Sephardi Voices UK

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Sofaer
Forename:	Julian
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	10/08/1924
Interviewee POB:	Baghdad, Iraq
Interviewee Occupation:	Architect
Father's Occupation:	Businessman
Mother's Occupation:	Housewife

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Today's the 17th of December 2012. We're conducting an interview with Mr. Julian Sofaer. My name is Bea Lewkowicz *and we're in London. Please tell me your name?*

First Name Julian. Sofaer S-O-F-A-E-R.

And where and when were you born?

I was born on the 10th of August 1924 in Baghdad.

Mr. Sofaer, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for the Sephardi Voices project. Could you please tell us something about your family background?

My?

Your family background.

Well, I have more to do with my maternal family because my father died when I was two years and three months old. The family was headed by a person who ended up being the North Star in my life, Abraham Haim who was my maternal grandfather. He was employed during the Turkish occupation by the Turks, and then by the English establishment when they invaded and captured Iraq. When the Iraqi government was set up under King Faisal, the son of Sharif Hussein, the man who led the revolt under T.E. Lawrence against the Turks, he became a member of parliament.

Now, in 1932 **[00:02:00]** Iraq was granted independence he was sent with five other representatives. Abraham Haim represented the Jewish community. He went to *Palais des Nations* in *Genève* and my grandmother Rachel Haim was the first Iraqi woman to sit wherever spectators sat. It was something unusual because she had to get herself a European costume. She has a handbag and looked quite European. I have photographs of her sitting there, as I have photographs of him. This was the background.

His father was a well-known and respected Rabbi and Cantor, his name was Nissim, *ma'alim* Naseem. *Ma'alim* Arabic for teacher, professor, and he was a gifted singer, as he had to be because he was a *Chazan*. I am told that as the musical character of the Hebrew chants had to be Arabic, and Arabic, they have *maqams*. *Maqams* are modes of scale. A very rich heritage, by the way, I believe that he introduced yet another one. I now know that all together, there are 46 different maqams but only about 7 or 8, probably 10, are in constant use up to now, and

people vie with each other in trying to guess what a particular piece **[00:04:00]** of music and what mode it is being played. What else I can tell you?

Tell us a little bit maybe about your parents. You said you didn't know your father very well because you were young when he died. But how did your parents meet?

It was an arranged marriage. My grandfather, Abraham Haim, had an important position. He may have been something like a governor, or whatever position he occupied in a town called Hillah. Hillah is near Karbala, which is where Daniel and the other prophets are buried. He had that position. My mother was the firstborn. And I dare say that my father at the age of 24, whatever he was, yes, I think was told that this is a good catch. My mother's family was told that he was a good catch. They were married. I don't think they were particularly happy. They were not. You want to talk about him?

Yes, please.

You see, he had a father who married three - had three wives. The first one produced two sons and one daughter. The second one produced one son. The third one probably clocked, 9, 10 11, however many they were. As there were a lot of mouths to feed, my father who attended his principal education was attending a *Cheder* to learn Hebrew, and at the age of 13, he went into the market. He was a very gifted businessman. **[00:06:00]** Because by the time he died, 13 - that is 20 years later he had business branches in Colombo and in Bombay, and was very successful.

One moment, Mr. Sofaer. I need to stop you.

You were talking about your father's business, what was the name of the business?

Georgi Sofaer. They had in Baghdad, in the souk, there was *khan***,** which was like a huge courtyard, on ground floor, first floor and with individual rooms, and merchants rented a room. That's where he and his father carried on the business successfully and continued after he died.

And he said it was import-export what were the importing and exporting?

I think it was sugar and tea, from India and there may have been other things as well. He sent his younger brother to India to represent him and that's all I know. I don't recall him, but I do remember I thought I had a dream I saw a man in a white nightshirt with keys in his pocket,

who turned his head and said something authoritatively. I don't think it was him, it was a memory. That's all I remember of him. Throughout life, I must confess, I didn't realize that at the time, I yearned for the **[00:08:00]** steady hand of a father which I don't have. This vacuum created by his death at the age of 33, was partially filled by my maternal grandfather, who was, I don't think it is-- Although, of course, there was hero worship on my part. But I am a critical person. He was an exceptional person. He had a face like Einstein. When you saw it, you remembered it. He had a marvelous voice and a very gifted *raconteur* and a very good public speaker. To me he was an inspiring person. I loved him very deeply, very deeply.

Just to come back to the father a little bit. What did he die of? What happened?

Leukemia. So did my mother in 1965, both my parents died of leukemia.

How did you mother-- I mean, she was very young at the time when he died.

She was married at 14. When my father died, she was 21 years old. with three children. I was the youngest and a widow became a non-person. She was not happy. I don't think she could have been, because she was the firstborn of a person who was known for his, should we call him, exceptional qualities. She dreamed about whatever she read in the French romances or the English romances. She dreamed about things in the upper stratosphere, and reality to her was completely unacceptable. You can't blame her. **[00:10:00]** She lived with him. They had two houses, one courtyard leading to another. The third wife to my father's father was producing her 9th or 10th children. So these people were in individual rooms. And this ambitious young person was kept to the room. The husband left in the morning came back in the evening, probably had dinner, and went to sleep. This was an intolerable life.

She moved in with your husband and his family.

With his family, whom she disliked intensely. I don't think they liked her either. She was too much of a strong individual. She was not an accepting person.

Did she talk about this to you? How do you know?

Absolutely. It was something one could not get away from. And when he died, she went to live with her parents, and her mother found this difficult to accept. You can't blame her. She had four daughters and two sons, and she didn't want to have one come back as a widow. She stayed

with them a few months and then declared independence, went and bought a small house near her father's house, and created her own establishment of which she was extremely proud. Looking back these were simply unhappy days for me. I had a very unhappy upbringing. She one day did something extraordinary. She went into the market, which was unusual for a person to go out, and she bought a gramophone **[00:12:00]** and she bought two records of an Egyptian singer called Umm Kalthoum and this became a symbol of independence, of which she was very proud.

We lived in this small house. I think I must have been four years old I can't remember. And eventually, after a few years, we bought a much bigger house. There she had something which was known as being exceptionally fine and sumptuous. She was very proud of the house, which of course was looted in 1941, during this pogrom. How am I doing?

Very well, very well. It must've been very unusual at the time for a woman to live by herself with three children

Very, very, but what was exceptional about her was her ambitiousness. She was a frustrated person, in that she would have liked to have gone to university or go to school or do something useful. Besides sitting at home, somebody goes to the market to buy food, comes back, the servant cooks. Day in, week in week after week, month after month, year after year, this was intolerable to her. She was a very angry woman. She did not accept what life she had. I don't blame her. She was also a very bad possessive mother.

What are your earliest memories? What are your earliest childhood memories?

At home, **[00:14:00]** life was very unhappy for me. I think it was for my mother, for my sister, and for my brother too. What was nice was on Friday evening when we walked to grandfather's house for the Friday evening-- I'm sorry.

Should we take a break, take your time.

This was very nice. The whole family congregated, the prayer was a beautiful, beautiful recitation, which he did. We all lined up afterwards to kiss his hand. Generally, my maternal grandfather's family, when people got together there was joy. There was music, there was literature, there was a lot of stories being told and it was stimulating. I think I was born musical.

My grandfather was musical. I used to put records for him one and the game was to guess what *maqam* the music was in.

This started very early, and it started with me with a love affair that lasted a lifetime with Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum. If you ask me, is there a rival to the girl over there I married. Yes. One, Umm Kulthum - she died on Monday, the 3rd of February **[00:16:00]** in 1975. She was the one I loved extremely deeply. When she sang, when I heard her voice, I felt as if I was standing at the gates of heaven. I'm not exaggerating. As I myself know a fair amount about music, and I've heard some of the greatest singers in the world. She was an exceptional artist, a highly gifted incomparable.

Your grandfather introduced you to this?

Absolutely. We all listen to her. I remember during the *Seder* night, when the ceremony, the *Haggadah* took about three hours, we were all together. One of his sons went up to the first floor where there was a radio and he heard that Umm Kulthum was singing. My grandfather and his brother, they abbreviated the thing that in a matter of minutes the whole ceremony was over. We all rushed upstairs to listen to this glorious, this amazing voice, her faultless intonation. I never heard her sing one note out of tune. What she did with the words was magical. I think that's about all I can say. I don't think I'm the only one. A lot of people probably feel the same way.

This was to me, something that lifted me out of those sordid, terrifying conditions under which we lived because there was terror inside the house. Jewish people were badly treated and were in danger certainly in the 1930s **[00:18:00]** it became life-threatening. When she sang, I suppose this sounds like an exaggeration, I felt as I was standing at the gates of heaven. And it became with me an addiction in that without hearing her at least every day, I missed it very badly. I needed it.

When we emigrated from Baghdad in 1941 to India, I was so glad to get out of this dreadful country we were brought up in, and those dreadful people who inhabited it. My main concern was what's going to happen if I don't hear Umm Kulthum, going to Bombay. And a better-off school friend of mine gave me a record, which I carefully took with me to Bombay. I more importantly explain to you how much it's meant to me. How am I doing, by the way?

Very well, and do you still listen to Umm Kulthum today?

Well, you see the answer is yes. I think about her every day. I have probably an extremely large collection of recordings about 150 hours of her performances. And I met her in 1967. After the six-day war, she gave a concert in Paris, and I had an interview with her. She was something mythical. Life would have been much worse without her.

You said your reality wasn't a good reality. What about school life, for example, how was that?

Pardon?

Your school life, you said at home, it wasn't happy.

It wasn't happy and it was not at school either. I was very-- **[00:20:00]**

Tell us a little bit about it.

Am I overdoing this, do you think? No. You see, I was a sickly child, very nervous. I came out with a rash. I made noises in my throat, I twisted my face and that was made fun of at school. I was very, very insecure, frightened in fact. I can't-- I don't know, have I painted a clear picture?

Yes.

At school, I was very antisocial.

You didn't have friends, did you?

I just was frightened and insecure

What about your brother and sister? Did you have a close relationship?

They managed better than I. They were tougher than I. They were tougher than I. I was not like the other being that I didn't give a damn about sports, about all sorts of things that boys indulged in. What I wanted, I wanted to look at books containing pictures of the Renaissance I wanted to listen to music, I wanted to read poetry, all these things which were looked upon as a bit of, call it sissy. And I think they were quite correct. They were justified in feeling this.

I also did a certain amount of drawing, here and I was artistically inclined. I have been. I have not done any of the things that other men do, whether they play football, rugby, ride horses, or

play tennis. It did absolutely nothing to me. When they did this year, the Olympics, nothing would have **[00:22:00]** made me go there to watch those crazy people try to run fast and jump high. As an architect, I didn't even bother to go and look at the buildings.

Did your mother encourage this talent?

She regarded me as being a better-- how shall I say? A better horse to run for her, than my brother and sister and was much more possessive of me. All that eventually came to an end. She moved me on to something else as we had to get out of this.

What other memories do you have? Did you join any clubs?

Yes, we used to go to the club, in the Laura Kadoori Club, which was very nice. In the 1930s this became dangerous. It became dangerous to go into the streets, for Jewish people.

Tell us about it. What happened to you for example? Do you remember any concrete--

Iraqi people are destructive, treacherous, and savage. The men cannot control the desire to molest boys in the street. Going swimming was dangerous. Walking to school was something to be apprehensive about. One did it because one had to. My mother was hell-bent on education. All her ambition was that her three children should be as well educated as possible.

The whole idea that either one of her two sons would end up going into **[00:24:00]** the market to become a businessman, she would not have accepted. Education had to come first. She fought very hard for that, successfully. I'll come to that when I tell you what happened eventually.

Who supported your mother? How did she manage financially?

My father, a year before he died, there was a flood at the Tigris, and the warehouse where they kept the sugar and tea was flooded. He had loss of a tremendous amount of money. My mother tells me that she was standing with him, she was crying because of all this waste I think. He said to her, "I did it once. I'll do it again," and he did. In one year he retrieved his losses and left us enough to be brought up on.

When he died, this task of looking after his children was delegated to his younger brother, a very aesthetic, deeply religious, Solomon, Salman - who looked after the estate for us, invested

the money and produced the income on which we lived. A person I think of with great affection and great admiration, and it was not an easy task to do.

He managed the business affairs for your mother?

He managed all this until we all grew up and took over.

Is it too--?

It's fine. It's absolutely fine. Jewish festivals, you said you remember Shabbat. What other?

Oh, my goodness. Yes, it was wonderful. **[00:26:00]** We went to the synagogue in our best clothes and of course on the High Holidays. On the way back, we went to Grandfather's house, sat in there, and Uncle Solomon used to come, and bring chocolate like a bun with a walnut on top, and I waited the whole week for that. It was very nice. I remember it with gratitude. I reminded him of it, later on.

What was the name of the synagogue where you went to? Do you remember?

Rahel Shamoun and the *Alliance* School. The *Alliance Israelite*. There were two in this particular area. Rahel Shamoun and the Alliance Israelite. Of course, on *Yom Kippur*, *Rosh Hashanah*, the whole thing was cleared and was made into an auditorium for-- Also people married there. The marriages took place in those schools. Of course, they brought up the generation. The Jewish community took education so enthusiastically they imported English teachers. They imported French teachers and made sure that the boys and girls were receiving proper education. This was extremely helpful. We were very fortunate that this was their attitude.

You didn't go to the Alliance School or did you?

Well, I didn't go to *Alliance* School. I wish I had. I went to Rahel Shamoun Abraham Haim's brother, that is my mother's uncle was the Head there. He was a very severe Headmaster. I went to that **[00:28:00]** school from one to six. That is infant, isn't it? Infant school before I changed over on to Shamash school.

Was that more religious compared to the Alliance school? Was it more religious?

Yes, we had the Bible classes. I think however the community did extremely well for my generation under difficult situations.

What about language orientation? Which languages did you speak?

Well, we spoke Judeo-Arabic at home. We learned the official Arabic Nahwi which means the classical Arabic of the Quran. Don't forget, I think people probably are not aware of the grammar of the Arabic language is extremely complex and difficult. Very few people could speak in a word-perfect manner, including well known public speakers, it was very difficult.

One learned classical Arabic. The subjects such as geometry, history, mathematics, exams were, of course, done in Arabic. English was done in English. I was English orientated, and the people who were with *Alliance Israelite*, did French. This was infant school, then there were five years of secondary school, which had not the process been interrupted would have ended up in **[00:30:00]** sitting for the University of London matriculation. My brother took it.

Don' touch the mic, please.

Pardon.

Don't touch the mic, please.

My brother took the matriculation and passed. I was not able to take the exam because the pogrom intervened and we left and had to go to India. Please move me onto something else.

For example, your grandfather, who did a lot of public speaking it was all in Arabic?

He spoke in official Arabic, spoke it extremely well, by the way, yes.

He probably spoke some Turkish as well?

He spoke French, English, Turkish. I can't remember. Once he showed me he was educated under the Turks and his final certificate had those subjects. In it was written *ali la allah* that means the highest of the high. He had hit the pinnacle in this. Let's leave it that. He was an exceptional person and to me, it was a great gift to have a grandfather like this.

You were close to him?

Pardon?

You were close to him?

Absolutely. I think he understood me. He had four daughters and two sons. One of them was the apple of his eye. I was not jealous. I fully understood that he needed this boy. He was very, very proud of him. Who again did something that had not happened before. In **[00:32:00]** 1935 or 1936, he was sent to London to City & Guild's, to become a civil engineer. He came to City & Guild's and came back like Julius Caesar returning from wherever he returned from. I don't know how many people turned up to receive him. His father adored him. I was not jealous, but I wanted my connection to him.

What is amusing is that when this boy became a civil engineer and was employed in the railways, I asked at that time when I was 14, is there something superior to civil engineering? They he said yes, architecture. I become an architect. This is what started me. I keep saying, there was no resentment on my part. I wanted grandfather to be happy.

That's what you chose?

That's what I chose. I ended up doing that.

Let's go a little bit more back to the '30s. You said the atmosphere was nice, but also you went to Palestine in the '30s. Can you tell us?

Yes. We were going to emigrate there, because my uncle Solomon, settled in Palestine and established himself there. He wanted us to go but eventually, we didn't. We went back. It was a revelation, for having left Baghdad to arrive in Palestine, Tel Aviv, and see the sea and the swimming, and then to see Jerusalem. Jerusalem to me looked unbelievably beautiful. The cypress trees and the wonderful **[00:34:00]** yellowish stone and the atmosphere, unlike anything else. I've been in Assisi, I've been in all sorts of places, Jerusalem remains something quite apart.

Did you go to school in Palestine?

No, but we went around. We went to the Dead Sea. We saw all the sights. We went to the Tomb of Rachel. We didn't venture onto the Temple Mount, but we went and prayed at the *Kotel*, the Western Wall. It was wonderful. I wish we had remained there, it would have been far better for us.

Your mother didn't want to?

No. Well, we ended up not going. She was the one who was making the decisions and must have been her decision.

Did your mother try to remarry at all?

Out of the question in those days, things like that did not happen. A widow was a non-person. She was a liability to the family and to the community, but she held her own with marvelously assertive personality. She held her own.

I was wondering whether for her it would have been not a good option to go to Palestine or to leave Baghdad in that sense, to get out of this.

I think that her, she was not very sympathetic to my uncle who was managing the affairs and possibly that put her off. She preferred to be within the orbit of her father, understandable. It was a sensible attitude.

[00:36:00] *A question I didn't ask you, who else lived with you in the house? Were there servants living with you in the house where you lived?*

Yes, we had a servant. The shopping was done by me or my brother or somebody or the other. People had a reception day, ours was Sunday, and the whole family would come on Sunday. On Monday, we went to one of my aunt's. Practically every evening was taken up with some such event going over there to sit and talk, and usually, grandfather will talk to and we would be rapt, sitting there listening in a rapt manner. There was also a lot of music.

Did people listen to music, play music?

Pardon me.

Did people play music or?

His daughter, one of my aunts played the lute and sang, and did it extremely well. I used to sit on the floor and just-- To me, she was the most amazing person that she could make music.

Did you play an instrument?

I didn't, no, but, later on, I did, yes. While I was studying architecture and while I was doing architecture, I wanted very much to become a professional violinist, and I played seriously for

16 years, but I failed. I could not have been a professional the way I played. It was a very, should we call it, a painful love affair. I had to give up because I had to earn my living. Nobody was going to keep me the way I played

When you come back from Palestine, it was the late '30s

1935, I think.

1935. Tell us a little bit about the late '30s in Baghdad.

[00:38:00] Do not forget that in 1935, there was the beginning of Arabs killing Jews. There was somebody called Ka'ouchi who attacked buses. He did what Arabs usually do, murder. They did. So, Palestine then was a dangerous place for the Jews. The Jews, of course, were forging ahead with their universities, with their education, with their business, with their culture, with their adventurous spirit, and capacity for hard work. It is very, very important.

Why did your uncle decide to go ?

He went in there in order to get out of Baghdad. He left his father in there so there was a business contact between the two of them.

Could you as a - you were at that point 9, 10-year-old - feel the political change in Baghdad?

Yes, definitely. Faisal died in '33, I think it was. The king, he was a decent person and a brave man, by the way. He came to Europe to get medical treatment and left his son, this frivolous, very spoiled person called Razi. Razi in Arabic means invader. There was an army. When Iraq became independent, they formed an army and guess what they did? In northern Iraq, there was a community called Athwiin, Assyrians, whether they were descendants of the Assyrians empire or not, I don't know.

Maybe they were Muslims, maybe they had a form of Christianity of their own. All they wanted was more-- **[00:40:00]** not independence. They wanted to manage more of their affairs. Razi sent the army, surrounded them, and massacred the lot. This set the scene from then on as to I am-- I'm possibly probably-- some people might think I'm being extremely unfair, but I'm weighing my words carefully. They were highly destructive, impetuous people. They seemed to be the robbery and murder was in their blood. I loathe the place, which when I hear people talking about the glorious days of Baghdad, forget it. To me, it's with the innermost pit in hell.

Do you remember the fear? What do you remember? How did it manifest itself in your life?

Danger, dangerous life. Walking on the street anything could happen to you.

As a Jew or as a young boy?

As a young boy, both. I had to go to the police, to get protection.

Did you?

I did. I had to.

Did they help you?

Altogether and with my nervous condition, it was difficult with that.

What happened in 1941 or what [crosstalk]?

Well, you see, what happened was that the army began to carry out one *coup d'état* after another. The Germans, the Nazis asserted themselves there because they sensed that Iraq was managed well. **[00:42:00]** It was a parliamentary democracy. The Jews occupied a high position in every sphere, but the Germans began to disseminate antisemitic propaganda. They brought with them those, they call, them artists. They were probably some form of amateur prostitutes usually blond or blue eyes, and of course, the Arabs went mad about the possibility of having something to do with a blond woman. They corrupted the whole thing. That's on the side of the Germans.

On the other side, the Iraqis were resentful of the influence the British exerted. There was this parliamentary democracy, but the army started to do *coup d'états*. Every now and then they brought down one government and instituted another. This went until the 1940s, but that happened once I think in '38 that the regent-- Razi died, he got himself killed driving while drunk, the King. There was a young, a nice boy, Faisal II. Razi had married a cousin and produced this boy. This boy became Faisal II. And the regent was the Abd al-Ilah who was, of course, the cousin of King Razi. They had to flee. **[00:44:00]** They went away but eventually, they were brought back as the revolution failed.

In 1941, it became completely different. Because on the first of April there was a *coup d'etat*. The king, the regent, and the whole government, Nuri al-Said, and all the others fled the

country. They ran away for their lives and Iraq declared war on England. England had a base called the Habbaniyah, west of Baghdad. They surrounded it with the army. Then we knew that the evil day had arrived because we lived in a street that had mostly Jewish families, but opposite us was a school building occupied by Kata'ib al-Shabab. They were like Hitler youths.

They were military boys what have you. They could hear, for instance, that we were listening to the BBC in the morning, and of course, this is when during April, this war was declared against England and we realized that we were in deep trouble. The British got together an army and marched across the desert, came, relieved Habbaniyah. This was on the 1st of June 1941, the day the British decided to quit, because they lost the fight over there.

It was also the first day of *Shavuot* that Sunday. **[00:46:00]** The British defeated the Iraq army, arrived to the outskirts of Baghdad. Churchill and Wavell had told the British ambassador, Cornwallis to let the government occupy Baghdad. Cornwallis countermanded this and told them to stay out. Now, that started on Sunday evening because Rashid Ali and the government that was fighting the British had fled with Hajj Amin al-Husseini. They fled to Iran.

We thought, fine, the British were coming, we were going to be all right. I was standing outside my house and immediately, next to us, my neighbour. There was another school boy, friend of mine, and well, I said, "Let us go for a walk." At that time, another Jewish fellow student came along and said, "Don't go, don't go out. They've started killing Jews." Now, it so happened that as he walked towards the end of the street I saw that he was surrounded by other people - later I learnt that he was murdered. Another rumor had it that he was injured but taken to hospital and there he was finished off. That was the night of the pogrom.

My sister and I were alone at the house because my mother went to stay with her parents on the west side of the river which is near the British embassy. We could communicate by telephone. We realized that there was a lot of trouble in there. We were caught in the house **[00:48:00]** alone. These people opposite, we were afraid they were going to break into the house and kill us or whatever they did. That was the night when-- How can I describe it to you? There was a lot of sometimes, a period of eerily silent, I suppose when the marauders were surrounding Jewish people.

Then there would be a huge hysterical cry presumably when a crime was committed. There was a lot of shrieking and screaming that went on right through the night. We were expecting

the worst because a lot of people were raped, murdered, including children, and of course, grown-ups. I think the estimate of Jewish people who lost their lives was something like 170 or 500, now I believe it's believed to have been 181 murdered and 600 injured.

An uncle of mine - that is my father's stepbrother, was well in with Muslims and he had a limousine, and he had a native driver. He was contacted and early in the morning he telephoned and said, "Stand behind the door. When you see the --, come out, jump into the car and shut the door." My sister and I did just this, and the thing just sped out of the street, crossed the river to the other side. **[00:50:00]** We were saved. After that, mercifully they waited until they saw us disappear. Okay, and broke into the house and even the toilet was broken. It was completely looted. The piano, even took the piano, and my mother, this must have been how it was to her-- she lost her Empire. This was all she had.

We stayed with her parents, and here we come-- What happens after this? The Jewish people saw the writing on the wall and knew clearly and my mother, sister, and I went to the passport office immediately afterwards, we wanted passports, wanted to leave the country. We had lost our place, and we were there, I think three days, we went from one department to another, filling in various forms. Then it came to the time when we had to go and see the big chief who would sanction the issuing of passports. We had a conference, the three of us, and they decided that if I went in as a 14,15-year-old, I would attract sympathy. So they said, you go and ask for the man to sign the final application form. I did.

There was this Iraqi boss **[unintelligible 00:51:47]** and a few cronies around him and I presented him with this and he said, "Well, son, why do you want passports?" **[00:52:00]** I nervously said, "My mother is not of good health we would like to take her to Lebanon." He turned to the other and he said, "You see, they're too scared to say that they want to run away. No passport." I was taken out of the room.

If I speak at an exaggerated manner, please don't think I'm exaggerating for the sake of exaggeration, because that is exactly what I experienced. Of course, I was crestfallen. We went back and grandfather said, "What's the matter?" I told him what happened. He said, "Tomorrow, I'll go with you." Now, obviously, I'm 88 years old, I've met all sorts of remarkable people. I have not encountered such a manifestation of assertive personality. Grandfather came

with me. There was a sentry at the door where this boss was. He brushed, he said to him, "*Wasabi* that is my professor. What do you want?"

He said, "Out of my way." He walked in holding me by the hand. He was received politely because he's a member of parliament. He was treated well and he proceeded to give them a dressing down. He said to them, "Do you think you can hold your heads up amongst other people, other nations when you rob, rape and murder innocent people, defenseless people? What do you think you're doing? Why did you deny my daughter and grandchildren passports? Have you not inflicted enough harm on them?"

And they said to him, **[00:54:00]** "Abu Sami", this is what they called him, "Calm down." He was offered coffee and cigarette? Yes. He spoke nervously but didn't shout like I was shouting. He calmed them. They [mumbles] He signed the thing there and then and we got our passports and went back home. And from that, we began to apply for a visa to go to India, which we did. We left in August '41.

So a couple of months later.

To go to Bombay, my mother, my sister and I - because my brother had gone in 1938 to London to study medicine here in London - had a career because not worthwhile going into this because, as we will leaving Basra, the British invaded Iran and we have to go back. They started shelling Iran because they wanted to supply the Russians through Iran.

Anyway, we arrived in Bombay it was not exactly an eventful passage. There was a suitcase, I was wearing my uncle's clothes. We arrived in there, frankly, I can't remember how we came to meet this family. All I know is that the ship arrived. We must have got out of it, landed in Bombay, I can't remember where we went, but possibly we went to what was known as a Jewish club. It's possible and there met the Iny family.

The Iny family is of course, David Sofaer's today **[00:56:00]**. This family took us in. We lived in their flat until we could get ourselves somewhere to live and we left them. They were so kind and so generous. We became members of the club. There, for the first time, my goodness, I was - what was I -15 or 16? We went to the Jewish Club. You went to and you bowed to a girl to invite her to dance and you held her close to you, I'm anything but a dancer. I'm like a clumsy elephant.

But it was wonderful to be able to be that close and that familiar with a girl, who - Mary, this girl who I fancied very much was actually a blonde - okay. We kept going there and there we started our new life having missed the matriculation examination in Baghdad, you want me to continue from there on?

Yes.

I had decided to become an architect. My mother, perhaps she could not have done it anyway but there was no idea of time to arrange a marriage for my sister. She was going to do university education too. But in Baghdad, to do the University of London education, you had to do either four or five subjects no more. Right. The first thing to do was to pass the matriculation with the University of Bombay. My mother went to see registrar, to try and get both of us into a school.

They said, "Madam to get into our school you must attend **[00:58:00]** recognized school. The student should have attended three years, in a school recognized by the University of London. Otherwise, they can't take the exam." So she said to him, "Change it. I want my children--" and he did. So we had to study, take an examination in 11 subjects, at least six more than-- and that in three months.

It was a marathon run, we did. My sister and I passed by the skin of our teeth, I think possibly because I was so good in Arabic. I think with Arabic that pulled me through. We passed this then came to the School of Architecture. There was only one school, Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Sir J.J. School of Art, who trained architects. You had to take a competitive entrance examination. There were I think 28 applicants and only four could be non-Indian.

Right. My being able to start training as an architect, depended on my passing this. The day of reckoning came, I arrived there at eight o'clock in the morning of the J.J. School of Art, and to be throughout the day we were given various papers. I'll give you an example, one of was ‘draw a bird's eye view of an Indian city **[01:00:00]** being bombed.’ For God's sake, what does an Indian city look like? How the hell do you portray it with a bird's eye view? Somehow I must have managed something. Then they came with various papers, one after the other. At about the end of the day, I sat there waiting with all the other students to see what my fate was going to be. Because if I didn't become an architect, I would have either become a tea or sugar

merchant or whatever it is people - which by the way, they did and they became extremely wealthy.

At the end of it all, my sister came to say something. I still remember because she held my hand. Then I was called in and to the head. The head of the school was Mr. Bathory. A very portly English gentleman and a very fine architect and an Indian architect who was the assistant director of the school. So I went up to the table and he said, "Yes, you passed." Then he said to me, "You were the first." I said, "What?" The Indian, said, ‘he is surprised’, I passed.

The next day. I attended the first lecture. The Indians didn't know how to teach architecture, this was ridiculous. It was very, very bad. But that that's all there was. To give you an example, a teacher would have a textbook. He would stand in front of us. Read the English text. We wrote it down. We went back **[01:02:00]** home, we faired it out, faired it out, wrote it again clearly, the next day we submitted it and it was passed without understanding a damn thing that was being taught.

The way to teach a person to be innovative, inventive. The Greeks created something called the Tower of the Winds which is still in Athens. So, draw the Tower of the Winds, then do it in a Hindu style. Then do it in a Muslim style, in here. This was their way of teaching architecture. I did three years over there. Indians are very good at memorizing things. What they wanted you to do, to give you an example, to teach history, you had to memorize cathedrals, palaces, renaissance buildings, Indian, Hindu temples. Now, how do you draw a Hindu temple?

The idea was, the examination The test was, draw shart cathedral for instance, and you had to produce all the elevation sections of the—Daft. When after three years I did the crucial examinations the third year, what I did was I had a handkerchief which I ironed having a immersed it in water that had, what do you put to make the cloth strong? Not bleach. Something made it--

Starch.

Starch, brava. Okay. I had a pretty good idea what they were going to ask, and I drew with hard **[01:04:00]** pencil on it and went in and surely they came out and I was pretending to have a cold and I had to take a squint of this and then when I left there, I looked in the mirror, I had a

black spot here. [laughs] I passed the third year and I remember saying to my mother, I said, "If I become an architect here, I can only do architecture in India." Haven't we had enough? I loathed place. Indians are decent people. They are very, very decent people. The people who are antisemitic were Indian converts. The first thing they learned was antisemitism when they became Christians. That's been my experience.

Did you experience antisemitism in India?

Absolutely. Because at that time, obviously, you were not born at that time were you? The whole world was filled with antisemitism. It was an accepted thing that the Jews were people to be despised, ill-treated, robbed and possibly murdered. We knew that, we knew that as a thing.

When you came from Baghdad to India, what did they perceive you?

Pardon me?

As what were you perceived in India?

Oh, I forgot to mention, I went to a Jesuit school - no, not a Jesuit school. The first one I went to, was in Byculla. Byculla was like the east end of London, a Jewish school that was so solid. Opposite cemetery and the teacher said I was being made a monkey of, and I went back home, my mother said, "What's the matter with you?" I said, "Look, he wants me to prepare to **[01:06:00]** do the matriculation in that school. I'll never learn anything. These people don't teach." She said there was a Jesuit school. Very successful, run by priests. We were told this was a good school.

We went there and the head said to her, "Madam, we're full, we can't give your son a place." And she said to him, examine my son and if you're dissatisfied, I'll accept your refusal. They did. I went in the morning and throughout the day, at the end of it all, yes, I tell, I loathed it. I loathed it because I felt that in a Jesuit school, I was on enemy territory, and I was an angry, unhappy person, and by the way, should we call it rather aggressive. I don't think I was an easy person to deal with. I did there until I passed the--

Why am I saying this? Because, this is what happened before I passed the matriculation. Then I pass the entrance to the JJ School of Art and I told you what happened. At the end of it all, I

said then I must go to London. I did send the Architectural Association a whole bunch of my drawings and they got back to me and said, "If you come to London, we'll give you a place." That enabled me -- I had an Iraqi passport. That enabled me to get a visa. But of course, the war was on, so one has to wait until May '45 when I was able to get on **[01:08:00]** a troopship going back to England, and part with my mother and sister, which was a big thing for the family to do.

We arrived at the docks in the morning, all three weeping - all weeping, two women weeping and a boy weeping. A boy of 20. Anyway, we got on the ship and they put me downstairs at the lower deck without any ventilation. I mean, one was literally perspiring like mad. I couldn't stand it anymore. I decided to go up because this ship would not leave, it would seem to be just sitting there. I went up onto the open deck, at that time, we, in the 1930's to me, the English were Gods own chosen people.

They were the exceptional people who were putting a stop to the Nazis and they were the most cultivated, the most powerful, the most influential people you could meet anywhere. And incidentally, I forgot to mention, at the age of 9, 10, I started a passionate love affair with English language. I adored it. I loved it, English. I thought that every Englishman was another Winston Churchill. I went on the open deck and there was a number of soldiers and one who was standing, stripped to the waist, bald, freckled, I think he was principal cook or something like this. **[01:10:00]**

He was standing there, this was an Englishman, he didn't look like Winston Churchill. Then he turned towards Bombay, it was the Gateway to India and he said, "India, what a fucking place." [laughs] That summed it up for me. And then, finally, started the propellers was going away for that, we were out at sea. During the journey, which took five weeks, they exploded the atom bomb in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, the war came to an end. I arrived in Liverpool. What I had with me was £35 which, by the way, other people who had more sense than I put it in a safe deposit.

I had it in the briefcase which I put under my head when I went to sleep, which carried with me all the time. [laughs] This was my capital. I got out of the ship, in the morning and this was my first encounter with the dreadfulness of English food because I went to the cafe and I was silly enough to buy a sausage roll. I took a bite of that poisonous thing and I threw it away. I got on the train and there was a woman and two ex-army people going back and she was

fascinating. This was what women can do which could never have happened in Bombay or Baghdad. **[01:12:00]** She was wondering whether they were worth giving a chance or not. It was interesting.

I arrived, it so happened that in the 1930s, my maternal grandfather and his son, Sammy, became very friendly with an ex-Iraqi immigrant called Mr. Glazier, who had a house in City Road. I telephoned and said that I was his grandson, I'd just arrived in London from India, and I stayed with them. They had a son called Joshua Glazier who was a Guildhall gold medalist. He was a professional violinist, a verified musician, all of them were communists. They had a photograph of Joseph Stalin on the mantelpiece and Mrs. Glazier used to say, "Bless him, he's done such a lot for us." [laughs]

This was my first entry and there you are. I got on number 73 bus, I went to the Albert Hall. Believe me, the people who landed on the moon did not feel as I felt in front of that amazing, marvelous building, full of panache, strong personality. I was in front of the Albert Hall. For one and ten pence ha'penny I got standing up on the Heisenberg Ida Haendel was wearing a red dress and she played the Beethoven concerto. I told her about it, probably again when I met her in subsequent years. I was at the Albert Hall. I went and looked at **[01:14:00]** this square, big--, what have you. What I forgot to mention, do I talk about the difficult things of the family?

No, go on.

What happened was as you must remember, my mother was an ambitious woman, very angry, unable to accept what life offered her, but she built up a lot of ambition surrounding her children. My brother came to London in 1938 and during those four years, I think it was probably in 1943, he began to send us photographs of a girl he met and he announced that he had married her. You must take into reckon on this. For her first son to marry a Catholic-Irish nurse, he was a doctor and he married a nurse. That's bad enough, that she was Irish was worse, that she was a Catholic was the end. She went nuclear.

She became completely unmanageable, understandably so - but for god's sake, what do you do? From then on, we lived under great secrecy, the great fear was that this scandal would become public property. Her brother-in-law sent a letter and he said, "Naima things like that happen. Perhaps even if it's a mistake, you must learn to live with it." She goes back and slated him, completely. We lived in terror, then suddenly, her first born married a non-Jewish woman

incidentally, it was a disastrous marriage. And she became impossible. What had been, I did something which I should not have, basically unfair to her.

I resorted to a subterfuge. I said, "If you let me go to London, I may be able to rescue him." This is when she began to think about the possibility of my coming to finish my architectural training in London. Ours was not a happy family. I came to London and I had never had a happy relationship with either my sister or my brother. He came to see me, he found out that I was in here and I went to where he lived in Edgware and he was an artful manipulator and he managed to get around me. I met his wife and I got a letter to - my mother had whatever I inherited from my father was under her control.

I didn't know that. I wrote and I said, "Look, what does one do? The man is married. Can't we just leave it alone? Do we have to do it?" She sent a letter, "Stop seeing Yacoub immediately, no money." I was left in London with what I was left of the £35 **[01:18:00]** with my brother, which made me dependent on him, and that was very unfortunate for me. They put me up in their flat in Edgware and we started fighting my mother over my patrimony because I wanted to study. I was a student of the Architecture Association, do I go into this other--? What do I do? I don't know.

In actual fact, there was a legal tussle between us. Eventually, it was settled out of court and my mother, very unhappily, had to relinquish what was my property, and I had not all my father left me and we parted company. This happened in the late 1940s. Where do we go from here? What do you want me to talk about?

I want to go back actually because I just want to let you talk. I want to come back to the Farhud to 1941.

'41.

Yes, before we come because what I didn't quite understand is, you left in the evening, did you come back to the house at all?

Yes, we came back and actually slept there.

You did?

We did. We found some, even the piano was found in the desert smashed up. We found some of our bedsteads with metal tubes. Dada, please guide me, am I talking too much?

No. Shall we take a break? Otherwise, you want to continue?

No, I don't want a break.

I would suggest so because the Farhud is very important.

[01:20:00] *You said you were with your sisters. Did anyone while you were there still come into the house?*

With the three of us.

While you were in the house?

As I slept there and the period before between the *Farhud*.

On the night of the Farhud, yes.

Things settled down--

Afterwards?

Some people were even hanged, who killed others. I told you what happened with the passports.

That's later.

In order to relieve the pressure on my grandparents, we went and stayed in the house.

For how long?

What?

For how long did you stay with your grandparents?

It must have been a few weeks, two, three, four weeks. Something like that. Then we got on the train to go to Basra and catch the boat to go to India.

Where did you take the boat from? From Basra?

Basra.

From Basra. That's what I want to understand. Did you go back to the house where you lived before or you left it?

Yes, yes. We went back because I think it must have been too much for my grandparents. After all, they had two sons living with them. To have a daughter and two children, it was too much.

Psychologically, what impact did this have on you?

Horrible because we thought this was the end of the world, in actual fact of course, it was the most marvelous blessing in disguise. It got us out of that bad country. Horrible.

At the time--

I had no-

-you wanted to get out?

Absolutely. I thought that the place was the innermost pit in hell. Unbearable. I did not like the people there. **[01:22:00]** There were some decent people by the way amongst the Muslims. I remember, I had a violin, which was found by the way, and the man who was part of the police - we were trying to find our things what could be retrieved. I can't remember, he said something, he said about Christians-- No, I don't want to go into that. He said something derogatory about Christians. I said, "Maybe the Christian messiah didn't steal our things, Christians did." This was my reply to him. He was trying to pacify me.

You said your grandfather was a member of Parliament.

Yes.

What was his perception of the Farhud or the position of Jews at the time?

Everybody, we felt threatened and in danger. Eventually, his son who worked for the railways, the one who qualified as a civil engineer in London was working in the railways. Somebody go and they said he's a Zionist and they wanted to imprison him or execute him or something like this. He got him out. You know what-- It's not far from what is happening now. No, I think that was worse.

What happened to your grandfather?

Huh?

What happened because he stayed?

Yes. He stayed. We left in '41. In 1952 he was very ill. We got him back to London. He came in 1952, stayed with my mother and went to the hospital. He had an ulcer of the stomach. **[01:24:00]** It was wonderful to be with him because-- I'll give you the example. By then, I thought I was going to be a professional violinist. I played for him and he sensed where my playing was going. I played records of Jascha Heifetz who was-- Every young violinist wanted to be another Heifetz at that time. I played him the Introduction Rondo Capriccioso by Saint-Saëns and he said to me, "This man, this violinist, *eshteghal*, he's working. Why don't they leave him alone?"

What he couldn't understand that the orchestra accompanying him were interfering with him. I said to him, "This is different from Arabic music." Arabic music is simple melody, simple rhythm. No harmony and complex-ism. In Western music, it is simple melody, simple rhythm, very complex harmony. You build a complex sound to create an atmosphere. I played him for instance, the swarm from Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony and he said, "Yes, yes, yes. Yes, this is like a swarm."

I remember that I was telling him about paintings, how wonderful they were and he said to me, "Raphael is a painter." Well, the man who painted the wall. I said, "The man who paints the wall paints a picture." He said, "Yes, this one." Before he left, I was then earning four or five pounds a week, whatever it was. I borrowed **[01:26:00]** £50 and I bought a camera and I took several photographs of him before he went back to Israel. I have them, which was a sensible thing to do. It's an exception, I think I would like to show you the photograph.

We'll look at it later. You said Israel. Did he live--

He went to Israel. Within a month or six weeks, he died.

Did he leave in the early '50s?

Yes. From then on, the bulk of my world fell apart. I don't know what happened. I could not accept that he died, but that's what happened.

How old was he when he died?

What?

How old was he when he died?

'52? What is that? 28, isn't it? Or something like that? 34.

You said--

52.

He died in Israel, you said in the early '50s.

He died in Tel Aviv. Well, I'm sure that other people have had similar experiences. It took me years to find my balance again.

Because it was such an important--

Pardon me?

It was an important stability?

I was a very hard-working person. I was employed. I qualified as an architect in 1948, and I joined a well-known firm not knowing, I didn't know about him at the time. I bulldozed my way into this. I said, "I want to work for you." I didn't even clear what they were going to pay me. The head of this **[01:28:00]** was a very charismatic person, very capable employer, impresario, who never designed a single building, but he had a national reputation and brought the work in. They were then preparing for the 1951 Festival of Britain. The firm was given the job of designing a school in the East End of London, which was badly built.

I designed a considerable portion of that. I worked on that for the firm. We completed it and George VI and his Queen came over and planted a tree. At that time, I was a newly qualified person, ambitious certainly, hardworking certainly but a mature architect, no. If you're a Mozart like Mozart woke up one day and he could play the viola - you are born a genius. If you are an ambitious, talented person, it takes 20 years to learn to do anything but with me, it took exactly 13 years.

Now, when that school was finished, we were very proud of this. Symbolic, something you do on paper became reality. It was there. I looked at this and I remember saying to myself, "But, there's no life in this. This is mechanical." It was something - the product of a consciously adopted formula, if you know what I mean. Do it in this style because this is what is expected

of you, and you get a building. That is not how you produce pedigree buildings. It can't be like that. I even had enough sense that I said, "No." It went on like this until 1960. No, 12 years. 12 years.

Finally, I reached the age of puberty, 12 years afterwards. I knew exactly what I wanted to do, how to do it, I never joined a bandwagon. Bandwagons came and went like women's hats. Fashion, this year there is this fashion, the other year there's another fashion. I never joined any of these and from then on, it was completely independent thinking on my part. I'm very proud of this. I worked like mad.

By the way you managing--

I worked like mad.

Public buildings, what was your--

Absolutely--

Public.

I designed several schools, two colleges about 1,200 flats, other housing, all sorts of things. I built homes for the aged, I build a synagogue.

Which one?

The one in Wembley and the *Beth Cholim* [Hebrew: hospital]. That was 1974, wasn't it? 1974? I worked for four Jewish synagogues in there. I built the West London Synagogue that got a civic cross award, in there. Yes, I was in relative terms, successful eventually, but it was a period of-- Does one go into this? I was with that firm for six years and two days and I became resentful, I was not an easy person. Not very employable but I worked hard for them. I did it, so they tolerated me, but I think when I left they were glad.

I sadly put my nose up in the air and said, "I am leaving you." **[01:32:00]**

I decided to set up on my own, which was a daft thing to do. Inexperienced, I had few dreadful jobs, minor things to do and I was on my own for six years, no wife, no children, no work. The people who when I was employed were working under me, I was senior to them, became associates, one of them became a partner. And there I was, stuck on my own - not on the rocks,

I felt I was below the rocks, but I held on. Eventually, work began to come in and I went for it like mad and I built up completely on my own my practice and I did relatively well.

Mr. Sofaer, I suggest we just take a little break.

I don't know how this is going to--

Cameraman: *All ready.*

Yes, Mr. Sofaer, I wonder whether we can just go a little bit back again to the '40s when you arrived in India. What was it like to arrive in India when you came from quite a different society, and arrive in India? What contact did you have to the other Iraq Jews?

May I go back--

Please.

-to the 1930s, there's something I failed to say. You must remember when I was a child, four-years-old, I decided to go to London when I grow up.

Why?

I'll tell you. Going back from our house to our grandfather's house on Friday evenings for the dinner and the prayer, things could be unpleasant. I was walking with my mother **[01:34:00]** on the pavement and a British soldier-- English soldier in khaki bumped into her and he said, "I beg your pardon, madam." God, if he had bumped into a native, he would have been glad to get away with a curse or an obscenity. I said, "When I grow up, I go to London," and remained with me as a crucial experience. This is what makes me go back to the 1930s.

You must remember one grew up feeling that the world was against one. We were Jews, Jewish minority threatened, at that time, murder was not on the cards but certainly, abuse, bullying and injustice were available all over the place. We turned to the English. Why? Because, I have this consuming love affair with English language. Our English teachers who came and they were such nice gentlemen compared with the natives. One built out the idea that the English were something exceptional.

During the '30s the danger become greater and our hope centered on the English and it was well-placed. Why? Because, Hitler walked right over the Norway-- What's the name? The Belgium and the north country, north of Belgium, what's it called?

Holland.

Denmark.

Denmark.

Denmark. Walked right over France. **[01:36:00]** There seemed to be no one stopping him. Europe was due to-- [coughs] It seemed to be, his success was unstoppable although there was a variation to that. Only the English said, “we’ll beat you”. If, when Chamberlain lost the premiership, if Earl of Halifax had been chosen as a prime minister instead of Winston Churchill, the results would have been appalling because, Mosley was there available ready to step in, Halifax would have negotiated with Hitler.

Churchill came over, he said, "No. We fight on." I say that because I've taken refuge in here for how many years? Was it ‘45 until 2012, in a country that is manifestly fair-minded. Of course, there are faults and disappointments all over the place. Of course not all English people are inspiring people. Who wants to be a friend of the leader of the miners' union? Whoever it was. One has to acknowledge and keep reminding people what one felt in the 1940s when the whole world was lost, we were heading towards a terrible disaster and the English stood up and held Germany to account.

I say that because all the people Hilter dealt with, he walked right over them. Not Franco. In October after he conquered France, he went to see Franco, what did he want? **[01:38:00]** Gibraltar. If Hitler had had Gibraltar, believe me the war would have taken not five years to win, it might have taken 20 years. How many more people would have died? Franco stood up to him. Hitler afterwards said, "Rather than have--" He made so many demands on Hitler, demanded so much of him, that Hilter afterward said he would rather go to the dentist and have his teeth pulled up than have another meeting with General Franco. That must be acknowledged. He was a fascist leader but he stood up to Hitler, nobody else did except the English.

Can I ask you something, were you not disappointed with the British that in a way, they didn't come into Baghdad in 1941 in that specific instance?

Can you imagine how many terrible things, terrible mismanagements happened during the war? Yes, certainly, if they had come into the city-- Eventually, they came into the city and they took the things it hand. We might have been killed like many, many other people but things like that happen. I don't hold that against it. Many individuals made terrible mistakes including the British army, including even important leaders but basically, they were formidable. When the English lose their temper, they are formidable.

When you eventually came to Britain, for you, did it feel like coming--

I was absolutely. This is where I meant then. It's a mistake, I should have gone to America. America would have suited me much better. Over here, the things that I have against English, they celebrate failure. They are embarrassed by success. Why? Life is about success, not about failure. You have a failure, you learn from it and then it's called success. **[01:40:00]** to even up the score. This is the way I see it. America would have suited me far better. Of course, it was a much more beautiful country because, the Western United States is amazingly beautiful.

I wanted to say that because it is important. This is built up a lot. The English were the saviors. We didn't feel that way about the French, not after the way they treated Léon Blum. I wanted to say that, now let's go back to the '40s.

When you went to India--

Would you mind you give me your question again?

I give you the question again. It is about India and what it was like to go to India from Baghdad.

It was bewildering completely, the enormous number of people on the street, and of course, the people who slept on the pavements. Life seemed to be degraded. I did not take to India then. I didn't like the heat, I didn't like the monsoon. You went back home and you found-- You opened your door and went into the bedroom and there were cockroaches all over the place and you had to get a-- I never took to it. A lot of my fellows, people from my background went into business and learned Hindustani. I never did that, probably mostly I know only about a half a

dozen words. I always felt that this was a stepping stone that must eventually end up in London, which is what I did.

When you were in Bombay, did you meet other German Jewish refugees or other people who got stranded?

Yes. We also had them in Iraq. They came to my grandfather in order to get help--

Tell us a little bit.

-almost certainly. We gave them hospitality **[01:42:00]** and they kept coming Saturdays.

In Iraq? Which year? When are you talking about?

In 1939, '40.

Really?

Oh yes. Absolutely. He was a well-known public figure.

Do you remember specific people coming?

Yes. I remember them very, very clearly. What happened to them, I don't know. There was an enormously successful doctor, Dr. Korbach he called himself, who had people by the scores lining up outside his surgery around here. He was enormously successful. He came to London, by the way afterwards. As far as I am concerned, whatever one felt about the English, was well-deserved. I think it's wrong to forget this. It's important. Went to India, yes, you stepped into a much more tolerant, much less dangerous milieu. The Indians were decent people.

Was it a relief? That's what I tried to-- Was it a relief for you to come to India?

Absolutely. Absolutely. I personally always regarded it as a stepping stone.

A transit?

Transit. Brava. This is a better word. I wasn't sorry to leave India. Even though-- Ada has not been to India. Do I go back and feel hot and perspire? I was so scared of snakes because, I had been bitten twice by a scorpion in Iraq that I was terrified there would be a snake, there would be one. I always undid the bed before I lay down.

When you eventually came to England on this boat, were your expectations met when you arrived?

Musically, yes. **[01:44:00]** Culturally, yes. But London was in a shockingly very bad state.

The war just finished. What did you see when you came? Can you describe some of the impressions?

Absolutely. A lot of ruined buildings, deprivation, lack of food, lack of clothes. I was taken to Petticoat Lane by my good friends. Things were-- England was bankrupt or appeared to be bankrupt. You felt, the war was won but shouldn't things be better now? They were not. Of course, I was a vegetarian and all I got was I think six ounces of cheese a week and one egg. One egg, this used to be the feast evening. When you fried the egg and fried chips, this was a marvelous, marvelous treat.

When it wasn't bad, there were some amusing things. There was a most marvelous tenor called Beniamino Gigli. Beniamino Gigli was a portly Italian full of spaghetti. He arrived to England and there was the newspaper, he said, "What? Italians coming back here? He was a fascist. He was a friend of Mussolini. He's so rich, he owns a whole mountain." There was already some worrying features by then. 'You know what he did? He called a press conference and he sang for them. “It's a Long Way to Tipperary” and he put them in his pocket. They adored him.

I went to his first recital again, one and ten pence ha’penny , up on the top of the theatre. This man was obviously opening his mouth and this glorious sound just **[01:46:00]** floated over the Albert Hall and then music. My God. Let me tell you, when I was in Bombay and I was mad about becoming a professional violinist, I wanted to be another Yehudi Menuhin. There used to be a shop and in it there was a poster, and the poster represented Bronisław Huberman. Huberman was an extremely individualistic great violinist, Polish violinist, Jewish. He's the one who found the Israel orchestra. I'll tell you about him.

Now there was this poster and Huberman was featured holding the violin and over and above him was somebody like an angel or a woman, obviously, enraptured with him. I used to go walking most evenings just to look at this. I came to the Albert Hall, Bronisław Huberman. I went and there was this old man, bald-headed, shuffled onto the stage and played the Mendelssohn. This is Huberman? And then he started playing and the performance caught fire

from the word, go. He was an extremely impactful player. He played and did unconventional things because he was a strong individual.

The other thing was this. At that time, you knew perfectly well during the war years in Germany, if you were a Jew, you would be excluded on the spot. Another one, Yehudi Menuhin. A Jew, Menuhin is going to play in London. I went and this man who had such charisma, he walked onto the stage and he put all the audience into his pocket. How he did it, I really do not know. The first time he came and people were absolutely enraptured, he played the Brahms Concerto. It was the first time I heard the Brahms Violin Concerto.

Where did you get exposure to western classical music? Did you educate yourself?

In Bombay. There was a symphony orchestra led by a Frenchman who was my violin teacher. I used to go to rehearsals. Zubin Mehta, whom you now see in his '70s, he was a boy of four or five who used to run around during the rehearsal. His father, Mehli Mehta, a very nice person, a very fine violinist was the leader. I was in with them. They all knew me. Of course, I had hoped eventually to stand in there and possibly play the Beethoven Concerto.

Then there was the British Forces, hired the hall in Bombay. On Sunday evenings there was a proceeding. People sat and then you heard a recording of an orchestra tuning. They played records. I acquired an encyclopedic knowledge of the repertoire, one after the other. Even now, I can remember certain things that I heard for the first time. My God, the first time to hear the D Minor Piano Concerto of Mozart, I felt the top of my head was going to come off in here. That happened continuously, this obsession with music-making.

But it was only you, it wasn't in your family. There was nobody else.

I was the only one who did that. My sister was very unmusical. My mother, apart from being quite perceptive about Umm Khaltoum, no she was not, didn't care. I was an odd ball. What was the term?

Odd ball.

Odd ball you say. I was an unusual infant and an unusual youngster.

When you said you then came to London to train to become an architect, at that time did you still think of becoming a violinist?

Absolutely, I practiced four hours a day. But, you must remember, the violin is a fiendishly difficult instrument. You are born a violinist. If you are not, you could be taught if there was an absolute magician of a teacher. They're not, they're all imposters. All the teachers are all fraudsters. I held the violin so hard. I'm a tense person. That was impossible. Now, you take the ones, Heifetz played under Nikisch in Germany, the Mendelssohn Concerto when he was seven years old. Elman did the same when he was about the same age.

Ida Haendel who was one of two daughters to family, a Polish family, her eldest sister was being trained, taking lessons in violin playing. She was not. When she was three and a half years old, one day she picked up the violin and started accompanying her mother singing in the kitchen. Nobody taught her, and she is the most natural violinist anywhere even now in her late 80's. She is still a formidable player than she was before. She didn't have to learn anything. It all came naturally to her.

So for you that the music help you, I don't mean the violin, but I mean also the general exposure to music help you to settle in England or was it an important part of your--

It put you in touch with the other spheres **[01:52:00]** where life was much more beautiful. It got you out of the difficult circumstances you were in.

Because, you were not in easy circumstance. You said you didn't have good contact with your brother, neither with your mother, so you were quite isolated if that's the word.

Yes, I was an odd ball. I was.

Did you have any contact with other Baghdadi Jews or with other--

Yes, I did. I played the violin in recordings of the Arabic department of the BBC. They paid me for it, but this is not playing Motzart.

You had some contact to Arabic speakers?

I did. I was able to play that quite easily. But the violin tuned the European way, not tuned in fourths, which is what oriental violin is, in European play, you tuned the strings in fifths. They Arabs do it in fourths, sometimes beautifully.

What other things helped you to settle down in England?

I had problems with my family. Other than that, I had a difficult passage as a student then, but I qualified, and as I told you, I got myself this job where we designed the school in the East End of London for 1951 festival and this school is now still there, and it's listed by English Heritage. It's still there. I took my grandfather there when he was in London. He stayed in here, we didn't have a car. Somebody, a Baghdad **[01:54:00]** person called Naji had a car and he had been a flyer.

In Baghdad, we collected money for him during the war to come and join the RAF, which he did. He said he was going to put on the bomb from such and such a family, you know what mean? Naji was almost like an Arab. He was well in with them. He had a motor car and he came to Cheam where my mother was, and took us in the car all the way to the school. Grandfather, he looked at him and said, *ayat al fatam* means it is the ultimate statement in art, the schools that he saw. He thought I did it all. I did not do it all but I played a very important part. As I explained to you, it was a shock for me because I didn't think that buildings should be done like that even at that stage, I was very critical of it.

You said you had the quarrel with your mother, so at that time we were back in touch with your mother, how many years were you not in touch with her?

Well, in the 1940's it was bad, in 1952, my brother who was successful, he was a doctor and successful in business. He bought a house in Cheam, in Surrey. Poor mother and Louise lived in a room in Maida Vale and, with a ring. Piled up with huge suitcases they brought from India. She was psychologically, mentally, in a very bad state, but fiercely opposed to my brother. Fiercely opposed to everybody. Putting up with it but **[01:56:00]** suffering very badly. He had an accident, he was run over by a lorry.

Your brother?

My brother did, so we went to see him. With my brother, timing, was either I broke off with him to get him out of my life, and then he managed to get in, and start all over again. At that time, he told me all that, so I said, "Look, what about it? Let's put her there, let’s take her there." And he did something very nice. He made the house available to her. [coughs] He had an understandable alternative motive in that he was so unhappily married, he wanted somewhere to disappear to over weekends. You see.

Soe went to Whiteley's we bought her furniture. We hired a lorry. We put the furniture and the suitcases in there, and we made our way to Cheam, and installed her there. She adored it. She had huge garden. She loves the place. And this is where she died. She remained there. Eventually, she acquired that house from my brother.

She accepted?

His marriage was a disaster. It was like the Russians and the Germans in Stalingrad. I was involved all the time, because I was concerned with the three children. You see, he was very young, he realized he made a mistake. Had my mother not taken this violent objection to him, I think they would have divorced. But with the misunderstandings and the fights and disagreements and all the businesses going on, I think he decided eventually to have a child and they produced three lovely children.

What's going to happen to them? The wife was alcoholic. She simply needed alcohol. I was involved in this. Eventually they divorced. There were court cases about who was going to keep the children but he got the children. One of them, David, this lovely nephew I had, died at the age of 43 and the other two, Moira, she is now successful barrister married and Clive is a partner at a law firm. It all turned out to be worth it, the children were all right.

What happened to your sister?

My sister was-- had a difficult life. My mother went to Israel in 1956 to her family because the whole family emigrated there in 1951.

The whole remaining family from Baghdad, they all went?

From Baghdad, they all lifted in this operation Magic Carpet, whatever it is they called it. She knew about a family called the Baḥr - Bahr is the Arabic word for sea. The Baḥr family were legendary in that they had elderly women, single women very old, they kept them and fed them, they gave them shelter. They were very generous. She knew the family, she was in touch with them, she and her sister – an arranged marriage between my sister and Menashi Bahr, and they married in Jerusalem and that's how as I've said, probably was the happiest day in my mother's life, because she saw her daughter **[02:00:00]** married to a lovely person, desperately in love with his wife, and in a synagogue. This was probably the greatest success she knew. She deserved every bit of it because there was very little of that. What else can I tell you?

Which year was that? When did your sister get married?

This was in 1960. Louise was - psychologically was in a bad state. As she was teaching, she absconded and that she pretended to be ill and got a certificate in order not to work. So all this worked and I, myself, as I said to you, in 1955, I walked out on my employer. I had six years of sorrow to get myself established, I did. On the 4th of December 1961, I got into an airplane, flew over there, I met my sister, her husband and her family and other friends, met over there and I went and stayed at their house. Along with me was a bunch of red English roses which I meant to put on the grave.

And you did?

When I say all this, I say, how old this is, you know what I mean? [chuckles] I don't think I had a normal life, I don't think I did.

Tell us a little bit about your personal life. What happened to your personal life?

I think it was one horrible liaison, one failure after another. I had several affairs, but all of them ended badly. I came to the conclusion that I couldn't. I didn't want to have **[02:02:00]** somebody, shall we say, have authority over me and start off where my mother and sister left off. I did not - I think I only truly loved only two women in my life. One, I was unable to marry, and eventually, after mother died in 1965, I said, "Look, let me succeed professionally, my private life is going to be a failure." And I stopped attempting to find a partner. I stopped. There was something happened to me professionally, which upset me very much.

My secretary said to me, she said, "Julian, if you continue like this, you're going to have another nervous breakdown." I did have one, a very bad one in 1969. I booked to go to Florence. I went there because I wanted to see art. I booked for 11 days. I went through Florence like a vacuum cleaner, taking everything in, but I was so lonely. The wife of a friend of mine, had another friend of hers living outside Florence. She got in touch with her, she said, "Julian is coming, I think you should see him", and my dear, “He's a batchelor, do something about it.” I met this family, they invited me one evening.

I was so lonely, it was during the time of attrition between the Egyptians and the Israelis and the Russians were putting some missiles and Israeli Police were being shot down every morning. I just said, "I'm going to go back, I can't stand it here anymore." I went to their office

and I said, 11 days, I want to leave on Friday, two days before. **[02:04:00]** So I phoned those people and I said, "Look, I'm going to leave." In those days, you had cheap night flights because they were economical. You flew at five o'clock in the morning. “If you're not doing anything, may I come and spend it with you, because I'm leaving early in the morning.” “Come on up.”

I went over and these people, an Italian, Guiseppe married to somebody from the Caribbean, with children and they kept having drinks in bits of nuts in the evening. Are they ever going to produce any food? The husband went and had a shower, came back and he said, "I feel a different man." I said, "Perhaps you begin to think about making a sandwich." [chuckles] They went to decided that at about eleven o'clock, to go - I must tell you that this family invited me home and invited the middle-aged lady, divorcee with four children, a businesswoman, I didn't realize that this was meant for me. She had a palazzo on Fizole which is outside [mumbles]. The thought never crossed my mind.

I thought she was a friend of the family, she put me in a cinquecento, took me back to the hotel. I shook hands and thanked her. It never occurred to me that this was meant for me. They concluded that there was another man who was a non-starter. Well, on Friday, they took me to a party. There was a German couple badly haunted by - because I think the parent was a survivor[?] and there were a number of people there. They had both some building outside of which they turned into a Villa. I went there. **[02:06:00]** It so happened that Ada's brother was going to bring his wife. His wife was indisposed, so we took order.

I went there, I could not speak Italian, she could not speak English, I spoke to her. She was wearing a lavender color dress and I said, “*comment vous appelez?”* “*comment vous appelez”* and she said, Ada Ammadeo with those open, transparent eyes. I thought, for God's sake, how can anybody be as nice as this? I was talking to her and I think these people was changing looks as if to say, "Well, perhaps he is not a non-starter. Ada had lost her father two or three months before, she was very attached to him. Like a lot of Italians, they feel that they haven't made it completely unless they come to England. She had booked to come to England and she was very apprehensive.

She said she was coming in a matter of days, so I took out my wallet and I said, "You come to London for me, I will show you London." She made a very deep impression on me, I said, "For goodness sake, if I had met her earlier, I would have stayed longer." Because she was

unbelievably, to me, I couldn't understand how anybody could be as nice as that. Anyway, few days afterwards, a friend said to me, she said, "Your Italian friend is in London." I went, she had arrived, she took a taxi to a hotel in Notting Hill Gate and was very depressed, she found it very depressing and the first thing she did, she phoned me.

So I went over. I met her and she was so apologetic, she said, "Julian, what **[02:08:00]** about your work, what's happening?" I said," look, I'm the boss, this is my office, I employ people. If I go out, I go out". I took her around London, showed her St Pauls, the usual things **[02:08:11]** and I said to her, "Would you like me to take you out tomorrow?" She said, "What about your work?" I said, "No problem." That was the third time I met her. I met her in the Strand, she was then wearing very thick spectacles, Ada's eyes are not good. We went into a pub of all things, and she disappeared into the lady's room and came back with those thick spectacles.

I said, "My God, she's been wearing, contact lens." She must have been in agony because they're all smoking and whatnot. Why does she do this? She looks lovely with the spectacles. Now, I'm coming - I don't know if I should do or not, I want to come back in here as to what happened because that's when my fate - the whole thing happened on that afternoon. In the 1950s, I was building a school in Worcestershire**,** and on the way back in the train, I bought a Reader's Digest, and in there was an article about an Italian artist called Eleonora Duse. Eleonora Duse and the French woman - what was she called? These two outstanding international artists. You know the one, what's her name. It will come back to me.

Okay.

Eleonora Duse was an exceptional - I remember in that article, there was a postage stamp with her face in it and I said, "That's all I want. That's the face I want to know every day of my life." That remained with me. I started reading about her, bought books about her, collected photographs of her. That face appealed an awful lot to me. She incidentally - by the way, she had an affair with Gabrieli De Luncio who was a fascist, who treated her abominably, I say that, but never mind. That's beside the point. This remained with me as something in the back of my head that's the sort of person I would go for. On the third meeting I was walking by the side of Ada, I look sideways, I say, "Oh my God, it's her." That was it I was hooked.

Of course, having been hooked, I was an experienced man – I wanted to -- she fell ill in the hotel and I used to take her food and help her. For God's sake, a lovely girl in bed in a nighty, of course, I wouldn't leave her alone, and she resisted like mad. She kept saying "*vergogna*". *Vergogna* is shame in Italian. I wanted more *vergogna*. [laughs] She recovered, I took her to Windsor, I took her to other various places. It became a stronger attachment but she was so frightened she ran away. I kept saying, "Why are you running away?" *Ma je m'avais.* No. She was going to go back and she went back. But we were both hooked. She went **[02:12:00]** back to Sicily to her family home, where there were people, and I telephoned her there.

She told her sister-in-law and her friend, they're still there, about me. They said to her, "What? A man," and there was a palace in town, you know the palace - what do you call it? A castle in the country. I had a cottage and this thing, "and you let him go? Are you crazy this is the last chance you have." [laughs] Anyway, I kept phoning her. We started writing, she would use an English dictionary to write part English, part French, part Italian. They can't divert and I had acquired that piece by Maillol. I take it you want to hear these things, do you?

Go on yes.

This one Maillol was one of the two most important sculptors in 20th century, the other is - what is the matter with me? You know him. But the provenance could not be proved. A man either goes an exhibition of this artist before my trustee and he came to see me with this and he said, "Julian, keep this." I said, "Look, I am not buying. I'm not in the buying market." He said, "Leave it with you," I said, "If you leave it with me, I shall fall in love with it and I don't want to buy it." He left it with me. Of course, I wanted to keep it. I went and all of them, everybody I went to Sotherbys, Christie two professional appraisers.

What do you think? **[02:14:00]** Is this a genuine thing? They all said there was only one person in Paris called Dina Vierny. If Dina says this is a genuine piece it's worth £4,000. Otherwise, it's worth nothing. I looked at them and said, "Damn it. These people think they know the Sicics, they have no judgment." I decided to go to Paris to meet Dina. I told Ada and she met me in Paris. Dina went to see her. She was the model of Maillol. She inherited him and she had all the work. She was the high priestess of Maillol. Of course, created a whole museum Maillol in Paris.

"ca c'est leuvre, mille dix neuf", means this now worth £1,920 – 90. So she gave me a certificate. She also wanted to buy it from me. I said, "Madam, I buy this picture because I'm in love with it. I want to keep it." This is when we met. Can you imagine at that time I was making a study of Chartres Cathedral. I went with Ada to Chartres. And I was taking, I don't know how many photographs I took -- because I wanted to produce electronic which I did. I was with this girl, I remember saying to myself, "For God's sake, how can anybody be so nice? There must be a snake in the grass." I was so suspicious but I was completely disarmed. I couldn't bear the thought of anybody hurting her, least of all I. This happened because we did another jaunt to Sienna. **[02:16:00]** I remember when we went to Sienna. Can you imagine the two of us in this glorious gem of an unbelievable city? With Ada. And we went back - I went back with her to Florence, stayed in her flat and she took me to her brother. He had a lot of friends with him in there eating mad like Italians do. I remember that some music was being played and the brother-in-law of Ada's brother said "This is Beethoven" I said, "No it isn't. It's Schubert."

Ada's brother said to me, "You can hear a difference between Beethoven and Schubert?" [laughs] I met these people, they were absolutely wonderful, and this went, on in there. Eventually, after how many months? One year and 10 months, we married. There were difficulties because the women in my life convinced me that I was an absolute bastard who didn't know how to love, he was selfish, cruel, all the rest. Doubting is in the soul. I didn't want to marry her.

I said, "What, you take the girl out of that family a nice flat, she is a professor of literature bring her to London and make her miserable? Unbearable." Eventually, all this is overcome we were married in 1972 and I've had 40 years of uninterrupted bliss. She knows exactly what to do with me, without even raising a voice. That's my story.

When **[02:18:00]** *did you get married?*

We got married on the eighth of April 1972.

In Italy?

No in London.

In London.

In London. Her family came over and we went to Caxton Hall. It was a wonderful life. Neema was born and that remains all my life, all my adult life. I wanted to be a husband, I wanted to be a parent, I want a daughter. I always thought in terms of a daughter. My daughter was born at a quarter to nine on Friday the 3rd of November. That's it.

It's wonderful.

From then, everything went right, on nearly everything went right, apart from the normal difficulties in life.

What sort of identity did you want to transmit to your daughter?

Pardon me.

What sort of identity did you want to transmit to your daughter?

Jewish. With the difficulties, Ada was born - not born Jewish but things become more complicated. Her brother published books. One of his books he did a lot of research and came to the conclusion Amadeo family were ones that were forcibly converted in the 15th century - he believes it implicitly. Her father who was imprisoned by Mussolini when he was dying, called a Rabbi. He had a great admiration for Jewish people. Ada the photograph of her holding a placard outside the synagogue in Florence protesting against slandering of Jews. I am very Jewish I think if you-- **[02:20:00]** if you took a photograph of my DNA, you'll probably find the Star of David in it. I could not. I told Ada that I've never misled any girls in my life. I said, if I marry, it's because there must be a family. I want children and the children have to be Jewish, not negotiable.

Was that important to you?

What?

Was very important to you.

Absolutely. She-- Ada accepted this and we married and she converted. It took two years. She was trained by a blind woman who taught her to read the Amidah in Hebrew, can you imagine that. She used to go once a week and we bought up Neema in a Reform but she is now a completely non-believer. This is the way life worked out. Eventually, my child did not become a gentile, but probably my three grandchildren will be, that's life.

How would you define yourself in terms of your own identity?

Very Jewish. Absolutely.

What's the most important aspect of your Jewish identity? Of your--

You mean why I feel that way about being Jewish?

Yes.

Because I think that the Jews are exceptional. They contributed to the world massively over the generations, they've been horribly, badly abused in the New Testament who planted lies on them and the Church speaks to them abominably for 2000 years. The expulsion, the contortion, the robbery, the forcible conversion, **[02:22:00]** the abduction of children, the whole lot, I find very - I could never forgive the Church for the way they usurped Jewish spiritual heritage, distorted it. Can you imagine the Jews going to Roman governor who was like Hitler and saying you must kill and crucifying other Jews? This is nonsense. This happened because of what happened when Christianity took root in Rome and the founder in 89AD, the Jews said, if you believe what you believe, you cannot call yourself Jew. From then on, there is nothing but animosity.

I'm more interested in you personally because is it - are you attached because you joined reformed synagogue?

Yes.

You're not attached - are you attached to the Iraqi traditions?

Yes, I prefer the Iraqi tradition.

Yes. It's quite a different tune in the Reform Synagogue.

Because I'm trained to listen to that type of chanting. When it's done, a la Mendelssohn especially in English, it was going to work, in Hebrew, they do. I feel that the Hebrew words took off.

Which synagogue, where'd you go to now on high holy days or where do you--

Lauderdale --

The Saatchi synagogue?

Yes.

Are those the tunes you grew up with? Are those the tunes which you hear?

I grew up with this, but officially the family belong to the Westminster synagogue in Knightsbridge. That's where joined, that's where Nima had her Batmitzvah

Emotionally you feel--?

When I wanted to really experience a religious **[02:24:00]** feeling, I went to by alone, to the Spanish or Portuguese synagogue, especially when they have a decent *Hazan*, which is not easy, not easy to do.

What is it of your Iraqi origin, what's most important for you, or something you-

Painful, but a source of pride. I think the generation of my family was very brave and they were exceptional - conquered a lot of difficulties which would have defeated others. They were not defeated. They were implacable fighters.

Is there something you miss? I know you painted quite a negative picture.

You see, I live in my own world, I had my own practice, I was producing the buildings of the results of my - for all I am capable of doing. There is the music, there is the art, there's literature, and away from the people who play bridge until four o'clock in the morning. You know what I mean? I don't think I understand that Jew, I don't think I am.

Do you have any desire to go back to Baghdad?

Never. I'm not a killer. If I go there, I would love to drop a bomb on it. No. No, these people are insufferable.

Are you interested at all what's happening today, do you follow?

Of course, I do and I think it's very worrying, very worrying. This American idea, I can fully understand. They want to preach and implant democracy. Muslims are incapable **[02:26:00]** of democracy, they can't. The two don't go together. What's happening is that these people, Muslims, can be ruled only by thugs, by absolute rulers who are intimidated into behaving themselves. If you get rid of them, the people who step in are the Islamists and that is a very

worrying process. I worry for my family. As I said, I don't know if I said during the interview, eventually, I think these people will get a nuclear bomb, they will use it.

Do you see yourself as British at all?

Pardon me

Do you see yourselves as British?

I can't because I know I'm not but I have a great admiration for them.

You don't think yourself as a British architect. Do you see yourself as a British architect?

I see myself as an architect who practiced in England. I did not. My buildings are different from the sort of things that are accepted in England.

In which ways?

As I said, I never climbed on any bandwagon. I didn't do a formula design. I let every commission I had, I didn't always succeed. I wanted it to germinate in my head until I can find a genuine way to produce a piece of work that has its own individuality and not according to a fashion auto formula. When that happens, it is a pedigree quality. I don't always succeed, but when I succeeded, it was pretty good.

Do you have any specific of your favourite building or do you have anything, what is your-

Yes, I have, but they're badly abused, unfortunately. **[02:28:00]** You see, this is the trouble with being an architect, that eventually your building - imagine, how would you feel if your children were abused and property damaged? How would you feel? These are my brain children. I am amazed what damage people can inflict on a building. A building is like musical instrument, it must be played by a musical person.

Which building are you very attached to?

I think I have one, two. The ones that are listed. Yes, they're the only two of them now that bear a resemblance to what they were like when I finished them.

Which ones?

One in where is Hakefield, darling?. What's after-- what is North of where Wellington is? That the buildings I did, my last building, it was an office building in an English royal garden, wonderful opportunity. It sits in there. You look at it, you go like this, he said, yes, I wouldn't alter anything. The other one is, I got 1963 and 1965, a friend of mine who had an exceptional house in Blackheath with a garden, an orchard and a cypress tree, he wanted to build a house in there and I did 15 different designs and I managed to get finally one which I considered a masterpiece. I would match it against anybody's work at any time. It is listed **[02:30:00]** by English--

Heritage?

English Heritage, that one although, was bought by another architect who enlarged it but they enlarged it sensitively in character. That remains representative of what I was all about as an architect. There were also some other successes, but these buildings are old and many of them - how many did I do? Six different schools, two colleges, they're destroyed.

Ada: *The West London Synagogue?*

The West London Synagogue is the worst disaster. [chuckles] I cannot imagine how they managed - it was an achievement in destructive - How do I say? In ruining a building. They ruined it in a way, it couldn't be ruined anymore, and there. That one was published and praised as being the most outstanding in-fill because it stood between a terrace of 19th-century buildings and the 1930s in the corner. And was I think, very, very good when that was finished in 1965, it's not now.

What do you see is your contribution in terms of architect? You said, you were not mainstream. What do you see yourself as your main contribution in architecture?

My main contribution. I convinced myself that I could do it, and I could do it better than others. I'm not of the best or rather compare me to Norman Foster, I'm nothing. **[02:32:00]** You wouldn't have got the type of - I never accepted to do a commercial building, I turned it down. I turned such opportunities down. In 1973 I was designing a building for the Jewish Chronicle. Unfortunately, 1973 war broke out and it wasn't built, I loved it. It was more of a support, as long last I could do a building in the city for a normal occupier, not working for an agent to try and market. What do we now -

Mr. Sofaer, is there anything which I haven't asked you, something you would like to add too?

Yes, of course, but where do you - One must stop somewhere. Look, I've done my best, but perhaps afterward I feel that I got it wrong, I don't know.

I have one last question to you. Is there any message you've got for anyone who might watch this in the future?

Hold on to your Jewishness, hold on to your Jewishness. It is a marvelous heritage that ought to be cherished. Don't compromise on it, I would not.

Mr. Sofaer, thank you very, very much for this interview and sharing your life history with us.

Thank you, and Frank.

[02:34:00]

Cameraman [Frank]: *Okay. If you could tell me who is in this photograph and what it -*

You want for the speak, Frank? This photograph goes back to 1919, 1920. The person on the left is my father Georgi Sofaer and the one on the right is our Haron Shamash. They were partners in business and my father must have been 26 at that time.

Cameraman: *Thank you.*

Okay, Mr. Sofaer, who is on the photo, please?

That's me.

In the middle?

I was seven years old or something like that. The one on the left is my brother, my older brother, and the one on the right is my mother's young brother--

Their names, please?

--youngest brother, Salim. Who was a known Dermatologist, what is skin specialist.

Which year was it taken?

I would say 1930, '31.

Where?

In our house in Baghdad. [chuckles]

Mr. Sofaer, what do we see on the picture?

This is the - What they called *Palais des Nations*

No, it's just a -

The other one.

That's round about 1932 photograph of my maternal grandfather Abraham Haim.

Thank you.

Yes, please.

This is a photograph of the **[02:36:00]** in the League of Nations, *Palais des Nations* in 1932 when Iraq was granted Independence. These are the representatives including Abraham Haim who represented the Jewish community. The one on the extreme right is Nuriel Sayed who fought against the Turks under T E Lawrence, and who lost his life in 1959.

Where's your grandfather?

My grandfather is the - Excuse me. One, two, the third from the left.

How did he get to Geneva?

That was quite an event for the Jewish community, because my two grandparents left from Baghdad at the airport by Nairn. There used to be a company called Nairn who traveled through the desert and arrived the next morning in Damascus. Then they had to go by taxi to Beirut, take the boat to Marseille. From Marseille take the train to *Geneve*. When they came back, of course, it was a major event because they brought parcels for everybody. What you call, gifts for everybody. It was a major event that a Jewish couple went to Geneva to represent the community.

Thank you. Yes, please.

This is a picture taken out of a newspaper. This is the audience in 1932 and the League of Nations where my grandmother, the first Iraqi woman took her seat in that context.

Where is she? Can you spot her?

She is--

Maybe show us with the finger where she is.

I can't see--. The second row and she is the third.

Show us, point it to your finger.

The third I think, yes, the third. She wore a European costume, had a handbag, and cut her hair short, which was a major event. She became a European.

Great, now.

Yes. this must be, 1978. This is Abraham Haim, Rahel Haim and the baby is my mother at the age of two or three, thereabout.

Which year?

I would say that she looks about two years or three years old. It must've been 1907, 1908.

Thank you.

Which year is this?

'*34.*

It is 1934, the entire family, Abraham Haim, his wife, his four daughters, and two sons. Of course, the husbands of the daughters, except my mother, who was sitting at the extreme right of the first row. I am just to her right, leaning slightly forward and I must have been what 10 years old or something like that?

Yes.

Yes. **[02:40:00]** The whole family.

Thank you. Yes, please Mr. Sofaer.

Well, you want me to list it again in 1934. Taken by the same photo studio kept by a person called Arshak who photographed everybody. Any Jewish wedding, he was commissioned to

take photographs. That's my mother, sister, brother, and I, at Arshaks studio. This was the back curtain that he used in most photographs.

Thank you.

The one on the right is my mother's grandmother, Khatoun – Kitty-- Khartom, sitting beside her, her oldest sister Masouda. It's an unusual photograph because these are the clothes, they wore those days, and it is an interesting photograph. There were all the time dress like this. Never everything else. They lived with their granddaughters and other families, they were guests. They lived as guests.

Thank you.

An interesting much earlier photograph, with grandfather and grandmother. In front of grandfather the child is my elder brother. There are one, two, three of his daughters, and his two sons. One of them is on the extreme left and the other is on extreme right. I think for this photograph **[02:42:00]** it's worth preserving because people did dress like this and looked like this. I think that's about all I can say.

Thank you. Yes, please, Mr. Sofaer what do we see?

Yes, I can't remember the year. This was the accordion which my uncle Solomon made the present to me. I did not play it well, in fact, I wasn't taught. I can't even remember what became of the accordion. This in those days, one discovered Kodak cameras and it was quite something to—Then, you had this box in your hand and you could create an image of what you're photographing. It was very exciting to have such a camera.

What did we see? This is a family photo of my mother, sister, and I, possibly in 1937 in our house in Baghdad.

This is 1939 photographs taken on the terrace, the flat roof above our house in Baghdad. Myself standing by the side of my mother.

Yes, Julian, please if you can describe this photo?

This must have been 1942 thereabout. This is the entrance of the JJ School of Art. Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy School of Art, which included the one and only School of Architecture in India at that time, and that's me standing at the entrance. This **[02:44:00]** was taken in 1945 before I departed, I left Bombay to travel to London.

Yes, please?

Well, this is 1948 taken in Hyde Park, not a very good quality photograph, bit southern in appearance. I was a very worried student at that time. I think it was my final year in architecture.

Yes, please?

I can't remember. This would have been right about 1949 or thereabout. I was then an aspiring violinist. Eventually, after 16 years of trying to become a violinist, I decided that I could never make it and I quit. It was a painful decision to make, but a necessary one because I could never have earned my living as a violinist.

This could be 1965. I have an uncle here from Tel Aviv and he want to take photograph of me. I just pose at my drawing board.

Yes, please.

This photograph was taken in 1952 of my maternal grandfather, Abraham Haim Mualam Nisim just before he left London to go back to Tel Aviv. I remember that I wanted very much to take several photographs of him. **[02:46:00]** I bought a secondhand rolling chord camera and used it to take a number of photographs. This is one of them. I like it very much. I like it very much because the face is like the Judean landscape.

Thank you. Yes, please.

This one here. These are the six brothers of the Mualam Nisim family the six of them. The two sitting down, one is Abraham Haim and the other one is Shimon who was the headmaster of Rahel Shamoun school. He, unfortunately, had this terrible disease that people had in those days of glaucoma, which ruined his eyesight, so he was very nearly blind. These are the – how many of them? There are six of them and that's about all I can say.

This was taken on the fifth or the sixth of December 1961 when I went back to Israel for the first time, since 1936, and I took with me, I have made a vow, that if I survived as an independent architect and made good, I would place English roses on his grave, and these are the roses that I bought in from Selfridges and took all the way to Tel Aviv to place it on the grave. It was something that gave me a lot of satisfaction and it **[02:48:00]** still does.

Cameraman: *Whose grave is it?*

Your grandfather's grave. What did it say on the grave?

I didn't say that? This is the grave of Abraham Haim Mualem Nisim my maternal grandfather.

Thank you.

Who died in 1952.

Yes, please.

Yes, this is a photograph of my wife Ada, on our wedding day, the 8th of April 1972 taken where the reception was. Was a small reception party, there were only 11 of us, given by my -- Eugine Rosenberg who years before used to be my boss. They're close friends. They gave us a reception. What else can I say? This is a photograph which I took of her, which I liked very much and that's why we included it.

Thank you. Yes, please.

This was taken during this reception. Eugine Rosenberg, Mr. and Mrs. Rosenberg gave us after our wedding in Caxton Hall, taken presumably by him.

Yes, please.

Oh, this is a group photograph the entire family taken at Christie's, at one of their previews of sales. You see son-in-law Maurice Kleinen holding Leonora, by her side is Talia behind is Neema with Ben, Ben Felix, the baby, Ada and I.

When was it taken?

I think it would have been taken about **[02:50:00]** a year ago or maybe two years ago. Probably the date is on the back of the photograph.

Thank you.

Yes, please. Mr. Sofaer?

What?

Yes?

This is the design I did at a synagogue at Wembley. A synagogue and joining near it a home for the aged between 1974 and '76. This is a front facade as a synagogue and we'll show photographs of the interiors.

Is this part of the Spanish and Portuguese?

This is for the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, yes.

The Edinburgh House next to it?

Sir Allan MacArthur was the head of the community, a very splendid person. It was very exciting doing this. It was at the time when there was this gazumping. Prices were going up daily and we had to grab this piece of land and quickly push the scheme through. We finished it on time and within budget.

Which year?

I think it was finished 1976. I could be wrong. What's his name? Philip of Edinburgh came. Everybody congregated, and he came and he was taken around.

Thank you. Yes, please?

What? This is the interior of the synagogue in Wembley adjoining the old people's home *Beit Holim*. In it, you see the *hekhal* with a separate Torah and the Ten Commandments plotted on. I used olive wood for facing the *hekhal*. **[02:52:00]** Yes, that's about it.

Mr. Sofaer, thank you very much for this interview-

I feel--

- and sharing your photographs and your life with me.

I feel extremely privileged. Thank you-

Thank you again.

- for the trouble you have taken.

[02:52:28] [END OF AUDIO]