

*Kindertransport Association Oral History Project*  
*Interview with*  
ERNEST GOODMAN  
June 6, 1998

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- Interviewer: My name is Anita Gross and I'm here to conduct the interview. Today is June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1998. We're at the Holiday Inn by the National Airport in Washington, D.C. And we're continuing an interview which was originally started on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1995, tape number 95FLB1. Could you introduce yourself please?
- Ernest: My name is Ernest Goodman and I come from the city of Breslau, now named Wrocław, now in Poland. It was in Germany when I left and when I left, it was August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1939. I arrived in England in 1939, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, so just 8 days before World War II began.
- Interviewer: And how old were you at that time?
- Ernest: I was fourteen.
- Interviewer: And when is your birthday?
- Ernest: Birthdate is the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1925.
- Interviewer: Did you travel alone or with anybody you knew?
- Ernest: I didn't know anybody, but I traveled by train. My mother took me to the railroad station and I traveled with a number of children from Breslau and we arrived in Berlin late at night on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1939 and the next morning—we spent the night in an orphanage—then the next morning we walked to the station and got on a train to Holland and eventually England.
- Interviewer: When you went to the station—you mentioned it was just your mother—where was your father?
- Ernest: My father had already left.
- Interviewer: Where did he go?
- Ernest: He went to England and from there to Canada.

Interviewer: When was that? When did he leave?

Ernest: I'm not quite sure.

Interviewer: Was it quite some time before you?

Ernest: It was probably a year earlier.

Interviewer: And just so we have a record again, what were your parents' names?

Ernest: Their names were Guttman. My father's name was Herbert and my mother's name was Rose. She was born as Rose Wagner.

Interviewer: Did you ever see your father again?

Ernest: No, I did not. I did not. There were family circumstances—divorce and so on—but I never saw him again.

Interviewer: And your mother, did she survive the War?

Ernest: Yes, she did. She escaped to Italy during the War, sometime in 1941. It's a very exciting story—don't know all the details yet and I never will because she's dead—but she went to Italy and from there she took a boat to the Panama Canal and from there to Bolivia, where she found work and survived the War.

Interviewer: And did you reunite with your mother?

Ernest: Yes, I did. She came to England in 1950, when we first met again. And then we came to the United States in 1953 and she had meanwhile immigrated to the United States, so we met up again. A very happy reunion.

Interviewer: Let's go back just a little bit. When you arrived in England, did you know where you were going to go? What were the circumstances of your arrival?

Ernest: The circumstances were very strange and very chaotic. I remember Liverpool Street Station, railway station, first stop for all the members of the Kindertransport. And we lined up at a table and I was given a number— I was 14, not easy to adopt. I was approaching manhood at 14. So people really didn't want to adopt 14 year olds, at least, that's my impression. That's all right; I didn't really want to be adopted. But I was given a piece of paper and the name on it was Bernard Brown. And there was a telephone number and under the telephone number, it said, "YMCA, Great Russell Street, London."

I made a call to Bernard Brown in very bad English. I had really very, very little English although I had learned it in school for three-and-a-half years, I hardly knew anything but the weather: "It's warm today. The sun is out. The post office is over there." Stuff that didn't help me much. So I called and it didn't make very much sense. I simply went there and met Mr. Brown. And Mr. Brown told me that they would sponsor me, which meant that the YMCA would put me in a hostel for about four or five weeks, and after that they would place me on a farm to work for a farmer. And he pressed my hands very hard and he said, "Press! Press! Press!" He wanted to see how strong I was; could I milk, could I do farm work. And he was satisfied that I could and the next morning I found myself on a train to Derby, in the midlands of England.

At the station in Derby, I was given a voucher. It was a comedy, really, in many ways, how I communicated. But at the station in Derby there was a man who introduced himself as Mr. Greenwood. Mr. Greenwood took me in a car. I carried my suitcase—we had one suitcase, of course, you couldn't have more than one suitcase—and I took this heavy suitcase to his car and he drove me to Park Hill, which became a hostel. There were quite a few refugees. Park Hill, Eggington, Meehan, Derby.

Another hostel where they put refugees, the YMCA, was Flint Hall, Flint Hall. I just met several people in our conference who had been to Flint Hall, near Henley-on-Thames.

So I was taken to Park Hill by Mr. Greenwood and found that there were a few refugees and also a few English boys. The organization was called British Boys for British Farms. British Boys for British Farms. And they were going to be trained for land work, to be placed on a farm later, as I was.

Although, there's a slight detour. I hurt my ankle. The boots were very, very rough and I simply wasn't used to wearing very, very tough leather boots. And several boys had trouble. I had very, very much trouble. So they couldn't at that time place me on a farm, so they sent me to a refugee hostel at Barham House, a famous refugee hostel. Hundreds of boys. Hundreds of boys.

Interviewer: Barham House. Where's that located?

Ernest: That is located in Claydon, near Ipswich. Claydon, near Ipswich.

And there I was put into the sick bay because the foot was in very, very bad shape and it took about two weeks to heal it with different sulfur powder and stuff. There was no penicillin in those days. So they did take care of it and after about two weeks in Barham house altogether—Learned how to do cold showers and things of that nature. It was a rough camp. And after that, I went to Flint Hall, the other YMCA hostel—I'm going into great detail here, but anyway—that hostel I stayed about four weeks, did some more training—although we didn't really learn that much—but eventually I was placed on a farm in Petersfield, Hampshire. And there I worked for quite a long time.

Interviewer: Now what was the nature of the training they gave you?

Ernest: Very little, really. We worked in the fields. There were a few cows and they put a few of us under the cows and made us milk— It was all hand milking in those days. Very few people had milking machines. So we messed around there and then started to milk. We didn't learn much, we really didn't. But we were there and learned to rough it—it was a pretty rough life. Somebody just wrote a book about this whole situation: *British Boys for British Farms*. The author is Barbara Vessey. And in fact, we write to each other. She said, "I wish I had met you because I could have written a great deal about the refugees." The only thing she said about the refugees was that many of them were failures. That is to say, they didn't become land workers.

Interviewer: So what reason—

Ernest: To school, they went into different other things. Although I did work on the land for a long time. I was on the farm near Petersfield for a long time and then from there, I went to another farm and worked there for quite a long time. It was a very lonely life. I was the only refugee.

Interviewer: So you were separated from the other refugees?

Ernest: Oh yes! Yes, yes. Totally alone. I was totally on my own and worked sixteen hours a day in the summer. Very hard work. Very hard work.

Interviewer: Were you given any English training at the time?

Ernest: No. No, but I learned talking to the farmers—a certain type of English—and then eventually— I was extremely lonely some of the time, totally on my own, sitting in the evening and so on, talking to the cows frequently in the cow barn. So I decided that I would go to the Buckinghamshire War Agricultural Executive Committee because I understood that they had hostels from where they went people out to farms to work to cut sugar beets, to cut mangles—feed for cattle—pick up potatoes, ditch digging, where you dug ditches across fields in order to be plowed. It was essential—supposedly essential war work—but I was always had suspicions that it was main work stuff.

But anyway, I went to that hostel where it was less lonely because there were other refugees there. And I met many from Vienna, some from Czechoslovakia, some from Germany, and it was a good life. We went out together, working on farms.

Interviewer: So then you were able to speak German with these other refugees?

Ernest: Spoke some German; some had practically forgotten it all. But we talked about things that interested us and mutual support– gave each other a little mutual support, psychological.

Interviewer: So what year was that?

Ernest: That was– That was '40– '41, '42. I was in those hostels working out on the farms. It was '41, '42, and into '43. It was probably more '42-'43 really, because by '43 the bug had bitten me that I must join the army.

Interviewer: While you were working in these hostels, were you in communication with your mother?

Ernest: I received– I didn't know what happened to her. I assumed that she'd been deported and that it was all over. I remember I was feeding the chickens and I had just come into the barns and the mailman arrived on this bicycle. And he called to me, saw me, and said, "I think I have a letter for you! Unusual, isn't it?" And I said, "Yes, it certainly is." I hadn't had a letter in years. And that letter came from an uncle in America. And it said, "You'll be happy to know that your mother is safe and she lives in Bolivia." And I was like paralyzed. I had to digest it somehow. She is alive in Bolivia of all places. What is she doing there? He gave me her address. He said, "I don't know whether a letter will ever get to her, but you can write through the Red Cross." And he gave the Red Cross address.

Well, to tell a long story short, I wrote her a letter which never got there. I wrote another one four or five months later and that did get there. And I received a reply. And so I knew she was safe. I was worried about her, of course, but I knew she was safe.

Interviewer: This was the first time you'd heard from the uncle?

Ernest: Yes.

Interviewer: And how did he find her?

Ernest: She wrote to him. I assume that America was not in the War yet. America didn't come into the War until the end of '41 and this must've been in '41. So from '39 to '41, I had no idea. I think I received this letter in the fall of '41.

Interviewer: Do you still have that letter?

Ernest: No. I've often looked for it. I have a lot of things, but that letter I do not have. I don't know where it went.

Interviewer: Did you, at that point, start any kind of relationship with this uncle?

Ernest: Yes. I wrote to him, he wrote to me, so that was— We had a relationship by correspondence. He had been to England earlier and went through all these things. He was a physician.

Interviewer: Do you have any other relatives who you have left?

Ernest: My brother.

Interviewer: Your brother.

Ernest: He worked on a farm in the Midlands somewhere, but it was difficult to get to each other. First of all, we didn't have any money. And secondly, you couldn't always get away and it was rather difficult to travel during the War. It just wasn't easy. By train, you sometimes had to go to London to get back to the Midlands. By bus, it was just not possible. But we did write to each other from time to time. He left Germany early in '39, directly, not in the transport. He went directly to a farm. How this was arranged, I don't know. Somebody, obviously, was putting this together.

Interviewer: I just want to go back briefly. Do you know how it was that you came to be on a Kindertransport?

Ernest: No. When I first saw the people at the Jewish community area responsible for immigrants and immigration, I went there after school with a friend frequently and we put our names down for Honduras, for Bolivia, for Cuba, for Chile. And they laughed at us. They took our names and laughed at us. And I said one day that I'd heard about the Kindertransport. He said, "What? I never heard of that." And I knew that some children had already gone on it. That was in early '39.

Interviewer: You knew because they were friends of yours?

Ernest: Yes. They were— Friends would suddenly disappear, or they were about to leave. And I said to one lad, "Where are you going?" He said, "Well this is my last day at school and I'm going to Kindertransport." So I said, "I ought to see about that." And he said, "Well they're all full. All five." I remember that very well. "They're all full. They're packed." And when I went to see them, actually the second time, they said, "Oh yeah, Kindertransport. Yeah, yeah, but that's all full. Forget about it." So I said, "Well could you give me some indication of where we might go or we could go?" I wanted very much to go to Palestine as it was then. I wanted to go to Aliyah preparation for Palestine. I want to become a Halutz, a pioneer. I was all gung-ho. But he said, "Well, that's out of the question. Nobody goes there anymore. And Kindertransport, well, there's a long list." First he said he didn't know about it. Second time he said there's a long list and he said, "There's no hope. There's no hope. There's a long list and the transports are full already for the rest of the year."

All I can tell you is that at the very beginning of August of 1939, I suddenly got a letter out of the blue that said, "You're going to join a Kindertransport." Well, my uncle had—who had been in London had pulled some strings. He also found the 50 pounds. 50 pounds had to be paid to the British government. He found the 50 pounds—I don't know where he found it, whether he had it or what—he paid 50 pounds to the government, this was of course for further immigration, and I received this letter that you are on a Kindertransport leaving Breslau on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August. I think I had less than two weeks. I had to be ready and there were some instructions. I had to see a physician to get a physical.

But I don't remember very much else except that my mother started to hustle around to do some shopping. She said, "You're going to need things and you can only take one suitcase and you only have 10 marks and what's going to happen?" So suddenly I was on the Kindertransport.

Interviewer: Did your mother participate in also trying to find avenues for you to leave the country?

Ernest: Yes, yes. She did too. She did too. We did all we could. But there were so many rumors all the time. Shanghai. Shanghai has opened up. And everybody knew that meant that you had to go somewhere and put your name down. I had my name down for probably a dozen countries at one point. Oh, she worked at it, too. And so did we.

Interviewer: What was her reaction when you received the letter that you would be on the transport?

Ernest: She— Outwardly, she said, "Good." She said, "I can't be happier." There were some tears. But my brother, of course, had left already and she was terribly upset when he left. I remember we came back from the railroad station and she threw herself on the bed and cried for two hours. I didn't feel good about that. I figured then, "Now I'm leaving. What's gonna happen?" She said she's very, very happy. And I remember saying, "You know, it'd be so much easier for you to find a place. Encumbered by a kid, it's going to be difficult for you. And if I'm gone, you'll be going, too. And I'll see you soon. And if not in England, then maybe later on." The war hadn't started yet. I said, "Maybe later on. Maybe we meet somewhere, but we meet again. It'll be much easier for you on your own."

Interviewer: Were you feeling that confident?

Ernest: I don't remember. I guess so.

Interviewer: It was a very adult thing to say.

Ernest: Yes, but having seen her already, after my brother left, I— At that time, we were thinking all the time, thinking "What next? Where will we end up? Will the family ever be together again?" Everybody had left, except my poor grandfather who was left behind.

Interviewer: What about any cousins? Do you have any cousins left?

Ernest: Yes. Two perished in Auschwitz. They lived just across the border in the province of Posen. And they were deported. We received—we, I didn't—but an uncle in America received an SOS from them, a telegram. "Save us." It said something to the effect of "Save us." Nothing could be done.

I had a cousin in Cuba who went there together with his father, my uncle, and they later came to the United States. And an uncle in Cuba. They'd all been to concentration camps and they were let out only when they produced a visa to prove that they would leave the country in two weeks.

Interviewer: So that was prior to '39?

Ernest: That was after Kristallnacht.

Interviewer: Oh.

Ernest: That was probably December, January– December '38, January '39. They came back from the concentration camp sick—pneumonia, beaten, scars. They looked haunted.

Interviewer: And this was all– Did your family all live in an area together?

Ernest: Yes, fairly close.

Interviewer: What were your uncles' names?

Ernest: Uncles names were Wagner. It was Arthur and Leo and Fred. Those were the three uncles. And they all– they all did all right in the end.

Interviewer: So you were able to meet up with the after the War as well?

Ernest: Met up with them briefly. The one died, then the other one died fairly soon after that. And so we did meet however. We tried hard to establish some kind of family life again in Chicago. My mother had moved to Chicago. We came over from England. My brother stayed in England, he's still there. But we all tried to gather in Chicago. It was never the same, of course. It was never the same. Great interruptions. But we tried to become a family again, tried to pick up the pieces, but it never really went well.

Interviewer: Did they have children as well?



Ernest: Yes. They had— The one had a daughter; she is terribly sick with diabetes. The other one had a son; terribly, terribly sick with diabetes. And the other one had a son. One each. One son, one son, one daughter. And the other son was all right. He was in good shape, died just quite recently in White Plains, New York.

Interviewer: So you were in contact with some of these family members?

Ernest: Yes, yes. We did take up again and sort of try to make up for lost time. I must say, I was happy to be able to introduce my children to them briefly at least. They got to know them. But I have no family left, except for my brother in England. So they did meet some of them. But it was a heartbreaking thing at my daughter's wedding, six years ago, hardly any of my relatives there. Nobody really.

Interviewer: I'm sorry to jump around again, but I wanted to ask you, during the period you were at the hostels, doing the farm work and that sort of thing, were you reading at all? Did you carry on any sort of intellectual stimulation?

Ernest: I was always something of a reader. And I tried hard to read a newspaper, if not every day, then at least every other day or so. In England I got the *Daily Express*. I found it easy to read. And how I got it, I don't quite remember. But I did try to read they *Daily Express*. Very soon, I borrowed books at a lending library, although it meant quite a walk to the lending library. But I looked around and I started to read the old whodunits—the Baroness Archie, an English whodunit writer, Warwick Deeping, whom I really don't like very much—but there were some books and I started to read them with a dictionary. I tried hard to read.

All that by candle light! By candlelight.

Interviewer: There was no electricity where you were?

Ernest: No. No electricity. None. We had spirit lamps. What do they call them?

Interviewer: Gas lamps?

Ernest: They weren't gas, but a fluid. Yeah, okay. And by that, or I found candles.

Interviewer: Lanterns!

Ernest: Yes, that sort of thing. And I found that candlelight puts really the best light: two candles, one each side of the book. But it wasn't easy.

Interviewer: Did they have running water?

Ernest: Yes, there was water. In the beginning, you washed outside. Outdoors. Only outdoors. Went outside the back door and washed there. I brushed my teeth with icy cold water. The farmers, the people I lodged with, were amazed. They'd never seen a toothbrush. And they watched me in awe. And I suspect they used the toothbrush behind my back.

Interviewer: So the toilet, was it an outhouse also?

Ernest: Yes, an outhouse. Yes. Buckets.

Interviewer: Buckets?

Ernest: Buckets. Rather large buckets.

Interviewer: Were you responsible for maintaining the—?

Ernest: No, the cowmen used to take that and dump it in the ditch somewhere, as soon as it was full.

Interviewer: So what happened: you were at Petersfield and then, what happened at that point?

Ernest: Well, the farmer— This was a gentleman farmer. I don't want to mention his name, but he owned much of the land in the area. And he paid us five schillings a week. He paid the farm boys—I actually was the only one at that particular farm and the only refugee—and he paid me 5 schillings a week. And then when farming was considered essential, they had to pay more, between the unions and the government and so on, they had— they agreed that farm workers must be paid well. So my salary went up from 5 schillings to 17 schillings. At that point, he said, "I can no longer afford to keep boys. I can keep the cowmen and the second cowmen, but we have to make due without." He did not feed the cattle very well, did not make much milk, did not make much money out of the farm.

So the YMCA was called: "Pick him up!" This was after about 18 months or so. "Pick him up! I can't afford to keep him any longer." Because he had to pay 30 schillings to the cowmen to house me and feed me, too, which was too much. He said, "I just don't have that money." He did, but he didn't.

So I was sent to another farm, again in Hampshire, North Hampshire. In Fleet. Fleet. It was another farm. And there I worked until one day I said to the farmer that I've decided to leave and go to a War Agricultural Executive Committee hostel. I just sort of told him that. And he said, "Well, you can't do that. You are supposed to be here. And you know what we can do with people like you: internment." And for special emphasis he repeated the word: internment. I thought well, I doubt that very much. I will pack my suitcase. And I told him—I put a pause in about four days, five days—I said, "I'm leaving and I'm going to Princes Risborough, where this was this hostel. Princes Risborough. In

Buckinghamshire. And I left! And I went there and it was full of Viennese, and full of Germans and so on. It was very different. Still hard work, but it was very different.

Interviewer: Now, it sounds like you were not under the control of the Jewish Refugee Committee?

Ernest: They claim I was. But I was never visited. They made—I assume they made a phone call to the farmer who said, “All is well. He’s okay. He’s all right.” A vicar. They didn’t have enough social workers. They Jewish Refugee organizations. They were all drafted, all the social workers. And so they asked some minister or other to check on this refugee. I have the records, actually. I got them from the—

Interviewer: CBC?

Ernest: Yes. And so they sent them to me and one very interesting notation says—I have it actually in my room. It says, “Should be visited because we understand that he goes to the Baptist church with a farmer. Check this out.” I think Mr. Laskey, Neville Laskey had looked through the records. What happened was that sometimes on Sunday night they had socials and there was good food. And the farmer would say, “We have a social tonight. Will you come?” And I used to love it because there was food there and they played some music and so on. And I went! Along with them. Change of pace, change of scenery. And that was it.

So when they called him and asked, “What about his religion?” He said, “Well, you know, he comes to the Baptist church. He’s all right.” And the Jewish organization, the Central Fund, they said that he should look into this. I don’t think anybody did. They were short of people.

Interviewer: What type of food were you eating, aside from at the socials? What was your typical—?

Ernest: The food was—

[The tape is cut and resumes]

Interviewer: We were talking about what your main food was during that period when you were working still at the hostel.

Ernest: Well, it was good British food, somewhat strange to me. Steamed puddings, we didn’t know that at all, but I got to love it in the end and now I absolutely adore it. A steamed pudding with custard: I don’t think there’s any better dessert in the world. So, apple pie—All the usual. Porridge for breakfast. Bacon, and that was difficult in the beginning because I had been brought up kosher, but before long I accepted it because it was very important to eat well. So there was bacon usually for breakfast. Or ham. It was just the usual English fare. Quite wholesome.

Interviewer: So you felt that you were pretty well nourished?

Ernest: Pretty well nourished much of the time. It depended where I was. There were times when things were not so good. But on the farm, it was very good.

Interviewer: So you said you were kosher before. Had you maintained any religious practices once you got to England?

Ernest: After arriving in England? No. No. The first High Holidays, some people showed up from Derby, I think, and they were rather poor people. They took us to synagogue. And then they fed us, but they had very little. They really didn't eat; they gave it to us.

Interviewer: You say "us"? There were others involved?

Ernest: Yes, they took some others from the hostel. They took— I think there were five or six of us that went to the same house, actually. At one time, there were just two of us taken to a particular house. The man was a tailor working for a large store and he really had very little. And he kept feeding us, but I didn't see them eat.

Interviewer: This only happened one of the holidays?

Ernest: That happened once. I don't think I went anywhere after that at all.

Interviewer: Now you have some pictures from that period when you were in the hostel?

Ernest: Well, this was soon after I arrived, probably the second or third day. That's Park Hill in Derbyshire.

Interviewer: Where was this photograph taken?

Ernest: A friend took it. He had a box camera and he wanted to take a picture of his friends, so he said sit on the paddock and we'll take a picture of you.

Interviewer: What was your friend's name?

Ernest: I don't remember. But I had special issue sneakers without laces. We didn't have laces. We were never given laces, but I went— after a few weeks, I made enough money to buy some shoelaces and I got those.

And the other picture was taken probably six months later, and you can see the badge, the YMCA badge.

Interviewer: And this was taken by whom?

Ernest: British Boys for British Farms. This was taken by a professional photographer. Somebody sent me, I'm not sure who it was, wanted me to have a picture taken. And so I did. But I cannot tell you all the details. I'm shocked sometimes to look at it because I don't remember who did it, who had me have that photograph taken.

Interviewer: Do you remember having a jacket like that?

Ernest: Yes. Yes, I had a jacket that was getting smaller and smaller.

Interviewer: That was one you had brought with you from home?

Ernest: I brought it with me. And it was in the top of the suitcase. And I put it on and there already it's a little tight. And it got tighter and tighter. I think within a year I had to give it away.

Interviewer: Were you able to use many of your clothes that you had brought with you?

Ernest: No. I couldn't. I grew out of them very quickly with farm work. I grew wider, taller very quickly. I couldn't use a lot of them. It was always difficult to buy them, however. I went to Marks & Spence in Petersfield once, I remember. I bought some socks. I bought some underwear. And I bought— I think I bought a shirt, or was it trousers? Maybe the trousers a little later. That's a little faint now.

Interviewer: Did you bring any memorabilia with you from home?

Ernest: Yes, I brought a— Unfortunately, I don't have it here, but I think in the earlier part I showed you that photograph album that I treasure so much. It's a little album that was given to me by a school friend at my Bar Mitzvah. She sat in the top tiers of the synagogue, the women sat, and when we came out, she gave that to me in a box. And I still have it. And I treasured it because it had pictures of my mother, my brother, my little cousin, and a number of others. Vacation pictures that I treasured and looked through every now and then. It sustained me greatly, greatly. I never forgot. It's now lying on my desk. I think we have a picture of it, in the earlier part.

Interviewer: We had spoken just briefly before about whether or not the Jewish Refugee Committee was involved in your stay and you brought with you some papers that you have just recently acquired?

Ernest: Yes, I recently acquired these. They're not very satisfactory. The dates are wrong. They're very mixed up. And—

Interviewer: How were you able to obtain this?

Ernest: I wrote to the Central British Fund. And they told me that, yes, they had them, indeed they did have them and that they would be glad to send them to me if I sent them— I forget exactly the amount. It may've been 30 dollars. Whatever. I said I'm coming to England next year and I have enough patience to wait and I'll be in to pick them up. I went in and picked them up and they said, "You don't owe us anything unless you want to give us a donation. We do need donations because children in Bosnia and different places." So I did make a donation. And they gave me these.

Interviewer: Before you read anything from them, do you just want to hold up so we can just see what the forms looked like?

Ernest: There's page one, page two.

Interviewer: As far as you know, you knew nothing really about this until you received these forms? You didn't know there was this kind of maintenance or anything like that? Or "continued interest" of any sort?

Ernest: It says here, "17<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, '41. Miss Tilling asked to visit boy to find out whether he would like to move to a youth group where he could have Jewish contacts." I was never asked. I was never contacted. I know I was never contacted because I would have jumped at the opportunity. I was alone on a farm. And this never happened. I'm sorry, it just didn't happen.

Interviewer: What other sorts of entries do they have there?

Ernest: Well, another very interesting thing is after I joined the Army, they're talking about what about appointing a guardian. And really that Lord Gorrell is the guardian of all of us, every "Kind." They're talking about guardians. I was 22 years old. I'd been to hell and back. I'd been wounded. I was in the hospital for 7 months. And you would talk about appointing a guardian? I never quite understood that.

So I'm not being critical of the Refugee Committee, I can just say that they never saw me and I never saw them. I am extremely thankful to Bloomsbury House because I did get a coat from them. I needed a winter coat very, very badly. I did not bring one; there wasn't room in the suitcase and I just didn't have one, not warm enough to work on the farm. So I went to Bloomsbury House and got myself a coat. Unfortunately, it was extremely elegant. It must've been donated by a very wealthy person, with real silk lining. To work on the farm, it was nice and warm; a little incongruous, but I appreciated it. They asked me did I need a scarf, no I had a scarf. So it was good to get that coat. So the Refugee Committee was okay from that point of view.

Interviewer: You were involved in and you went to the hostel with the War Agricultural Committee. What happened at that point in your life? You said you started getting this bug to join up

Ernest: Yes. Well, first of all because I'd worked there with friends— I made friends very quickly at this hostel. We had a great time. I began to live. You know, a 16-year-old beginning to get ideas about having a good time. You want to go to a dance, maybe, you want to go to the movies. We were paid very little, but a little more than the farm paid. So it was quite a good life there. Talking to friends in the ditch and while hedging, cutting down hedges so that those fields could be plowed, and doing all kinds of other farm work with others. With friends you could talk to. You didn't only have to use your imagination; you could give it free event. And started to get interested in girls. Land girls, with the women's land army. They were out there with us some of the time and we would start to flirt around a little bit. It was nice. It was new. Different.

So that was okay. Starting to take some girls to the pictures. There were some magnificent wartime pictures, romance. Wonderful. Absolutely wonderful pictures, well made. Those sustained us again and before long, I felt like, you know, everybody's wearing a uniform. I should, too. It's our war. We should get involved.

Interviewer: Was that a discussion among the group of you?

Ernest: Yes. From time to time. And some said, "No, no, no. Never. I'm not going. I'm doing war work and I don't think I'm gonna go. I'm not suitable. I'm not this, I'm not that." Some may not have been fit enough. I don't know.

Interviewer: And your Zionist aspirations, at this point, what were they?

Ernest: Well, the Zionist aspiration had flagged by then because I had no opportunity really to be in contact with them any longer. I would gladly have gone to Palestine if it'd been possible, but it really wasn't at that time.

So I sort of thought I was going to live in England forever. I was quite ready to. I started to like the country very much, love the country very much. I had integrated quite a bit, talked quote "blimey" like the rest of them. I had a wonderful time. Went to the pub with the cowmen, and we had a good time. Later on, with the lads in the agricultural hostels, we were pretty much English. And every now and then went to London where we saw, of course, all these uniforms. The whole country was a troop carrier.

Interviewer: Hold on a second. So at this point, you felt that it was time to look into that?

Ernest: Yes. Started to look. As I say, rarely a day went by without my thinking about joining up. And I wasn't sure which service. At 17, I went to the recruiting office in North Hampton because I was in Newport Pagnell at the time, at the hostel there. I asked them about the RAF. And I could see myself flying off as a kite and chasing around. They said, "Look,

all the training facilities are packed full. There's nothing open. In any case, you are not old enough, are you?" And I said, "Well, I'm almost 18." But they didn't buy it. They said, "Well, do you have any proof?" I said, "No, I don't have any proof. I'm 17, but I'll soon be 18." So they said, "Well, why don't you come back when you're 18." So I did.

I asked a friend of mine, "What do you think about it?" He said, "Absolutely. We ought to go. We ought to go." And so the two of us went. And before long we were in Glasgow.

Interviewer: And you went to where? The Royal Air Force?

Ernest: No, no. They said, "Well no, don't go to the Air Force because the training facilities are packed full. We wouldn't know where to send you at the present time." So they said, "What about the army? Cannon fodders are always needed." So I said, "That'll do. Good enough. Yes." They said, "Well, we'll send you to Glasgow for basic training. You'll hear from us soon. And then you can decide what you want to do. You can go to the Engineers, you can go to the Artillery, you can go to the Tanks. Whatever you decide and whatever your aptitude." They tested your aptitude.

So I found myself in Glasgow. We did our basic training. It was cold. Mary Hill Barracks. It was cold, but it was good. It was great. I enjoyed it very, very much. And then from there, I went to my county regiment, which was the North Hampshire Regiment.

Interviewer: Let me just ask you, at this point did you feel you were really English? Did you feel integrated, or were you still a refugee?

Ernest: Very much. Very much English. Into the British forces. I didn't care whether there were any other refugees there. I was in the British forces.

So in the North Hampshire Regiment, I did the infantry training. Very tough. And just before the passing-out parade, just before the end—music with all the pomp and circumstance—the commanding officer called me in. The sergeant had talked to him and he said "You're officer material. We think you're officer material. Have you thought about it?" I said, "Yes I have thought about it but not very much." He said, "You can't really do it. You're not British-born." So I said, "Well, okay. Okay. If those are the rules." "Well," he said. "There are some field promotions, but we don't take— but you have you be British-born." I said, "Okay, okay. If that's what it is." And I saw the commanding officer and he said, "You know, you ought to change your name because you'll soon be in the field and I would not go with a name like yours."

Interviewer: Which was Guttman at that time?

Ernest: Guttman. So he said, "Have you thought of a name?" I said "Well, Goodman. Is it good enough?" "It sounds wonderful." From then on I was Benny. Nobody new my name.



Interviewer: Benny?

Ernest: Benny. Ben, Benji, Benny. Always. Right through.

Anyway, after that passing-out parade, there were still three or four days left before we either went for further training—either tank training or further infantry training. There arrived a contingent of Guards, recruiters from the Brigade of Guards. It was a Welsh Guard, the Coldstream Guard, the Grenadier, a good number, a Scots Guard. They looked through our records and I guess they looked through mine, too, and my name was called. And they said, “They’re looking for first-class shots or marksmen. We’re looking for people that are 5-foot-9. We’re looking for people that have done this assault course and that assault course. And all these different things. We’re looking at training records and you will qualify. Do you want to volunteer for the guards? We’ve lost a tremendous number of people in Italy.” I said, “Yes, yes, yes. Absolutely. The Brigade of Guards.” And that was it. He tested us. We had an interview and all kinds of different things.

And within a week, I was at Bright Camp for further training. And now it really began. I thought I had been trained with the infantry, but now it really began. At 5 in the morning with a swim and a run. It was really just unbelievable.

Interviewer: So you really conditioned?

Ernest: It was—I felt tough. God, I felt tough. So that was wonderful. They assigned us to the Coldstream Guards. My friend Archie and I went to the Coldstream Guards. They said, “All right, you’re a Coldstream Guard.” So that was a great honor. I could hardly believe it. So we were the first Jews since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Interviewer: Really? How did you know that?

Ernest: There had been one—I asked them. They looked through the records. There had been one General Greene, quite a famous author. He served fairly briefly and he wrote, “They died with their boots clean.” And that was it. So we were the only two Jews. They didn’t care, really. You do the training, you’re assigned and that’s it.

Interviewer: This is when you mentioned that you had a dogtag that said Jewish on it.

Ernest: Yes.

Interviewer: And that was issued when you first went into the infantry?

Ernest: Yes, and you kept that. You weren’t allowed to temper with government property. You couldn’t change it, you couldn’t do anything. But I did.

Interviewer: You scratched it out?

Ernest: I scratched it hard. Once we were in the field, once I got over there. And I put on there "Atheist." I couldn't quite bring myself to put Baptist. It just didn't feel quite right. And I had a friend who was an atheist in the army and we became pals. He always said, "I'm an atheist and you should write atheist on there." And I said, "Yeah. Good idea."

Interviewer: So the others in the army, they were aware that you were Jewish?

Ernest: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. Not— I didn't tell them every day and all, but they knew.

Interviewer: How did they know?

Ernest: Well, because we mentioned it. We mentioned it. And Archie has quite a strong accent. I didn't have much of one. I'm a mimic. I can change accents very quickly.

Interviewer: Because you don't have a British accent now.

Ernest: No, no. I've kept it occasionally, but it isn't really. So, again, I'd assume I live in a place for three hours and then I go.

So then, church parade was always difficult, of course, because you were left there be they didn't have you on the list at all. You just didn't exist.

Interviewer: Did you feel that you were treated differently because of it?

Ernest: No, never. Never. Never. This is why I say I never cared that they made dumb remarks about Jews. From time to time, without thinking, "I Jewed." And so on. But they don't mean much by that. It gives you a jolt, but that's it. But they never put me at disadvantage at all. I did everything the others did, sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less, but in the course of things that's what happens.

Interviewer: Let me pause a minute. Okay, go ahead.

Ernest: That was the Army. And eventually, of course, I went to Normandy and was wounded. I was in the hospital for 7 months recovering. And had a great time in the hospital because I didn't have any visitors, I didn't have any relatives, didn't have anybody around, and so I was visited by all kinds of kind people who worked at factories around the area of Browns Grove near Birmingham, where I was in the hospital. And they were wonderful to me. The nurses were just magnificent. I was at death's door at one time; I was told I would die that night. That nurse was supposed to go off duty at 7pm; she held my hand all night 'til daybreak. I can't say enough about the British people in wartime. They were

good to me. They were very, very good to me. More than good to me. Especially in the hospital when I recovered.

All in all, I would say that my stay in England was a great gain to me. I became tough. I greatly value the stiff upper lip that was given to me, I think. And I try to maintain it. I think I learned a great deal through all the experiences of the Kindertransport: the transport itself, my life in England. Eventually, I came to the States and it is that stiff upper lip, I think, that put me through graduate school. Luckily I got a job as a professor and taught for 30 years. No regrets. No regrets except some relatives that perished. But otherwise, I really have no regrets. I've had a wonderful life.

Married and English girl. Met in the army. She was in the ATS. We met at Buckingham Palace, right by Buckingham Palace where I was stationed for a long time doing public duties at the Palace as a Guard. And she worked at the War Office. It's a good life. I have no regrets.

Interviewer: If you could pass on something to future generations that you've learned from your experiences, your lifetime, what would you want that to be?

Ernest: Be meticulous. Learn. You can learn from everything: good experiences, bad experiences. It's the whole pattern of life that you develop through the years. And I think we became tough.

Interviewer: What do you mean by being meticulous?

Ernest: Be meticulous, be punctual. Most refugees are extremely punctual. I've talked to people who stand around ten minutes before the gong for dinner. I think being meticulous, being punctual, you can get on in life when people depend on you and know they can depend on you. And they depend on you if you are reliable. And reliability means keeping your word, your promise. And I think it's important. We learned that the hard way. No allowances were made for us. None. And I think it helped us in many ways.

Now, whether we were brought up tough or not—I think my mother was tough. She made sure that we wrote thank you notes within 24 hours of getting a present and I still do that. So you learn a lot. You learn a lot.

I learned that it's good to fight for what you believe in and fight hard. I'm not a pacifist. I did believe that the Nazis had to be destroyed and I felt strongly that I had to be a part of it. I felt the pull all the time, as I say not a day went by when I didn't think about joining from the age of seventeen. It wasn't so much ideological, I just knew that there was no other way than to go at them, to destroy them. There was no other way. They were well equipped. They were fanatic. And I fought against some fanatics, absolute fanatics that wouldn't give up a machine gun. We had to go around and through grenades at them and there was no other way. They were fanatics. They had to be beaten. And I felt I can't sit

on the farm and let other people do the fighting. It's my war, primarily. So I was thankful for all the experiences. Believe me.

Interviewer: Thank you.