But generally, this is how it is handled. And in addition to that, after it goes online, we find a way of getting you a copy of it. So that would either be sent electronically, or on a flash drive, on a DVD. And that will most likely happen when we get back to the office.

Yeah.

So does this sound acceptable to you?

Well, it's perfectly acceptable. I've got no problem.

OK. OK. Thank you. Thank you. And thank you then for all the days that you have sat and shared your story with me, your thoughts, your impressions, all of our technical glitches that we have overcome in the end.

Before I say my concluding words, is there any final thought that you would like to share with everybody who will be listening to this interview?

I'm very, very grateful for you for having interviewed me so sympathetically. And I apologize for my old age forgetfulness so many times.

But as far as I'm concerned, this interview was a very nice, meaningful experience for me. Thank you.

Well, thank you too. Thank you too. And I will say then that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Helmut-- now Yitzhaq von Schweitzer on June 30, 2020. And thank you again. Thank you very, very much.

OK. Thank you.

OK. So now I am going to-- hang on just a second.

Can I come and say goodbye to her?

Yes, yes.

Yes, absolutely. Wait a second though. I want to stop the recording. And I am finding it difficult to do so. Hang on a minute. There we are.