

*Kindertransport Association Oral History Project*  
*Interview with*  
**BEN ABELES**  
November 13, 1993

KEY:

- [brackets] describe action in the interview
- *Italics* indicates a word in a foreign language, spelled correctly
- {*italics in bracket*} indicates a word in a foreign language that may be incorrect
- {brackets} indicate indecipherable words

[FILE: EL\_B\_11\_BenAbeles\_11\_13\_93\_mp3]

Interviewer: Can you tell me your name?

Ben: My name is Ben Abeles, and I'm from Prague originally.

Interviewer: When were you born?

Ben: June 23, 1925, in Vienna.

Interviewer: But you just said you were from Prague originally.

Ben: Well, because my father worked for a company called {*Shta Cognac*}, which was a liquor company in the Austro-Hungarian empire. And they were first based in Trieste, and they had branches all over the Austro-Hungarian empire. And so we moved from Linz to Poland, and we lived in Poland for a while. And my mother went to Vienna to have me, because she didn't quite trust Polish doctors. And then during the Depression my father lost his job, and we moved to Czechoslovakia because my father was originally Czech. So that's how this came about that I was born in Vienna and ended up in Prague in the thirties.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names?

Ben: My father was Arnošt or Ernst, and my mother was Selma. And she was from Linz, actually. She came from a family of seven siblings, and my father from four. In my father's family they were horse traders in a village near Prague. And they were kind of half Czech, half German. The Jews that lived in Bohemia tended to be more acculturated to German culture. So I grew up in a bilingual home. My mother couldn't speak Czech, and my father spoke Czech fairly well.

Interviewer: And German?

Ben: And German, of course, was their natural language.

Interviewer: And you spoke?

Ben: I started speaking German, and then German and Polish, because I went to a Polish school. And then after we came to Prague in 1934, I learned Czech, and I immediately forgot my Polish, because Polish and Czech are so close together, and I think children are not able to keep two languages that are so close together.

Interviewer: Did you ever speak Yiddish?

Ben: No. As a matter of fact, Yiddish was forbidden in our home, because my parents were very assimilated, and we looked with great disdain on what we called *Ostjuden*. And so Yiddish was considered bad manners.

Interviewer: Did you have other siblings?

Ben: I had a sister, Mary. And my name was Fritz, by the way, which shows you to the degree that my parents were trying to assimilate us. And she was four years older than me.

Interviewer: Did other people live with you in the house?

Ben: No. Well, as a matter of fact, now that you mention it, yes, because when we came from Poland to Prague, our financial situation was rather strained, and so at first I remember my mother used to make gloves at home, and then we had a lodger for a while. But then our situation got a little bit better, and we were just the four of us. And of course we had a maid, because even the poor people had maids in those days.

Interviewer: Did your father get another job?

Ben: No, my father started a business. He had a small factory with mustard, vinegar, and soup cubes. And he borrowed the money for that, I believe, from his brother, who lived in Paris, from Charles, who later played an important part in my life. We'll get to that later maybe.

Interviewer: Let me backtrack a little. Was your family at all religious?

Ben: Well, not really. Not only were they assimilated but they were also not religious. And in fact, I didn't have a bar-mitzvah. And on Yom Kippur, when my friends were in shul, I had no one to play with, and I used to hang outside the synagogue waiting for them to come out and play with me. So no.

Interviewer: But did you know you were Jewish?

Ben: Oh yes. My colleagues at school let me know that, the ones that were not Jewish.

Interviewer: How?

Ben: Well, by calling me “dirty Jew.” Well, when I first came to Prague, when I went to the elementary school, there was only one Jew there, and the children were from rather working-class, proletarian background, and they were quite anti-Semitic. Some of the mothers of the children were selling eggs at the market. They were very poor people. And I used to get into fights. And one of the boys was also calling me “you dirty Jew,” and I beat him up. And then the other children carried me on their shoulders and proclaimed me the champion of Palestine. So that was my first contact with Palestine. There was more to it later.

Interviewer: Do you remember starting to hear about things changing? Were your parents aware of what was going on in Germany?

Ben: Well, yes, because of course it started in Germany and then— I remember, years after the war, I had an aunt, the only aunt that survived the war, sister of my mother (Aunt Gretel is her name; she recently died at the age of 93), was warning my parents. And she told me later, after the war, that my parents said, “Well, it’s not going to come here,” and so on. But then it came to Austria, and my mother had several siblings living in Austria. And I went through some correspondence recently, and I read how she was writing to somebody saying that things are getting so difficult, and she was trying to get my sister, {Muts}, Mary (her nickname was Muts), to France, where my Uncle Charles was living, my father’s brother. But I guess nothing came of it. But yes. One had to be very stupid not to see the writing on the wall.

Interviewer: What kind of things did you see?

Ben: Well, the speeches of Hitler that we were listening to; the Nuremberg laws; and then of course the *Anschluss* of Austria, and then came, in the summer of ’38, the Munich with the Sudetenland being taken over.

Interviewer: Do you remember hearing your parents talk about these things? Or did you talk about them with your friends?

Ben: I don’t remember distinctly, but I remember remembering. I mean, yes, the subject was talked about. We listened to the radio a lot, and whenever Hitler was giving a speech, I remember the ranting and raving. And yes, there was talk about this.

Interviewer: Do you remember the German troops crossing into Czechoslovakia?

Ben: Yes. Well, first they took the Sudetenland. My father had a sister (Ida) and her husband, and they were in the Sudetenland, so they came to Prague. So that was sort of the first step. All the Jews from the Sudetenland came to Prague, because that still remained independent. It was called *Protektorat Mähren und Böhmen*. And then in March ’39 (I

believe it was the 15<sup>th</sup> but I'm not sure, of March '39), the German troops moved into Prague. Our apartment was just behind the museum on *Vaclavskem namesti*, the main square of Prague. And I remember seeing the tanks rolling and parking not far from our car, and the German soldiers. The traffic was going on the left side in Prague as it had in all the Austro-Hungarian empire. In two days, it was changed to the right side. So this is my recollection of the invasion of Prague.

Interviewer: Did your relatives from the Sudetenland come to live with your family?

Ben: No, but they were living close by. By the way, talking about anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia, after the Germans took the Sudetenlands, the whole thing started turning rather ugly in the school too. Just before Munich, we used to start wearing gas masks to school because there was imminent danger of war. And I remember, the children at school were beginning to be less friendly to us.

Interviewer: How many Jews were in your school at that time?

Ben: Well, I went to high school, and it was the third year high school at that time. I was 13. And the third class was divided into A and B. And all the Protestants were in one class, and the Catholics and the Jews were in the other class. And we were probably, in our class, out of 30 or 40 kids, we were probably 15 Jews. Abeles, I was always the first, of course. And we used to have religious instruction. We were obliged to have religious instruction. You had to declare your religion, or you could also be without religion, *bez vyznání, konfessionslos*. But you had to declare something. So you had to say you had no religion. But we went to Jewish religion, and we were very disrespectful to our rabbi. And sometimes when he just came into the class, he said, "Abeles, Neumann, and {Oplatke}." We were the three close friends. He threw us out of the class even before the class started.

Interviewer: And you said the other children became less friendly after the Germans came to Prague?

Ben: Yes. And they started blaming us Jews for the difficulties. And I don't remember the details, but somehow the sense of it comes back to me.

Interviewer: The sense of?

Ben: That the children were more hostile to us, the non-Jewish children. But this became much more later on, of course, as things started tightening up. And I was already gone by then.

Interviewer: Do you remember how the subject of sending you away first came up?

Ben: Yes. My parents started talking about the possibility of— I had this uncle in Paris, that he would arrange something perhaps. And then we started going to a committee which was

on *{Rubešola}* (was the name of the street) in Prague, not far from us. And I remember getting a number and registering me there, with my mother. And then one day the news came that I had been accepted into a Kindertransport. We of course didn't call it Kindertransport. We called it *{děti}* transport, which is the same in Czech. And then I remember going with my parents to *{Yevani}*, a resort near Prague, where we spent a weekend. And this was our last weekend together.

Oh, I now remember another episode before that. I was vacationing with my friend, Neumann, who then was my best friend and still today is my best friend. And he's a physician in Chicago. We were embracing each other in the railway station when I was going back to Prague, in order to go to England. And so that was my last vacation with my friend.

And then I went with my parents for one weekend, and then we were packing and I was going to go. And I remember that I was really looking forward to going, tremendously, because I considered this to be a great adventure. I was 14. And I didn't see the implications that I might never see my parents again. Or maybe I didn't want to think about it. But I felt that I couldn't show my parents how I was excited about it, and I rather was showing a lot of sadness. And so my father said to me, "Well, you know, you don't have to go if you it's too hard for you." So then I had to try and convince him that, well, it's very hard but I really would like to go.

And then on the night that I was going to depart, I remember the whole family was gathered: my uncle and aunt and cousin, who were from the Sudetenland. We went to the railway station, and I remember my father walking with me on the railway plank. It was the main station in Prague. It was *Wilsonovo nádraží*, the main station in Prague. It was in the evening. And he was telling me that I should never lie, and I should clean my teeth, and giving me all kinds of admonitions. And then we embraced with my parents, my sister, her boyfriend, his brother, and I mounted the train. And I don't remember how long we stood there, but then the train started moving, and I still remember my mother sobbing. And it was the last I saw of my parents.

Interviewer: What did they tell you about your adventure?

Ben: Well, they were telling me that I was going to go to England, and that my guarantor would wait for me there. Well, that was she. Wolf was her name, and she was a relative by marriage to my uncle in Paris. My uncle in Paris had arranged that, because in order to be able to go to England, you needed a sponsor. So this family sponsored me, Wolf. He was an ophthalmologist on Wimpole Street in London, which was a street of doctors. But the only thing my parents impressed on me was the seriousness of the situation, and that I was their hope for the future. And that is the extent that I heard about it.

Interviewer: Did they tell you that they would join you?

Ben: Yes. Well, what I knew was that my sister was going to join me. And she was four years older so she couldn't come on a Kindertransport, but she was going to get a job as a domestic in England, and she was going to wait for a visa and join me. But of course that never happened. And about my parents joining, there was less talk about that, or maybe no talk.

Interviewer: Do you know what eventually happened to your parents and your sister?

Ben: Well, they all perished in the concentration camp. We know exactly when. The last correspondence— I mean, we used to correspond with my parents quite frequently until the war broke out, and I still have saved all the letters. I still have them. And then we used to correspond through neutral countries: Holland and Hungary and France. But then, one by one, these neutral countries fell to the Germans. And so finally we were corresponding through the Red Cross. We were allowed to write maybe ten words. So in ten words I had to put in as much as I could to make them feel that I'm in good shape. And then I used to get back, on the other side. And the last one I got was that *{Muts} und Hans verheiratet* (Muts, my sister, and Hans, her boyfriend, were married), and Father had his gallstones operated. And this was a problem he suffered for many years. And I still remember him crying in agony when I was a boy at home. And that was in '41. I think that was in the summer of '41.

And then, from what I heard later, my sister and her husband then volunteered for resettlement in Poland, because this way they were assured that they could stay together. And my parents, I found the exact records (the Germans were very thorough in this), they were deported to Theresienstadt in February '42. And then they were deported from there to Auschwitz in June '42. And this is information that I found after the war, of course. And also my sister could have come to England, because the affidavit had arrived before the war started. But she didn't want to leave her boyfriend. And that's why she stayed.

Interviewer: Let me backtrack a minute. Do you remember about the train ride? Were you with people you knew?

Ben: No. I knew nobody there. And my recollections are— I think that when the train moved out of the station, I realized that I'm on my own. It was really a very incredible feeling, now that I'm on my own, and there's nobody else there. It's just myself. I have to fare for myself. That was one feeling. And then the other I remember is that when we crossed the border into Holland, that the children (myself included) started shouting out of the window, "Free Hitler" and so forth. And then I remember in Amsterdam—I don't know if it was Amsterdam; in some town in Holland—some Dutch ladies came on the train and gave us buns and lemonade to drink. And the next I remember, I had never seen the sea before in my life, and it was a tremendous thrill. And I remember seeing the sea and then getting on the boat. And I'd never been on a boat on the sea, and being on a berth. That was Hoek van Holland, and crossing to Harwich. And then the next morning everything was so green and so beautiful and prosperous, and so different. And we played a game of

soccer. And then we took the train to Victoria Station. And I had a label, a tag. I still have the tag.

Interviewer: Do you remember your number?

Ben: Well, as a matter of fact, I'm going to check, because I found my name on the list of Czech children of Nicky Winton. I never knew about him. And so I asked Miss Ross for his address, because I'd heard about him at this meeting here. And I was going to write to him to find out if my name was on the list. So she said, "Well, I have the list here. Let's go and look." And I was absolutely flabbergasted that the first name was Fritz Abeles, with my number, and it said the address is the West London Synagogue Association, my guarantor, on {3} Seymour Place. And I knew all this. And saw it there, after 50 years. It's just unbelievable. And my address, Hotel Bailey, which sounds very fancy, but I didn't live there. I worked there, in the kitchen. And that I'm a trainee waiter. But that wasn't correct. I was a trainee cook. You asked me about the number, so I'm going to check whether the number on that tag agrees with that number.

Interviewer: So you arrived at Victoria Station.

Ben: So I arrived at Victoria Station, and I was waiting there. And then a very elegant lady came forth when my name was called, and she hugged me. And I couldn't speak to her because she only spoke French and English. And I didn't speak English. And so she took me to her home, and I remember they had a daughter Audrey, who was somewhat older than I. It was a very elegant home on Wimpole Street. They were specialists, doctors who lived there. And I remember breakfast: grapefruit and eggs and bacon. It was very strange food for me, because at home we only had delicious rolls for breakfast. And then the next day, they packed me off to school, Taplow Grammar School near Maidenhead in Berkshire. And so I really had very little contact with these people.

Interviewer: The school they sent you to, was it a school for refugee children?

Ben: No. Actually, so I arrived in July, and there was school holidays, and so the only people who were there were refugees. And there were maybe three. The three of us were there, if I recall correctly. There was one boy from Poland, and then there was one from Austria, and maybe one other. I only remember these two or three. And it was a kind of an inexpensive boarding school for lower middle class boys, boarding school.

Interviewer: Did the three of you talk?

Ben: Yes, yes, we did. Actually one of the boys, I helped him to get correspondence. I think he was Polish, and somehow his parents sent a letter to him through my parents, because they had connection in neutral countries. And so I was sort of a conduit for correspondence. And I still think I have his letters. I still have one of his letters. I don't know why I kept it, but I have it. But yes, we did stick together a bit. But I didn't make

any deep friendships with these boys. And then of course the school started when— I remember now that actually the war started before the school started. And they billeted in our school soldiers. Then the school started. And it was a very, very hard experience, that school, because they treated us very harshly, the principal. And the food was just terrible. And the children were unfriendly to us, and they were calling us “dirty foreigner” and of course also “Jew, Jew boy.” And the children were getting care packages from home because we didn’t get enough food. And we used to beg them for food. They had what they called {pat} boxes, where at 11 o’clock or 10 o’clock they went and took their goodies out to eat. And they wouldn’t give us anything.

And so I used to make extra money by running errands to what is called the {Tack Shop}. That was a small store outside the school, where one could buy candy and cigarettes. And I used to run errands for the boys. Of course it was strictly forbidden to leave the school. And I used to get money for that. But when I got caught, then we were punished severely by the headmaster. We were beaten with a cane. We had to lie on a chair and pull our pants down. He first used to cane our hands, and then he used to cane our back side, to the extent that I had red stripes on it afterwards; I couldn’t sit.

And we had to go to church on Sundays. And we had to sing church hymns, and “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem” and so forth and so on. And then also it was winter, and it was so cold, because the school was just heated by small coal stoves, and if you didn’t sit close to the stove, it was very, very cold. And then I hated school anyway because I did very poorly in Czechoslovakia. I flunked the last year. And if I hadn’t been sent away to England, I would have probably not been able to go back to school anyway, not because I was a Jewish (that came later) but because I flunked. So I really didn’t like school, and I especially didn’t like to calculate 10% of 10 pounds 6 shillings and threepence.

Interviewer: How did you learn English?

Ben: I think it took me about two or three weeks, or four weeks, to learn English. I just started talking English, almost instantly. I think that I was talented for languages. I had some background already. I spoke Polish first, and then German and Czech. And English isn’t so different from German in certain ways. I studied a little bit before we left. *Englisch Lernen an Vergnügen*, I remember, was the name of the book, Learning English with Pleasure. And I really picked it up so quickly.

Interviewer: When you were in the boarding school, was there any adult you could talk to? Could you tell your sponsors that you were having a hard time?

Ben: Well, it’s interesting because my sponsors, I didn’t have much contact with them until the following episode happened. As I told you, a British army billeted a unit there. And one of the soldiers (Basil Drake was his name) befriended me. And he actually lived in Maidenhead; his family lived in Maidenhead. And they were a very simple working-class family. And he started taking me there for dinner. And the family actually wanted me to move to them. They wanted to adopt me, so to speak. And so the headmaster contacted

my guardian, and my guardian came out at that time to interview these people. And they were very disapproving of them because they were much beneath their class. And they didn't allow me to do that. They also were corresponding—I wrote to my parents and asked them for permission whether I could live with them there, and so my mother wrote to—And I still have that letter, because after the war I found some of the correspondence of my parents. It was left with the uncle of my brother-in-law, my sister's husband, who'd survived the war. And there she says that "Frizl (Fritz, Ben) wants to move there, and we really can't advise him. Could you see, yourself? They seem to be very good people." And so this is the only other time that I saw where they did this. And I was very hurt by that, because these people were very good to me. And they didn't want to see me afterwards because I think that Mrs. Wolf must have offended them. Maybe she told them something insensitive. But I don't know what transpired. So I really didn't have anyone to talk to. And I hated the headmaster, Mr. Williams. He was a cruel man.

Interviewer: Did you write that to your parents?

Ben: No, no, no. Not at all. No, I didn't. But I did write to them about wanting to leave the school. But I was rereading the letters before I came here, and there was such a disparity between what my situation was and how they perceived it. They were writing to me whether somebody is washing my laundry, and if I'm cleaning my teeth, and if I have regular stool, and if I'm studying, and how much my studying was important for them, and that their son is going to be an English lord. And they had such expectations of me. And they were treating me, in a sense, like I was still the spoiled brat that I was at home. And here I was having great difficulties in making it. And I found that really a great burden, in some sense. So I was really writing letters home which were fantasies. And I was, in a sense, protecting my parents. I couldn't let them know. So really, in a sense, I was kind of carrying two burdens at that time. But I didn't begrudge. I think I was mature enough to understand it at the time, what was going on. And so they were imploring me not to leave the school. But I was so unhappy in that school, and the committee, I think they were quite happy to see me leave the school, because I guess somebody was paying for that. Well, there are long, many, many more stories about the school, but maybe some other time.

So in April of 1940, and I was 14 then, the committee said that I should come to London, and this teacher from the school put me on the train, and I was off to London. And I was by myself. And I was given an address to go to. I believe that at the station I was met by a German refugee couple, and I stayed with them for a few days. They lived in Kensington. And they took me to a catering agency, an employment agency, and in fact they were called Cook, that agency (nothing to do with the travel Cook). And they found me a job, and my first job was in Chelsea Cloisters, and it was in Chelsea, which is a district near King Street. It's a sort of an artist colony now, I believe. And the job was washing pots. And I remember, some of those pots were bigger than I was.

Interviewer: Did you want to be a cook?

Ben: At that time, I didn't know what I wanted to be. Later I had many fantasies of what I wanted to be.

Interviewer: Like?

Ben: Oh, I wanted to be a doctor, or— I think I wanted to be a doctor, a medical doctor. I never made it. And then I rented a room for three shillings a week. And I was washing pots. And then for some reason they fired me, and I don't know whether I wasn't washing the pots properly, but I think I stayed there maybe just for a few weeks. And then I got another job. And this time I climbed in the world, because I became an apprentice cook. And I had a job in Hotel Rubens, which is on Buckingham Palace Road. And the reason I took that job was because a friend of mine from the school—now it comes back. I used to call him Fatty because he was fat.

Oh, and then I remember another boy from the school now. And I don't remember now his name, but it's kind of interesting. Maybe I should say this now whilst I think of it. I remember I visited his father. He lived on Edward Road. And we were talking about his son, and then the father started molesting me sexually, touching me. And I didn't let him, and I left. That was a kind of a shock to me because it was the father of a friend of mine.

But Fatty was working in the sister hotel Rubens, and so he told me that this job was available, and that's how I got the job. I went to interview. And it was a rather fancy hotel. It was on Buckingham Palace Road, which of course is right next to the queen's palace. And I worked in the kitchen there, and I was a *hors d'oeuvrier*. They called me *hors d'oeuvrier*. They had French names then. I was helping make hors d'oeuvres, very fancy salmon and stuff like that. And I remember one day we spent hours preparing a dish, and I was taking it to the dumbwaiter (it's a little hand-pulled elevator where it was going up to the dining room), and I dropped it on the floor. And the chef was chasing me with a knife. And I locked myself in the toilet, and he was saying, "You dirty Jew" in French, "*Sale Juif*." And that was the end of that job.

Interviewer: So at 14, you went to this job interview yourself. You were living in a room by yourself. Did you cook your own meals?

Ben: Well, I used to eat at the places I worked. And I don't think I was long out of work.

Interviewer: And who washed your clothes?

Ben: Well, that's interesting that you ask that question, because I think what happened was, I had a lot of clothes from home, still. I mean, my mother really gave me about 100 pairs of socks. And I used to use my socks, and then I'd put them in the basin, and they used to accumulate in the basin. And I think by the time I was through like 50 pairs of socks there, then I just sort of pulled them out and started using them over again. So I don't

think I washed my clothes much. I don't remember my underwear, what happened to that. [laugh]

So that's the job. So then I went to look for another job. Where I lived whilst I was looking for another job, I don't remember, because then I lived in the hotels where I worked. But then I got a job at Hotel Bailey. And that's what's mentioned in this list, that I'm living in Hotel Bailey. And there I also had a job as a commis cook.

Interviewer: We just have five more minutes, so I'm going to ask you a few questions. When did you come to America?

Ben: Oh, I came to America in 1956. And actually after I finished my career in the catering business, I joined the Czechoslovak air force, and I took some correspondence courses. I also went to school later. Before that, I worked as a waiter at night, and during the day I went to a school, Pitman's College, preparing myself for matriculation.

Interviewer: Let me just ask you this about the Czechoslovak air force. Did you try to be a pilot?

Ben: Yes, yes. Well, they interviewed me and they asked me, "Well, you know, what was your father?" I said he was a businessman. So he said, "Well, why would you want to be a pilot? You know, Jews really don't want to be pilots." So then I said to him, "Well, at least let me be a gunner." So they wouldn't even let me be that. So I was a ground mechanic.

So after the war, I returned to Czechoslovakia. I demobilized there. And I was looking for my parents and I didn't find them. And then I found my friend Marcel, and I went to live with him and his parents, and they treated me as a son. And I kind of skipped high school and went directly to university. And I got a degree in physics at the university in Prague. And then in '49, we all went to Israel. And I worked for the meteorological service there. Actually my first job was as a waiter. I couldn't get anything. It was very hard to. So it came in good stead. For a few weeks I worked as a waiter, and I always made more as a waiter than as a professional. And then I got a job with the meteorological service, and then, in '51, I got a job at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot. And I did my Ph.D. there in physics, and then I came to the United States in '56.

Interviewer: And where do you live now?

Ben: In Princeton, New Jersey. And I work for a company called Exxon, that make a lot of pollution.

Interviewer: Do you have children?

Ben: Yes, I have three children. In fact, I decided to make this interview because I wanted them to have something. I have a daughter who lives in Boca Raton. She's married and has two children. And she educates her children at home. And then I have a daughter in Toronto, and she's a schoolteacher, teaches first and second grade in the inner city. And then I have a son in the state of Washington, who is studying to be a nurse.

Interviewer: Did you talk to them when they were growing up about your experiences?

Ben: I talked to them about it. Yes, I did.

Interviewer: What do you think is important to carry on to the next generations?

Ben: You mean, from this experience? Well, I think that as a result of my childhood in England, I think that my family really had a hard time, in the way it manifested itself. And I think that perhaps what I'd like for them is to understand me better, so that they can understand better why and how I impacted their lives. I think that's basically— I don't think that I like for them to see that as a model of how they should live their lives. But I think that maybe I'd like them to understand where I come from and why I am the way I am, and how it may have affected them.

Interviewer: By why you are the way you are, what do you mean?

Ben: Well, why I was the kind of father that I was.

Interviewer: What kind of father?

Ben: I think that I was not a good father figure, that I had difficulty in being a father. I was more like a friend rather than a father figure. And I think that confused my children.

Interviewer: Do you think that was because you lost your father?

Ben: I don't know. I know one thing, that I always thought that they should do things on their own. I wasn't as supportive as I might have been. I thought that they should solve their own problems. And in that sense, I wasn't a supportive parent.

Interviewer: I would love to talk with you for hours longer. You're wonderful. And if you have something you feel it's important to include, I urge you to say it now.

Ben: Well, one thing which came out of this meeting here is, I think I felt, at the time when I was in England, very unworthy, because I was living under depraved conditions, in some sense, and I was so estranged from the milieu of my parents, that I always felt, "How could I ever face them?" And I think this certain feeling of unworthiness has stayed with me all my life. And I think this has somehow made it more difficult for my family, the

way it manifested itself. I think this was the negative experience that I got out of my growing up in England. And in fact, I remember going back to Czechoslovakia and looking for my parents, and I was really afraid I wouldn't find them, but I also was afraid that if I *would* find them, how would I face them? I'd seen them as a child, and now I'm a grown man. And the expectations they would have, the love they would expect of me, and in meantime I didn't feel that anymore. And I think it's only now, and I think especially this reunion here, has brought me close to my parents again.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Ben: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]

