

Sephardi Voices UK

IMPORTANT

This transcript is copyright Sephardi Voices UK.

Access to this interview and transcript is for private research only. Please refer to the Oral History curators at the British Library, and to Sephardi Voices UK, prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

**Oral History
The British Library
96 Euston Road
London
NW1 2DB
020 7412 7404
oralhistory@bl.uk**

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it. Should you find any errors please inform the Oral History curators (oralhistory@bl.uk) and Sephardi Voices UK (info@sephardivoices.org.uk).

Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	Sephardi Voices UK
Ref. no:	SV32

Interviewee Title:	Mr
Interviewee Surname:	Shuker
Forename:	Edwin
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	23/07/1955
Interviewee POB:	Baghdad, Iraq
Interviewee Occupation:	Businessman
Father's Occupation:	Business Agent
Mother's Occupation:	Housewife

Date of Interview:	13/07/2012 & 14/09/2012
Location of Interview:	London, UK
Name of Interviewer:	Henry Green
Recording Format:	Video
Total Duration (HH:MM):	03:38
Copyright/Clearance:	Yes

Additional Material:	Photographs
Interviewer Comments:	

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

We are in London, England; we are interviewing Edwin Shuker for the Sephardi Voices project. My name is Henry Green. It is the 13th of July, 2012. Cameraman: Frank Battersby.

Could you please tell me your name?

My name is Edwin Shuker.

Where were you born?

I was born in Baghdad, Iraq.

And when were you born?

On the 23rd of July 1955, eight o'clock in the morning.

You mention that in 1951 there was a change. Could you talk a bit about your, your family history, your grandparents? Was it a tradition of the Baghdad family?

Yes, obviously I was not born in 1951, but what happened in 1951, was a landmark in the history of Iraqi Jews. And...as the vast majority were forced to immigrate within three month's notice, and with very little to take with them. That applied to my grandparents from my father's side. My grandfather was a merchant in the souk of Baghdad and, my, my grandmother was just a typical housewife. They had four children. They took- they registered for de-nationalisation, the father, the mother, the three kids but not my father. My father was in his final year in the University doing law. And they decided, 'You know what? Let's leave him out. He'll come a few months later'. They go out. They immigrate and then there's the twenty years before they ever see their son again, before they ever see his children, or anything like that. We just

complete, total cut off. That repeated itself into hundreds of thousands of families where the, most of them left in that time, and all that remained there were just odds and bits and pieces. On my mother's side, my grandparents my grandfather was also a, a big merchant in, in the traditional Arab market. And they decided not to leave themselves but they sent all the children except for two. And again, you had another tragedy where kids - the youngest was seven years old - finds himself in a foreign land, with a foreign language, without his mother and father. And it actually coloured all our lives that, that 1951 schism. Because the kids, the seven year-old never recovered, and the parents never also managed to go back to normal life having sent all their children and not see them. My, my grandfather actually passed away in Baghdad never seeing his children again.

Was your family, grandparents, religious or more secular?

[04:37]

My grandparents well, I don't remember about my grandparents from my father's side were not there, but my grandparents from my mother's side, yes. *Shabbat*, absolutely, *Chaggim*, but the religious traditions in the, by the time I grew up, were different from the one I can- that I live here. So you cannot actually put it in a box. You cannot say it was Orthodox or Masorti or Reform. It was something that evolved after it, in 1951, with the remnants that remained. And it was a typical give and take convenience. So we go to the synagogue on *Shabbat*, but you know if something happens in the afternoon, and it's a birthday party, so we, we take a car and go there. The Rabbi of course does not know about it; does not want to know about it and even if he doesn't want to know about it. If he hears about it, he pretends not to have heard about it. So, that's really how we lived there. It's a kind of a traditional Orthodox Sephardi synagogue with the congregation, I would say, gradually, losing their adherence and observe-- observance as times pass by.

Because this community was small, what would, what was your upbringing like in the house as a child?

Well, because the community was small, and because by the time I actually grew up, and understood what's going on, we started having major persecution from the outside. And therefore we became so much closer. We became a kind of a community that I really think there are very few of that sort of community anywhere in the world, in any religion. Because we lived almost in an incubator, between 1963 till everyone else manages to escape. We lived in a kind of house arrest stroke concentration camp which was not a real camp but it was a virtual one, mentality-wise as well. We shared suffering, we shared losses, we shared...being persecuted by the majority. We had, for the vast majority of us we had only one school, from primary to the secondary to the, to high school. So therefore we met each other on a daily basis. We lived like one big family under pressure and under stress. And out of that, long life, life-long friendships developed which even now, I would go to a wedding in Montreal, or in Israel, and I would meet somebody that I have not met for forty-five years. It would be like I have met him yesterday. It will be like I am back in school, with, with this family. That's the type of... bond that, that was struck in that community.

[07:38]

Your parents, where - where did they meet and when were they married and where?

Well, my father...as I said he was doing his finals in the, in the law school in Baghdad, so he graduated. And my mother, who was not sent, was not sent to Israel with her brothers and sisters, she was kept because she was too like, mature. At eighteen they were afraid to send her away. They, they wanted to protect her sort of out of modesty, that she stays with her father and mother. And so when the dust settled, and when the word came back from Israel that, 'Look guys, don't rush. You know, things are not really, we didn't have palaces here. You know. They put us in tent cities.' And Russian food, and no work, and the language; so those who actually did not register, pushed back their intention to join their brothers and sisters and, and kids. And so, a new type of transit, temporary life began, which lasted twenty years. But every day, there was that thought, 'We are not here for permanent. We are here until things get better in Israel or somewhere else, or we have an opportunity.' And so we are, it's a kind of a very unique life developed. And so after a few years, two, three, four years, normality sets

in and there are now a much smaller pool of eligible husbands and wives. But there were. And my father met my mother and, they got married in 1954. And I was born in 1955.

And where did your family live in Baghdad?

[09:31]

I...it's in the new Baghdad area. The, I mean the Jewish areas of pre-1951 were Souk Hinun, *Haq de Yehoud*. All these places now were vacated, and Jews left towards the centre of Baghdad. So you have Alwiya, Bataween, Masbah, Mansour, new areas. And that's where I, I grew up in Bataween, with, at the beginning with my- at the house of my grandparents. And then we moved house to a place called Bassem Ebeid, which was not far away, maybe, I don't know, a few hundred metres away. And that's really around the Meir Taweig synagogue, which is the Souk of the Bataween, and the heart of it is Meir Taweig synagogue, which is actually a very- the only synagogue which is still functioning as a synagogue in the whole of Iraq, is the Meir Taweig. And that's around that sort of synagogue, within walking distance of the, of the, of that area. There is like a, a community there. A distinct community that goes to that synagogue. So very similar to what is now here in England or I don't know in the States, but in England the community evolves around the synagogue within walking distance of that.

Did your, your...your mother her maiden name was what?

Abu Temmen. Abu Temmen means 'the father of rice' so...and she comes in, they are from the, they descended from the Sassoon family. The Sassoons, Rubin is the brother of David. David Sassoon is the one who went, who left in the mid 19th century, 1832, who was smuggled out to Bombay, and there he started the Sassoon dynasty, and the brother remained, who was in, remained in Baghdad, and from that is the source of my mother's family.

When you were growing up, your brothers, your sisters, do you have any?

I have only two sisters, younger than me.

And their names?

Rita is two years younger, and Linda is five years younger than me.

And when you were growing up, could you describe a kind of typical day, when you were say ten years old? What would a typical day be like?

[12:07]

A typical day would be school, so, rota. One of our neighbours would pick us up, and we would or the bus coach at certain years, so we would go. The school was very intensive ...major discipline there, and lots of things to learn and a long day. So I remember leaving very early in the morning, with our packed lunch. And we would go together to the same school, and this- Frank Iny became actually throughout the time I lived there, was the centre of our lives, because that's where you meet absolutely everybody. And increasingly, it was becoming dangerous to go anywhere else. I mean after '67, Jews were kicked out of all the social clubs. It was dangerous to walk in the streets, speaking Judeo-Arabic. So, the school became the centre of our lives. And you know it's like a- what can I tell you- everything revolves, you know you meet your own girlfriend, and you have- you set up parties and you have conspiracies and rumours, and...this whole life in there until the end of the school day. And the school day, when it finishes, I mean, as you grow older, it becomes later, and later until it sometimes finishes I think four o'clock in the afternoon. And so you go back and...you go back to your home. You know the methods of entertainment decreased as, as life became harder. So there was one station, for example, of TV, which is the official government one, and maybe there is one program a day that you can watch. And we'd all sit around it, the whole family, it's either a, a serial from Egypt, or a...a sports program and the family would gather around it. My parents would leave for parties practically every single day. They had a party every single day. And, sometimes they would meet at our house and sometimes at other peoples'. But we had maids to take care of us. We had two maids in the house. We had a butler as well. I call him butler; we didn't call him

butler then. But they'd go for that type of thing, so we had three people who were serving us, when my parents were busy playing poker and, and meeting their friends socially.

In the house, when you had Shabbat, which was a weekly event. Can you describe what a Shabbat meal would be like? Who might come over? What kind of foods?

[15:07]

Yes, I...I'm struggling to remember whether I mean Friday night we would have *Kiddush*, that is, that was Holy. Everybody comes in, the whole family, and my father would do *Kiddush*. But as I said, I think straight after *Kiddush*, my parents would go to a party. So...and then, the observing of *Shabbat*, I mean right now if I tell you, it would be, it would sound ludicrous, but that's how we lived. For example, lighting a fire, or *shachat*, [firepit] you know switching on something which is, which results in to like a kitchen or some- would be tantamount to heresy. My father would go absolutely berserk. But, they would happily go in the car and go and play poker. So it was a...it was a mish-mash of traditions and bits and pieces that were picked up or not. We would normally go on *Shabbat* morning to Shul, to the synagogue, we would walk there. Synagogues in Iraq for some sadistic reason always start at the earliest possible time, so it would be like five o'clock in the morning. And then when we come back from synagogue we would have our breakfast, which again, was typical of almost every home in, in Iraq, which is the Iraqi bread with the eggs, the brown eggs with the salad, the chopped up salad with the mango pickles and the aubergine. It's absolutely unique, by the way, the Iraqi kitchen. Nothing ever changes. Absolutely nobody would attempt to do any changes. You are compared like for like. If it's *kubbe* with red, it has to be red when you have beetroot. You cannot possibly have it with, with a different type of vegetable. Absolutely not. So, so you- all these parties that everybody goes to, and all the *Shabbat* meals are exactly the same from house to house. And you could compare like for like. And that was my whole life. And even today, my mother would do exactly the same things. You know, it would be unheard of if you would replace beetroot, the red beetroot with another vegetable, I mean a mushroom for example. That would be just, just not done. So that's something that really typifies the, the, the Jewish cuisine,

which over the tens and tens of years and across the world, became a common denominator for all these families.

[17:41]

What about Passover or Seder, what would that be like?

That is the big day. That, I remember that, more than anything else, the preparation for *Pesach*. I remember my grandmother would start with the rice, sorting the rice out, you know it's a major job. You've got... washing it, making sure that there is no flour in it. That starts weeks before. I even remember sometimes they would scrub eggs, scrub them. And, we had special, and then we had the excitement of ordering the *matzah*, which was baked, especially for you. You go to the synagogues where the, those who bakers are there, or the ovens are there and you order, for you. So it's made for you, you like it a little bit ...more harder or softer. And, and it comes in a cage like a...made of wood, wooden cage where you put chicken normally, but we would have these, these matzoth, which are very, very thin. That's why you have to protect it with a, in a cage, in a case. Because otherwise it just breaks up into dozens of pieces. And oh, and the *silan*, the date juice, which has to be squeezed into linen and then the juice comes out and then you, that's put out upstairs in the, on the roof, in the sun, to become, to, to, to - for the water to evaporate and become thicker. And you decide how thick you want that *silan* and how, what colour you want it. The longer you leave it in the sun the darker and the thicker it becomes. And the walnuts, the preparation for the *charoset* and...oh, dozens of things. The lettuce has to be checked and inspected and sorted and put into plastic... bags and put in the fridge. It was- *Pesach* was a mega story for us.

Did you help in the preparation at all?

Yeah, we all did. Everybody chips in. It's a...

Did you go to the souq?

[19:59]

You have to clean up the house. You have to go through you know the *Pesach* cleaning we did it very, very seriously then. And I go with my father. I sort of, when he orders the, the *Ej Ra-diq* as we called the *matzah*. And...Very happy, very happy occasion, very happy *chag*. Everybody had, I remember, we had silver cups and, and special of course cutlery for *Pesach* but all came out from boxes. But I, I mean you also have to remember that these remnants of Jews, inherited tons of memorabilia and Judaica from parents and grandparents they all, when they left...So if you think like out of every ten, nine point something, have left, we're talking here about heirlooms. I remember for example I had a particular *Pesach* cup for, for the *Kiddush*, that has been there for generations, and it was given to me because I was the *bechor* [firstborn], I was, I am the *bechor*, my father is a *bechor*, my mother is a *bechor*, and my grandfather. It was just a series of *bechorim*, so when I was born, it was the first kid in a, in a tribe, so I get this silver cup, that has passed from generation to generation. So I look forward to receiving it every *Pesach* before the Seder, and we sit there and we do the *Seder*. And wonderful memories, *Pesach*.

Do you remember your bedroom and what it looked like and any special things you had?

Yes, of course. I remember we, we- I only lived in two houses, in my whole life. And...I remember my room very, very well. I remember I am absolutely finicky and extremely obsessively sort of tidy and sorting out everything to perfection. So I had collection after collection. And all were in my room. So I had, if you opened up the cupboard, there was the key ring collection, and it was done in, by colour, by size, my things. I had a... stamp collection. I had cards, you know, football cards collection. I had matchboxes, you know, so I had...my room was full of collections, all of them are untouchable. They're not allowed- nobody is allowed to touch them. So that's my memory. I had a fantastic bed, I still remember it. I used to sink into it, one of those Turkish style, with the huge...the frame was very huge and you'd just sink into that. Yeah, I remember my room very well.

[23:01]

Did you, in school, did you learn Hebrew? Did you...learn Jewish topics?

Yeah, in school we learned four languages at Frank Iny. We learned French as a matter of course. We did several subjects in French, not just as a language. We learned English; we learned ...we learned Hebrew, to read. The government allowed us to read Hebrew, but not allowed to understand what you're learning or to, or Modern Hebrew. And they used to have several inspection visits. Somebody would turn up, the inspectors from the government, and they would particularly make sure that the teaching of the Hebrew is reserved for only for religious studies, for reading, for *Siddur*, and the Bible. But nothing else and without any translation or explanation; purely for ceremonial and prayers.

And can you describe what one of these inspections might be like?

Well, we were not as children, we were not overly moved, but I know that the, the Headmaster and the teachers would be very nervous. Sort of, we would be sitting there and then suddenly the door would push and... the Headmaster would come in and with his two people and he would talk to the teacher and he would say, 'This is the inspectors from the...Ministry of ...Education.' And I...you feel the nervousness in, in their voices and in all that. They would sit with us in the class. They sort of take a, you know a bench, the two of them and just observe and make notes. But we were, we were not aware of what they were taking or we had never... It didn't affect us, but you knew that they were there, for a reason.

[25:10]

Did, as time continued from '55 till whenever you left, did your sense of anxiety...fear, did it grow; did it change?

Well, obviously, there were good times and bad times. They were, I mean, good times were till '63. The Ba'ath Party came in February '63. Things changed. And then, gradually as you got around near '67 it became very, very restricted and uncomfortable.

Very uncomfortable. And then '68 when Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party came for the second time, it then became a living hell, basically. Also, on top of that you had the *coups d'état* and the revolutions, what we called, for the general public, not necessarily the sort of Jewish anxiety, just everybody's anxiety. I dreaded that time. I mean you would be sitting the class, in the school, and suddenly you would be hearing...machine guns and planes. And I remember the fear in my heart. I mean I, I'm getting it now as I talk to you because first of all now I mean I'm responsible for my two sisters, two younger sisters. Secondly, you realise you know that something big is happening around you, that there will be a revolution. That the Army will be in the streets, that, Will my parents reach me? Will they find us? Will they come and get us? Will they get killed in the street? Will we be orphans? Will my sisters get trampled in the panic? Do I go and pick them up? Do I stay? And then, when... and that happened frequently by the way, not just the one, the revolutions you know, but frequently there would be like corrections and, and suddenly everybody freezes. And I remember what happened then. Then the teacher would take control. The Headmaster, well there would be an hour later or two hours later, while you're sitting trying to pretend nothing's happening while the guns and, and, and, and planes are around. And then the Headmaster would come in and whisper to the teachers and then suddenly they'd take control, and they said 'Right, everybody sits. There is no break. Nobody leaves the, the classroom. Everybody sits.' And then while you're sitting in there, you get somebody coming in, and the janitor comes in with a name and they would say, 'Ok, Salman Mashael.' And that means his parents are coming to pick him up, because and then Salman Mashael will pack up and go, and we will look at 'You lucky person', you know 'You are saved.' And he would look at us not knowing whether he would ever see us again or what. It's just, we are talking about kids of ten, eleven, twelve. And, and you would sit there waiting for someone to come and pick you up and sometimes you are the last or, or you are in the middle or whatever, but it was very, very anxious times. And so that's beside the, the Jewish persecution, there was the general anxiety in there. It's...you, you lived on edge. You lived on edge. And then you go back, if you, when you get saved, you get back home, and you rush home because there's now, the bullets are coming closer and closer. You try, with your father you try and get some, some food on the, on the way, some bread, but everybody else is trying the same thing. So everything else is finishing. And then you sit there and then you switch on the radio,

and you hear music and music and music - military music - for hours. And suddenly a voice comes in and then everybody rushes to the radio. And it's the *Bayan Raqam Wahid* [Arabic: Decree number one] which is the, we always got used to that sort of the first announcement after the revolution. And, and then says, 'Stay tuned there will be things, but in the meantime there's a curfew, and everyone anyone who is seen outside is shot – on sight.' So, there was that excitement too.

Did...did, at your school, which was the Jewish school, did you have friends who were not Jewish, which, which were Christian or Muslim, or...?

[29:36]

Yes. The school had to take a few every year. Mainly the upper class of the Muslim world. The son of X or Y or some Minister or some, some big shot, a couple of Christians. We're talking about maybe three, four in a class. Now these were rarities and we all wanted to be their friends, and, actually they were celebrated and welcomed, even more so than Jewish friends. And till today, we all are connected or, or in touch with the two Muslims or three Christians who were in our class, wherever they are in the world. And one of them is a Minister in Iraq today, currently. And yet, when he comes here, has immediately connects with his classmates from Frank Iny and they, they, they sort of, get together and, and, and feel that bond and that friendship forty years later.

Did you visit their homes or did they visit your home?

No. There was always this...the way we grew up and which I always think was a model for probably coexistence, between Jew and Arab, was, how much respect they had the communities - I'm talking about the man in the street - for each other, for each other's traditions and religion. Yet there was a line, there was a virtual line which you do not cross out of total respect and I'll work with you. I will talk to you, I will listen, but the home is home. And my children are my children. And...the idea that a Jewish child would go to a Muslim house and some did of course, neighbours, absolutely. But the idea of a, of a, of a Jewish boy going out with a Muslim girl was *so* no-no, that I can't

even begin to tell you. In spite of all the, the bonding and the, the, and the greetings and the, 'my brother' and 'my...' things, there was lines which are not written. And I've always said, this is an unwritten contract of how a Jew lived in the Arab world, between a Jew and an Arab.

Did the, did ...what about sport events, for example, if there was a football game. Would, would you and your friends, Jewish, non-Jewish, go to the football game?

To watch or to play with others?

To watch or to play.

[32:24]

Yes, but look, there were good times, worse times, you know, better times...there were periods where you don't actually show your face...outside. Especially after '67. But did somebody go to see the national team play? Of course. One or two, but it was not something that, that...that would be welcomed or that your parents would allow you. Especially at our age. They wouldn't allow us to go to a football match where we would probably if we start speaking Jewish dialect then we would be identified and God knows which hot head...Well certainly after '67 life completely changed. I mean after '63, you knew you were a Jew, because my, my first good memory. I remember actually when I was three years old, things happening. But my first good memory of meeting the government body and knowing that I'm actually different from the other citizens was when we all had to queue to get our Jewish IDs, which was something new that the Ba'ath Party did in 1963. It was an identity that says, 'You are not a denationalised Jew.' That's how it actually, literally means the words. So, you'd actually have to hold a certificate that says, 'I'm a Jew who has not denationalised.' So, it was a yellow ID card, and we had to all be there, and we had to put our fingerprints there, and I remember that very distinctly. I still have it, that thing, with the children's fingerprints on it as well as my parents'. And, that yellow ID and that February '63 revolution, and made immediately...that was the first time I actually, I and others, realised that we are not

longer an Iraqi citizen, or an equal Iraqi citizen. We are now different; we are now yellow carded. And, so that was '63 onwards.

Your earliest memory at three, what was that?

[34:45]

I, my earliest memory, was... you will not believe it, but I actually remember it so well. It was the revolution of 1958, 14th of July, 1958. The Army, for the first time in the history of Iraq, the royal family was murdered, slaughtered, on the 14th of July, and the new junta came into power, and took over the control of the TV and radio. And the famous, world famous, Nouri Said, Prime Minister, ran, made a run for it. And he was caught. He was caught a few days later, wearing an *abaya*, a lady's hijab. And he was beaten to death, and his body was pulled through, by ropes through the streets of Baghdad. It's a punishment that happens in Arab countries; even recently there were some scenes like that. I don't know what pleasure they get out of it. But I remember so distinctly, because when, when that procession reached near our house and we were able to see on the main, we had balconies on the main street, the panic my grandmother and my mother panicking, anxiety, crying, but unable to resist... going up and watching that gruesome scene. So they were rushing up to the balcony. And I remember rushing beside-- behind them...so clearly. And they were trying to say, 'No you stay in, stay. Stay. You go back. You go back.' And I was like, as a, you know, child, I was, I was going with the excitement. And I, I, I remember that very distinctly. And I was exactly three years. That was July '58 which is three years old, on the dot.

In this period, you felt yourself Jewish. Did you feel yourself Iraqi or Arab at all?

Yes, we, we did feel, I mean when the football match plays, or when the competition goes, we would root out for Iraq with all our hearts. Yes. No doubt about it.

And Arab at all? Did you feel yourself Arab?

[37:30]

I don't think Arab, Arab as it was, apart from even within the population. We felt more Iraqi because Iraq is different from places like Egypt and all that. Iraqi minorities lived with the majority, intermingled, the same street. We had Sunnis and Shias and Armenians and Christians and, and honestly I for well, I left when I was sixteen. Plus, I didn't, I could not distinguish who was Sunni or Shia or sometimes who was Christian. We were all kids playing and we were all adults, young adults... talking about young adults things. I, so, so we were more Iraqis than Arab. And I felt this was generally the case in the whole country.

Your...you spoke what language at home?

Judeo –Arabic.

Did your parents speak French or English?

Yes, they, yes they, I mean every Jew had a background who was there in these periods, they had a background in French and in English.

Did they speak these languages to you, to the children?

No.

And when you went out in the street you had a Judeo-Arabic Jewish dialect. Did you change this at all?

Absolutely. We immediately changed it to the, to the language of the street, to the Iraqi street. It's not always easy, especially when you are young, to, but, but we had to.

And did someone teach you this or was it sort of like...?

No. No, you just knew, when you are in school or when you are home you switch on to your, to your Jewish language. When you are outside naturally you switch on to the, to

the dialect, the local dialect. You wouldn't dream of asking a, a vendor in Judeo-Arabic. You wouldn't dream.

And did, in your, in your...neighbourhood, was it segregated as time continued? Were Jews only really, after '67 spend time with Jews or did you have interaction with...?

[39:50]

No, within the neighbourhood, I don't think, I mean no Jew moved, was moved to a Jewish area or to a ghetto, or anything like that, at all. But I mean our immediate neighbours; we carried on with them to the very end. Our...you know, we had Muslim friends as well. But increasingly they were themselves, the other, even though we were friends, they themselves did not want to mix with Jews, especially not in public. Definitely not, because, and especially after the '68, when there were the trials of the spies, the Jewish spies. And so-called spies, that made each one of us a pariah. Because *davka* [Hebrew: 'for no reason', doing something because one is able to-usually out of spite], because they all knew, that these are completely totally innocent people. And so, when they arrested any ...a Jew, he was beaten almost to death, and therefore he had to say who are his partners, who are his collaborators, who are helping him and, and he might have come up with a couple of Muslim friends or they might have put these two Muslim friends in his testimony, which happened quite a few. Each one of those people who were hanged or who were tortured gave a full confession, so called. And a full confession contained the people he knows. And so the, the Muslims for sure, and the Christians, started keeping distance. And the clubs that used to welcome us, which were mainly Christian clubs, actually one of them, maybe all of them, but one of them for sure put signs saying 'No Jews are allowed into the club any more.' And the memberships were revoked and, for self preservation, and none of them, I mean you know I didn't see any of them wanting to be a hero so, so they just didn't want to meet Jews or talk to them or do anything like that. That's after '68.

You were born in '55, so you-- did you have a Bar Mitzvah in '68 at all, or?

In '68 my Bar Mitzvah coincided with the, the big revolution of July when, when Saddam Hussein, there were two in the same month. The first revolution and then the second one, two weeks later, where the Ba'ath actually betrayed their own collaborators and the people who brought them to power and killed them and imprisoned them. So they didn't-- it was a double act. And mine was right in the middle of two revolutions. You can imagine. It was...a...a very lonely and sad affair, my *Bar Mitzvah*. It was a curfew, day, and I remember my father taking me to, to one of the rooms and saying to me, 'Unfortunately that's all you're going to get.' Just me and him. And he put on the *tallit* and *tefillin* and I recited it, put it on, and that was my *Bar Mitzvah*. There were, you know, not too many guests.

[42:50]

Did the period after '67, your, you say life changed dramatically. Can you describe sort of your experience, personal experiences between '67 and the few years before you left?

Yes, well it started before '67. It started in preparation for the war of '67, so I would say two months before, June. You could not help being affected, with the daily dose of propaganda raining on you. Now we, I grew up not knowing the word 'Israel' almost. Because literally, the word 'Israel', is never, ever, ever pronounced in any communication. You know remember we didn't have satellites and channels and all of that. There was one channel; there was one radio, there were five newspapers. You would never, ever see the word itself. And when these few publications come from abroad like 'Newsweek' or 'Time Magazine', the censor literally either...tear the page, or, with a big black thick ink, removes every picture or word of 'Israel'. And I'm talking about literally. So you just substituted with a *al apipa* which means like a bastard nation type of thing, when they want to refer to that place. So, so we had the-- so how do they explain to the Arabs, to the ...how do they explain to them what is going to happen? So in order for them, because Israelis are not seen, so, no pictures, no words. So the way to explain it is to use Jewish symbols and Jewish people.

[44:48]

And therefore they wrote the stereotype Jew, which is Moshe, Heskeli, Asra, which is us, this is us. They modelled every evil character, all day long, both TV and radio, on us. And so inevitably Heskeli is a traitor, is a lowlife, he abuses, he rapes Arab girls, and eventually he gets killed. And what whenever you switch on anything, that's what, that was what's happening. Then you had the newspapers...preparing the people for, to celebrate victory. You had Umm Kulthum the greatest singer of the Arab world over the last 100 years; she promised everyone that she would be the one, the first one to sing in Tel Aviv on... And, the images that were not politically correct you know about all the things that now the people don't use, though actually they are starting to use them again, but about wiping, about throwing in the sea, about rivers of blood, all that was graphically fed to us day in, day out. It was a siege; it was, it was just hell. So of course, and I was by then thirteen years old, and we were very, very, very mature thirteen year olds, all of us. We had to mature very quickly at seven, eight, and nine we were already maturing and knowing what's happening in politics, knowing about these revolutions, knowing about this, what...So, yeah so it was, it was... The mind has to live, adapt, and live normally sometimes during the day. Like, you hear now about the concentration camps and the Holocaust. At the end of the day you have 24 hours. So at, at one hour you actually have a joke, or a laugh, or play a game, but you are in that...whole atmosphere of, of actually, I don't know, persecution...awaiting death, awaiting something major to happen to you. Almost daily, thanking God that your father is coming back home. It was just a major thing when, I remember I was particularly sensitive. I remember my father has to come back at one o'clock. And I remember before one, ten to one I would be standing at the window... [Pauses with emotion] willing that my, my father's car would turn up. And not sharing it, not sharing with my mother or my sisters or whoever was in the house. Just, just waiting for him to come.

[47:40]

This, this kind of code, in a way you're talking about, between speaking Judeo-Arabic in the home and speaking, and then speaking...Arabic outside the home. Can you talk about what the differences were? How, how would one of them...?

Well, for us it wasn't a code, for us it was: this is our language at home and school. This is the language you do, we talk with Jews. And actually, unfortunately, as you can guess, it's disappearing, this language. It's one of the major losses that we have lost in that displacement of Jews from Arab countries. It's, it's a language which developed over centuries I guess because it's got Persian words, it's got Turkish words, it's got Hebrew words. It's- the accent is completely different. However there's something very interesting. When people hear us, there is one district in Iraq, with similar pronunciation, not the, not the words, but the pronunciation, and that's in Mosul. And sometimes when you get when people got caught speaking that, you always say, 'I'm from Mosul.' And, however, there is a, I read an ...an academic paper recently that says the Jews and the people from Mosul, are the only ones who are speaking the true Arabic as was spoken a century earlier, before - or two centuries earlier -before the Bedouins and the people who arrived later changed, before the Arabic cultural invasion of the thing happened. And therefore the language became more similar to Saudi Arabian, Syrian and that sort of thing, sort of, the dialect. I don't know how true is that or not, but I thought I will mention it. But, Judeo-Arabic is something I absolutely treasure and I try and talk to my mother now, my sisters. Whenever we can when we meet up, as friends to try and keep it alive a little bit longer. But now and then a word will come and we will say, 'Ah! I've not heard this word for forty years, or thirty years.' But it's in there. It's in the recess but it's no longer gonna be there for the next generation.

[50:15]

The, the experience post-'67, the... Israel became stronger in your, your, your consciousness as it were, even though it wasn't mentioned. Were you involved in anything Zionist or did you become involved in anything Zionist? Were there covert things going on?

Not to my knowledge, at all. The only thing is that we were walking six feet, twenty feet tall, in spite of all the persecution, after '67 war. We assumed like the rest of the population that that's the end of Israel. ...I was almost shocked personally that somewhere that I actually have not heard of much, and I don't know about, will not be there. By the way I actually did not know I had uncles and grandparents. We were not

told. Our parents wanted to protect us so that we would not come up with something in the wrong place or at the wrong time and say 'My Uncle lives in Israel.' And then you have to explain, 'how did you hear about it' and 'when did you hear and are there secret messages?' And I think what happens is they get secret coded words from London... a letter which is, which describes the weather and talk about nonsense and then suddenly says, 'and by the way, Jacob had a baby.'

[51:50]

And then my father would know it's Jacob, his brother, who lives in Israel. And that's the, that's really the, how it, how far it went, in terms of concealing your relationship with Israel. But my father wouldn't pass this message to us, and therefore we didn't know anything about it. And I remember personally how I, for months after the '67 war, I would pretend to be an Israeli soldier, in the bathroom. And I honestly remember it today. It was my best time, because increasingly we had nothing to do. You had, in the summer we had four months off, because the temperature was fifty degrees. Four months without, almost without leaving the house. And there was no computers and no TV, and, and no iPhone so, there was just very little to do. I didn't have a brother, so my two sisters were playing girly games and I was by myself. So I used to spend hours and hours imagining things, and I imagined that I was an Israeli soldier, an Israeli soldier would be at least two metres to three metres high. And I honest to God believe that up to the time I landed in Lod. I expected people who were of Superman size; totally powerful, totally knowing everything – Superman. Superman was my hero, and therefore this was how I imagined all the Israelis, all of them to be like that. And I pretended to be one, and I pretended that the Arabs are coming to get me and I am sort of waiting for them and so on and so forth. So these are the games that kept me occupied and kept my mind sane in '67, '68, '69, sort of knowing that there's somebody who's teaching these guys who are giving us such a hard time, teaching them a lesson. But Zionist, in the sense that covert meetings or, or arms, for me it was just totally out of, totally out of, our league. Together with the rest of the population, we used to hear Radio Israel in Arabic in total secret of course. And that was our lifeline to what's happening in the world, especially after the persecutions of 1968 when we felt totally isolated and we thought we would all be killed. And that was the time when we used to

hear, when we used to hear the, the French speaker of the Parliament Alain Poher actually holding a meeting across Europe to discuss the situation of the Jews of Iraq. That was – Wah! – that was our oxygen, our life, our...we would, whoever heard it would go rushing and say, you know, in very quiet words, 'I just heard x and y and z.' And then you know if people are actually thinking of us, you know that people actually coming to get us sometimes. We're not by ourselves.

How did you... how would you listen to this service? How would you know of this?

[55:02]

No, I mean the radio was, you know, we all had transistors. And obviously Israel was broadcasting in Arabic and was a very powerful broadcaster. It had different days and different hours; it wasn't all continuous. We knew, that on Tuesday at nine o'clock Ibn Raffidain which is one of the most famous programmes would come on, and it would be in the Arabic, it would be Iraqi, Iraqi local Muslim dialect. And it's a ten minute slot. And he ends up always with a story. Oh! I don't know many of the elite of Iraq who don't rush home to hear his secret, this Ibn Raffidain, this broadcast, on Tuesday evenings. And, so, you find the thing, of course your, your parents tell you that this should not happen, and you should not you are risking everybody else. But you know, what else are you going to do, I mean you know, as a teenager you take the transistor and you go up to the roof, and you dial until the dial goes to Israel and then you get the... a lot of the time it would be jammed! But when you're not jammed you just get catch of the news or the summary of the news or, or something and that's your lifeline.

When did your parents begin to confide in you more about what was going on?

Well, now that everything was, was really...transparent after a while. I mean the attacks on us, on the Jews...I mean it wasn't, I don't need to hear it from my parents, you know the radio, the TV, the... they were all, you know the newspapers, there was one newspaper that every Wednesday, and I remember I had to go and buy it. And in it, there was a third of the page, and that page was invitation to the great Iraqi people to send any kind of unusual behaviour that your Jewish neighbour is doing, please let us

know. So on Wednesday, you take the paper, you buy it, it's folded, you don't open it. You rush home to see which Jew's time has come to be exposed publicly as somebody with, with, and unusual behaviour that might be sending messages or to the enemy, or acting as a spy. So you get a letter from x, y, z, and he gives the full name of the Jew, the full address of the Jew, and he says, 'something really weird, you know, every ten o'clock, after ten 'clock there's some kind of stick coming out like an antenna, which comes out of the house.' I mean you know, total dreamland, but it doesn't matter. That guy is sitting there reading about himself with the antenna, and shaking to, to, to, to... and I remember that, that, that, every Wednesday coming going from the newsstand until I get home, in order to open it and see whether our name was on it or somebody else's name in it. What torture! Absolute torture. And to pretend that, 'oh, you're buying a normal paper.' No, look or no, anything exciting, just rush with it back home and open it soon as you walk into your home. So you don't need your parents to, to tell you about these things.

Were there any of your friends who were named in such a thing?

[58:38]

Oh, all the people who are there were our friends. All of them! There was...

Your age? Your age friends?

No, no, my age we were just, *just* under the radar. I mean, I escaped at sixteen. So, we're talking about the period of thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. That was under the radar. All those sixteen, in 1967, and, and, and older, were the ones who took the brunt. We were *just*, just - under the radar.

At some point, you left. Can you tell the story about your leaving and how it developed?

Yes. I...After '68 and January '69 with the hangings, there were other trials during that year and other hangings and other killings. And, and again, you try, I remember when my parents used to have friends and they whisper. And how I used to be behind the

door and try to catch some sentences. And they would say, 'Please leave the room.' And I would go behind and try and hear what was there. And things like, somebody called Atrakchi, who was arrested with the nine Jews who were hanged in January. Of him, nobody has heard. Not released, not hanged, not imprisoned, just gone. And, then the rumours grew that actually - and then somebody who actually was there and came out a month later, and the image still in my mind and I have to share it with you, I don't share it with anyone before.

[01:00:28]

But they said they actually tied him up, spread-eagled him, and, and passed a, a very heavy metal machine, that normally levelled streets after you put the asphalt you level it. And they actually just passed it on him. And he just, just disappeared; just became paste. And they did that, so that the others, who were watching, or hearing him, know what happens to them unless they play ball with the government and make full confessions and, later most of them were hanged but...I mean an image like this was, I don't know. You don't, you just don't believe in that image, it just doesn't leave me. So every time I hear the name of the family I, that image even today comes to me and, how I played it tens and twenty the times in my mind, how a person can become a paste. We call it *amardine* which is something you eat which is, apricot when you squeeze them to, to paste and then you put them on a tray and you make them level and you sell them as sheets. And so I always imagined that man like that. And that's why when you know you can't afford that your father is late by, by, by minutes. Also my father was arrested as well as everybody else and another story of how he was...how my mother went and pleaded for his life, with someone that she knew is powerful enough, and that person told her that she has to leave the house and never to come back or ever mention his name, or anything of that. And next time she comes it will, it will not be good for her. But he did actually help release him, but that was, he said to her, 'This is the first and last time you ever see me or hear me.' So, so that was the, so that was the background for the, for the community saying they can't take any more. And so...people, we started hearing about people escaping, by themselves. Sometimes they were caught. We had, in 1970 it became almost there was a rumour that the government has made a deal and it's ok to go. You've got to leave everything, you've got to leave

your house, you've got to leave everything. If you play it rightly, and low profile and go to the north, then there are smugglers there and in a way you can reach there. When people did that, there was mass arrest, one day, and that was one of the blackest days, because that was after the hangings, and then suddenly the rumours spread without any...Jews were not allowed to have a telephone. So the rumours would be, one person, you see the person coming to your house and you see his glum face and he wants to speak to my father. And he would be saying something [whispers]. And then we realised that what happened was there was a mass arrest, that people who are brought back in coaches, children, and women and men, and they are all under arrest. And you immediately start thinking, death, torture. I mean torture, by Saddam Hussein and his henchmen are what they did. I don't think I don't know, I don't know any other place that, that had such sophistication, such cruelty and such sadism, as the Ba'ath Party had from '68 till recently probably, till the, this century, till 2003. But they, they excelled, they excelled in, in, in methods that defies humanity. How a person can be so cruel to another.

[1:04:40]

You heard your parents talking behind doors, and that led to what process of your leaving?

Right, so in... I remember in 1970, my father suddenly feeling...ill. And I remember the ambulance coming in, and I remember, he was holding his heart. I mean we're talking about a period when all these things were happening continuously; deaths, torture, release, either somebody is being released, somebody is being arrested, somebody is being hanged. It was a tiny community, and I would say at least a quarter or even half of all the adults were arrested at some time or another, or anybody over eighteen. So we're talking here about being bombarded with this sort of thing. And, my father had this, this sort of condition, and, I remember how, how anxious we all were. But then my mother said it was not a heart attack, it was palpitations. And, I cannot remember whether they told us the story then, or later, but apparently that was the day that we were supposed to try and escape, in 1970. And my father decided to go and buy a small suitcase for our trip. And by the way every house, including ours, had 24/7,

guys, watching us and this is not paranoia, this is true. Watching every Jewish home, they would be, either setting up a small place to sell tea, or a little stall. But you could tell that they're not a stall man because they'd change. And they would be sitting watching almost every Jewish home, and the street, and the neighbourhood. One of the things that Saddam did was to have in every street, someone who reports back. And in every district somebody reports on the street, you know it was pyramid built total control, brilliant. But that way they knew everything and anything that happens in the street level. Not, not... You don't need to read the papers or, or letters.

[01:07:19]

So my father went to get this suitcase and as he was crossing a road, suddenly two Army people handcuff him, not with handcuffs but take him by the, lift him up and throw him into the...lorry. And...dark lorry. And you can imagine what would a man feel; he was escaping that day. He hasn't told us that and, he thought this was the end. Long story, but it turned out that that day there was a new law about zebra crossing. You're only supposed to cross from a zebra crossing and therefore he wasn't. And therefore he was going there and he had to go to the station to pay five Pounds penalty because they needed – the end of the month, of every month - they need to pay wages. So there is always some kind of a penalty to be paid in order to pay the wages. But by the time he knew what was happening; you know he had a heart problem, as a direct result of that incident. So that pushed us another year. We didn't know about it, but finally August, August 10th 1971, he then gathered us. By then we all knew that one day, this is our only way of living, because you're honestly were not living. You just, I don't know, watching...watching...catastrophe after catastrophe, you were just counting minutes. You wouldn't buy anything new, you wouldn't dream of a new project, if you finished school you are, let's say you are unemployed, sitting at home, can't go out. That was...so there was absolutely, absolutely nothing to look for, but zero, except for running away. That's your only chance. So, so we were expecting it but we, we, you hope you never hear it, like a major operation. You just hope that it won't happen but you know that it's in the, in the offing. So, one day he brought us back and it was, I remember the day very well. I remember the room very well when he asked us to come in. And...you know, with glum face he said, 'We have two hours in this house, and we

will be gone. After that we will try and...' that's when he gave us the instructions, not to speak at all, unless spoken to. Not to, you know, not to, not to take anything with us except for, he specified the size of, of how - what we can, you know, a couple of shirts, couple of you know, sort of underwear, some this one, and...that's it. I mean you know, I can go on describing it as if it was yesterday, but... That was, we then left the house at the time that we were supposed to and the, I always talk about the two hours that we had.

[01:10:13]

I remember going up and down looking at all my collections, one at a time, saying goodbye to all of them. And although I was able to take one, I just don't know how to explain it, but I decided it's like my children this was, I, I lived for them. And therefore no one should be escaping with me at the expense of the other collections. So they're all there. Left them all. Didn't take anything with me. I took a couple of things which I still have. Gifts for my you know sort of excellence, for excellence in school, the prizes like this, but other than that, we spent the two hours just roaming around, counting minutes, anxiety, fear, sweat, hot August Baghdad. I remember so well these hours and as we got out to the car, you try to be pretending to be normal and, and in front of the guy who's making tea outside, and, and here your inside is, is churning, is tearing, as you got into the car in the heat of Baghdad. And you are embarking on the, on the adventure of your lifetime. And so on and so forth. I mean, I don't know how much you want me to describe the, the, the day. But...you know we, I remember very clearly moments in that trip. I remember standing, it was funny, it was like six o'clock, seven o'clock in the evening, and the sun is setting and just about light. You know, that... And I always remember Baghdad like this. My first, when you tell me Baghdad, or you tell me how, when I was a kid, I always remember it at that time of the day. Sun is setting, not yet night, there is no light. And, and I remember standing there waiting for our next instruction, because my father only knew one instruction which was to go to the, to the train station. And waiting for something to happen, and we were standing there.

[01:12:31]

And I remember the young man who came in, which we recognised, and he very politely said to my father, 'Hello Mr Shuker, how are you?' And, 'I see you are planning a trip. You know, may I recommend Mosul at this time of the year? Absolutely superb weather apparently. Very cool.' And he just went, into the horizon. And, and then that was the cue for my father to buy tickets for Mosul. I remember in the train, the train was, was hell, because the journey, because it was packed. And soldiers, were so many of them. And we were sitting in a compartment but we were not by ourselves. And, it's a night train. And my sisters were not allowed to speak, I was you know, in case they reveal their identity and I, I just I remember when like, a sleepless night. One thirty at night when you are just dozing off and the door of the cabin just opens and it's identity checks; ticket and identity. And, we had forged papers, my father had. And my sisters were oblivious I think to the forged papers and all that but, I was the anxious man. I was anxious and I worried all day, every day, of my life. So, I'm always anticipating what's going to happen in the next minute and the worst scenario, of course. The next time they are coming in, they will check that it's forged, we will be marched out, we'll be dragged out by our hair; we'll be tortured to death. You know, the every minute was a scenario for me, until we reached the station. And then we had to hire a taxi, and the taxi driver doesn't know who we are, what we are. And we were saying, my father was giving the orders, and saying, 'I want you to be, to go to the Salahaddin.' And he said, 'what? What are you talking? Are you crazy?' And this was like the Kurdish area. 'I take you to the best, best places. You will always remember me for that.' My father says, 'No, we have something sentimental. We have people waiting for us there. Family who are ahead of us.' And he says, 'But it's dangerous going up north that much. We will have to cross so many checkpoints and...' And my father, 'Yeah, but it's too late now, because my...the other family has already left and they are already waiting for us, and, I will give you more money.' And the guy says, 'But I'll take you to another place.' And, and I don't know, I mean you know, so, I just remember so clearly these moments that, that, that, that, that, that screamed at me. And I remember the checkpoints, with whenever we get to a checkpoint, and the, the, the Army.

[01:15:24]

I mean till today, till now, if I see anyone in uniform, my heart sinks, totally and absolutely. At my age. Today. After being here for forty years. I look in the mirror and if I see a policeman, even though he's not even asking to talk to me, just a police car, my heart just completely and totally sinks. And when he stops me, I'm shaking. I was there, last, two weeks ago I was stopped. I mean, you know I did not absolutely, he stopped me for nothing, and I'm, and I'm trembling and I'm shaking and I'm sweating, and my heart is beating. And so I remember these guys when we stopped at checkpoints and they would push these machine guns inside the, for extra effect, inside the car, and ask my father to get off the place. And, and my father would go out and you could see him, how anxious he is, we are sitting in the car. And the film plays in my mind. And my grandmother. We were three kids and my grandmother, in the back and packed and, she's reciting the *Shema Yisrael* in, in, in a hear-able way and I was like, we're all begging her, to keep quiet. And I just, just... on and on and on, until we reached the Kurdish enclave. And then there was a, major complications, because there was another couple of families, who were not supposed to come. We had to get the ok from the smuggler in Baghdad, so he would tell them to expect that family. And we had a, had a piece of paper, we had a card that's cut into half so he knew the person who would bring the other half of the king of spades is the family that is *bona fide* and they are supposed to come. And there was another two families who tried to beat the system, came out without that. And the Kurds, were going to shoot them.

[01:17:31]

They said, 'You can't'. And, I remember my grandmother and I remember my, my father, and literally, I have not seen that, literally, falling on their faces and kissing the feet of these Kurds, who were going to shoot these guys, or at least send them back under threat of shooting. And just to allow them that chance, having reached all these checkpoints, finally they agreed and, and we had a very rough ride, because we could not have the nine people journey, we were now twenty-two. And the same car, the same sort of pick-up car for like a cattle, we were packed there. And...and that was very, again, I was, I remember the thoughts in my mind saying, 'I want to be back. I want to go out. I want to go home. I cannot take that. I cannot take any more of this. I cannot look in the, valley, and it's the valley of death.' The car was, we were twenty people in

the car, twenty –two people. We were packed one on top of the other. There were no lights. The cars had to drive completely in darkness. The valley is down there, no barriers, no nothing. You could see the odd lorry down, down in there. And I don't want; I cannot take any more of this. And...I was so angry for, for, for being put into that position. But we made it.

The Kurds took you over the mountains?

The Kurds took us to Iran.

Iran.

And, the, the Kurd who took us was, identified himself as Massoud Barzani the son of the legendary Mustafa Barzani and the current President of Kurdistan. He personally took us over the border.

Once you got to Iran what happened?

[01:19:32]

Once we got to Iran, we were like refugees. Like, all refugees anywhere in the world. No papers and you get the United Nations, and you get the Jewish Agency, and we were put into hotels for asylum seekers, so to speak. And, you could see the rest of the population looking at this wave after wave of people who come in with, with almost nothing and stationed there. And we were interviewed by the Jewish Agency who interviewed my, and we were given temporary papers, refugee papers, called *Parauana*. And, were happy days, were happy days in Teheran, the few days that we spent there, were very happy days. That was the relief of a lifetime of being under, what felt like a lifetime under that persecution. And suddenly we could walk in the street, nobody is going to be arrested, nobody is going to be hanged. In a way, that experience some people was negative, because, every minute and every hour and every day, we had only one objective, get out. So now we are out, and suddenly you had to pick up your life! You had to say, 'Ok, I'm out now.' So I was sixteen and something. 'So what do I do

now? Where do I go?' What... All these questions that were never, ever being entertained before. We only had one thought. And I was the lucky one, at that age. People who were twenty-five or thirty-five, having spent all their life for that one day and that day came and now they are...What do I do next? Who am I? And that's why, actually when I see, refugees I, I immediately sympathise. Genuine refugees, I just know exactly what's going on in their minds. It's just total blank, total blank, total...no joy, no joy. It's, 'I'm free, but what do I do now? I have not been free for, for...for years.'

The, the Jewish Agency, the...where did you go at that point from Iran?

Well, the Jewish Agency had, I mean...once they interviewed us, they would want, they would ask us whether we want to become immigrants, in Israel. And they helped us, with, with the logistics, tremendously, of course. They coordinate with the government of Iran, and finally, the flight to Tel Aviv.

And so you come to Tel Aviv, and did you think of staying there? Did your parents want to stay?

[01:22:34]

No, my father knew exactly where he wanted to go beforehand. So he actually...we have family here in London. We learnt, in school, in the English way, and he just wanted us to have English educations. Absolutely determined.

How long did you stay in Israel?

Days. [Coughs] I think days, because...in order to catch the, beginning of the, academic year here in London. I mean we were, we, we reached Israel on the first of September 1971, and the term here started, I don't know, sometime in late September. And in order not to lose the year, I had to make a very quick move. My sisters and my mother stayed behind a few more months, but I, I, I rushed back.

With your father, or...?

No. I rushed, I went back with my Uncle Karim, who lived here, and who came to see us in Israel, and he took me back with him.

And your family, did they ever considered staying in Israel? The rest of your family?

No, they did not. I must tell you, the, coming out of the air--, the plane and seeing that Israelis are normal people and... short and fat and ...and, and swear and, and, and was the biggest shock. Because...I, I expected these supermen people, and... they, and every time I said, 'Maybe, maybe they are just outside the airport. Maybe these are just the cleaners... [Laughing] and the reception committee and then once we leave the airport...' and that was what I remember this. I was sitting in a car, taking us to the thing and I'm waiting for these wonderful superman blond and blue-eyed who conquered all the Arabs. So, I'm looking out the window and waiting for them to come in the next turn. And, in a way...it was not, it was, overwhelming. It was very overwhelming. Um...

[01:24:54]

Emotional?

Everything. I mean we first day we arrived was my Uncle's...wedding. He- We arrived straight almost from the airport to the wedding. It was, we were dressed in Iraqi clothes. Not cool and not modern, and, you know...

What does 'Iraqi clothes' mean?

Well it was old-fashioned, proper, you know suits...as we walked in Iraq with maybe a bow-tie, because we were going to the wedding. But we looked quite ridiculous there. Everybody was in sandals and short, you know even the, even the groom didn't have a tie on and, there we were with little ties, you know... I don't know polyester ties, you know, whatever. Just foreigners. Just outside. And, and then suddenly I... we were

overwhelmed because they, I mean the biggest thing was when I, when they said, 'Here is your grandfather.' And you know, you- he was an old man who's, who lived to see his *bekhor* Shaoul and, to see the children of Shaoul. I don't know it was overwhelming, it was very overwhelming because I did not even know I had a grandfather. And, then my grandmother and then uncles, and then cousins, and then second cousins and then other side, and all were at the wedding. But we just...and the language barrier and... It was, it was, it was too much. It was very traumatic.

And you spent then some time with family, before you left, after that the next few days?

Yes, yes, but we were we were like fish out of water. It was a different language, and... I don't know what we expected. I don't know what I expected. I'm talking about myself. Would I expect to be received as a hero, who suffered as a, prisoner of Zion? But really quite honestly nobody gives a hoot. You know, you're just there. Or, the language barrier; I could not understand what's going on. The people had to go to work the next day, you know, my uncles had to work and my cousins said goodbye and we were sitting in this heat of Ramat Gan and, it was anti-climax a bit for me after the joy of, of Teheran where, and the anticipation that we just left, and the foyer... And what do I do the next day, waiting for my time to go back to London and the visas, and all that.

[01:27:52]

And you come to London. And what was that experience like, arriving?

I, I did not expect much from London. I again, my image of London was from the Charles Dickens books, so I expected everyone to be in a bowler hat and long umbrella and, and, and speaking a certain way. And... again it was shocking for me to see normal people, unwelcoming, cold, but there was a feeling that 'I'm now on my own'. Because I was on my own, you know my father wasn't with me and my mother and kids. 'I'm a big boy now. I have now to make my life'. And that was overwhelming that feeling, I felt, 'I'm a man now. I have to make it work'. And the, the weather was awful. The rainfall... I honestly think the first year, it rained for five, six months without a break. I honestly don't think I had one day without rain. And I didn't see it. In Iraq, in Baghdad

it would rain once a, a year. And the, so pleasant. We would be dancing in the rain because we were hot, and dancing and cheering and then, this gorgeous smell after the rain from the garden and from the... we have something called penda which is the, the flower on the trees, the citrus trees. It has such a beautiful, beautiful perfumed smell. And after the rain it's filled...oh! And so from one day or two days a year to daily, dark, dark, you wake up in dark, in night and you come back at night. And...my clothes were ridiculous. I mean I just remember I, I didn't have money to buy, and I was in rags really, quite honestly. We didn't have winter clothes, so I was wearing two or three jumpers that my mother knitted and... But I, I rose to the challenge. I absolutely...internally I grew very much, very quick. And... the idea that actually 'I'm free and I'm in London among English speaking people in a capital of the world - ah! - I'm no longer a persecuted Jew wondering day in day out whether he's gonna, whether his father is gonna live or not'.

When did your parents join you?

[01:30:40]

My parents joined...maybe I can't remember, maybe six months, maybe nine months later. And they lived ...with my uncle who was in South London, and I, I lived in North London near the school. So I carried on living by myself.

Which school did you go to?

I went to what was called Hendon School...Hendon Technology or something like that. It was an A-Level preparation, so, we went straight. Because we were prepared in, in English, although I hadn't finished the last year of the High School, we were able to adjust. I will tell you that the mathematics and the level that I learnt in Iraq, when I was in year 10 or 11, was equivalent to the one I was then taught on first year of University in, here in Leeds. That's how much we were so academic in Iraq. The Headmaster made sure that we were doing calculus and algebra and, and, and, and very, very sophisticated... teaching. And that kept me going. I was really in control of the subject that I was studying. So I actually learnt more intensely in Iraq.

What subject did you, did you get a degree, what did you...?

[01:32:16]

Well the thing that I was, that I excelled in, and I was learn—I learnt so well in Iraq, was mathematics. So I actually went for a mathematics degree. It was not my...my, my first choice. It was not something that I had any passion for. It was the thing that I was able and in control. I always wanted to be a lawyer. My father was a lawyer. And most, and many of my imaginary, games in Iraq evolved around Perry Mason, which I used to worship. I mean every episode I must have seen whenever it was shown, again and again. And I was Perry Mason. I was you know, saving the innocent man in the last second when I would reveal the...the, the smoking gun. But... I couldn't do it. I didn't have enough language skills to go for that. Neither did my father. My father had to go to selling T-shirts in the East End because again, without the skill of a language and place, it was, it was tough.

After your degree, what did, what did you do?

Well, I arrived to the University on the Sunday following the break out of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. I, we were sitting here actually, in this house. My father came back from the synagogue on Yom Kippur. And with you know with ashen faced and he said, 'War. There's a war.' The next morning I had to go to the University. So I arrived to the University, with all the fears of Iraq back again. I was standing, filling out forms, when I heard the chilling voices behind me of Iraqis speaking in the local dialect. I immediately became very, very nervous. And they noticed that, and one of them said that 'this guy, I think he understands what we're talking about.' And ...I pretended not to, I just... And they actually caught my form. I was filling the form, caught it by force, and it says, 'Born: Baghdad, Iraq'. And he said, you see? I told you. And then, they escorted me, to the Union, where about 200 Arabs were sitting in a dark room watching war videos from the front. And they switched on the light, and suddenly, I cannot describe that moment of fear, as 150 Arabs turned back to see, 'Why would you switch on the light?' And then, there I was, and these guys said, 'We want to introduce a

brother of us. A brother Arab who, who just arrived!’ And a round of applause and then suddenly all the questions started coming to me because they were all watching. And it’s like, ‘So what’s your name?’ And I said, ‘Edwin [Mumbling a last name]’. What is this name? It’s, it’s a joke. What is your real name? So I said ‘Well it’s a kind of a Edward...’ And they said, ‘You are a Muslim?’ So I said then, ‘No. My mother was English.’ I was making it up, out of sheer terror. And...they said, ‘Look, what’s the difference? Muslim. Christian. We are all brothers today. There’s a war and the Jews have to be eliminated, and so doesn’t matter, don’t worry about not being a Muslim. You are, you are an Arab.’

[01:36:30

And...that drew the, the framework for the next three years, because I just could not get out of that lie that I started off. So I actually did the University, as a Christian Arab, who doesn’t like Jews, who actually in the...in the Arab League there in the elections I am in the Arab society. And I avoided speaking to any Jew for three years.

So you didn’t go to Hillel?

You’re kidding me? As every week that passed by, it was more difficult because if you would reveal yourself after three weeks they would kill you. So I thought, ‘Well if I’m going to die, let me at least enjoy myself for one day!’ So I just played the game and I had a great time, actually, with it.

Ok, so you graduate Leeds. You have a degree in math. And then you...you get married. Where does your life take you?

Ooh! You...eh...Well, after; first of all I didn’t live as a Jew. I came back here. I started working. Are we talking now in the...’76. And ...I, after a year I could not...the idea that I actually clock in and clock out every day, and have a boss the thought was just so un-me, that I, I went into freelancing and I did mathematics, computer science, computers. And I freelanced for a couple of years, which meant that I had no boss. I can go from one place to the other. And, I then, reached the stage of life where I felt

‘What’s life for? What is the meaning of this life?’ And I remember the minute and the day that that happened. I was just passing by, walking on a river, on the bridge. I was beginning to lose my hair, at 21. And I was very depressed about it. And I was looking around saying, ‘What is the meaning of this life? I am now, I’m – I’m handsome, I’ve got a sports car, I’ve got a degree. I, I had the world; I’m earning a lot of money with this freelancing. So what’s next? What’s going to be next? Next I’m going to lose my hair, then I’m going to lose my sight, then I’m going to lose my limbs, and on to...it’s just, from now on, it’s just downwards until death. So why don’t I just – literally, I had that thought – Why don’t I just jump right now? Right now, into this river, and finish this. Don’t want to go down. I want to stay in my peak.’ And that opened a world of spirituality for me that changed my life, because I reached the absolute lowest point at that moment.

[01:39:52]

[01:40:12]

[End of Part 1]

[Part Two]

[0:00:00]

Edwin, in the first part of the interview, you talked about how you had come to London, and that you had gone to University, and you started off ...in a, a future life. And then you said that you began questioning life; that, you began to question the meaning of life. Could you begin by talking about that please?

I still remember very well, the...that moment which was a life changing moment. I was crossing a bridge, by foot, and I was looking and I, I was worried about my hair loss, that day. I was in my early twenties, I had a sports car. I had found a niche work in computers which was earning me per day what I would have earned normally per week for my age. And I thought, ‘Life cannot get better!’ But then, life can only get worse. That was the second part of the sentence. And I’m thinking, ‘right now I am handsome, I am rich, I’m everything I-- one wants to be. And here I am, I’m beginning to lose it. I’m starting with losing my hair line. What’s next? My eye sight, my movement? What

do I need this for? What is the point of this whole journey, that you only go downhill from now?' And I looked at and I seriously thought, 'Let's end it on the top. Let's go. Let's jump.' And it was not just a flippant remark. It was a very serious and deep moment. And, well I chose not to throw myself over the bridge, obviously. And I began to look at life in a different way. I joined a, what one could call a cult, now. Some movement which is based on Eastern... meditation. But more than that, on a philosophy.

[02:39]

And they, I joined them. I went ...learning about philosophy and economics and the surface. And this movement chose kids, young people between the age of say twenty-one and twenty-eight. They had a precise age. And, they asked us to go and join them over weekends. And I went for the first weekend, and that lasted for three years. And for three years, I was at that headquarters near a place it was Waterperry Gardens, near Oxfordshire, and...every weekend. And there, I learnt to see life in a different way. I learnt what I call now, spirituality. That there is a voice inside you that tells you, that you connect with, that there is an inner truth. That things are not just physical and not just surface-wise.

Were there other Jews that you met in this, retreat that you entered?

There were other Jews but Judaism was left at the doorstep. If you recall I had, I just came out of University where I actually lived as an Arab for three years. I found Judaism at that stage totally trivial, superstition, based-- no intellect. No meaning for me. And, the traditions that we kept in Iraq I rejected. And therefore it didn't mean a thing to me at the beginning.

Did the spiritual awakening, did it also make you reflect upon back to your feelings towards the Iraqis who had made you feel fear and distress and...?

No, absolutely not. I-- what it made me, it made me ...have the ability to go over, all the physical things that happens. It's something that helps me till today. I simply lift up

and I am above day-to-day things and above pain and above... all the normal physical things that one can have. And, it, basically made me, as if I was entering a new world which has no relationship whatsoever to the world that - the physical world that - I've lived up to that moment. It was as if, I was playing Monopoly and now I actually have real money.

[05:24]

And so you then, as this was going on, because you said for three years you did this on the weekends. How did your life go in terms of...business?

It was at the beginning of my business work. I, as I said, I was actually in computers, in programming and system designs. That was such a new world at the end of the seventies, that you could name your price. You could name your timing. And so, I worked as- around the country...going there for during the week and then Fridays I would just go to Waterperry.

And during this period, your parents were in London?

My parents were in London, in this very house.

And did you have contact with them?

Yes I had contact with them. Yes, of course.

Frequently?

Yes. Because, I actually was living at home at that stage, having lived three years in University, and because I, I was living a, a pretend life, I actually did, they...I did not allow them to visit me once, of course in the three years. I did not speak with them from there. And I did have a very difficult, other than the, during the vacations. So then after I came back, I came back and lived here.

And did, so you, you lived here, you, you moved forward with your retreat. Where did your life change after that?

[07:02]

After that, something happened. As I progressed in that cult, there was a, a character which has founded this thing, and, as I progressed in seniority, we were getting closer to this, human being, to this person. But it seemed suddenly that we actually need to almost worship that person. And to, bow in his presence. And that's when I believe my Jewish *neshama*, my Jewish soul, for the first time, got suddenly awakened. And I just simply could not do it. And which was very surprising, because I, what we used to have is a group of young people, a class. So this class which we'd by now we'd been three years together, built very strong bonds between each other. We lift each other up and sometimes you actually feel really down, sometimes you have complete disbelief of what you're doing and what you're working on. And so, each one is in charge of lifting up the other. And people leave their jobs; become better things or different things. They live together, they keep good company, good company meaning, each other's company. And everybody was progressing very, very nicely. Except I just couldn't do it. I just could not worship any human being or, or feel such reverence to him. And, it showed. And I... actually was in very short time I was, felt, I cannot carry on with this anymore. And when I stopped going there, which normally would not happen, once you'd built up this bond, they actually would call you, would, would write to you, would show up on your doorstep, saying you know, 'Don't leave us. Don't let us down.' They actually did never call me again, ever. Full stop. No--Nothing. Just, let go. I stopped one weekend, and that was it!

So where did you go?

I learnt a lot, and I thought I would try to teach my sisters now, how to live that life. And my sisters were actually, they came younger than me, so they actually weren't, were more, conversant in Judaism. And the Jewish Judaism that they were, were actually based on what they learned in this country, based on a lot of intellect, books as opposed to the Judaism...almost...pseudo-Judaism of tradition and superstition that we

lived in Baghdad. So, instead of me converting them, they actually managed to do the reverse. And, open my eyes to what can, what Judaism was meant to be, rather than how it was practiced in back home.

[10:18]

And so how did, did you become Shabbat shaves? Did you become more religious, did you...join any Jewish organisations?

What happened, they led me to their Rabbi, *zichrono livracha* passed away last year, Rabbi Freilech. And Rabbi Freilech...I run with him about...I was bursting to teach people what I learnt, and how can one connect with his inner truth. And I found out that actually, many of the things that I've learnt were embedded in Judaism; it was just not explained. And even the Rabbi was not able to explain. But by him talking to me about it, and me asking him questions, it suddenly hit me, that everything I've learnt, was there to teach me Judaism in the proper way. So he, the only thing that I remember, him challenging me to keep Shabbat. And I...he made a deal with me; keep one Shabbat and we'll see how it goes. And I accepted the challenge, and it was a summer day, and Shabbat here finishes at about ten thirty at night. And at ten thirty-two, he called me and he said, 'How was it?' And I said, 'Absolutely horrible. Worst twenty-five hours of my life.' And he said, 'Oh, great! Very, very good. It means it's working.' I said, 'What are you talking about? In that last twenty-five hours I would have done hundreds of things.' And he said, 'Exactly. You'll see that actually the hundreds of things, it doesn't matter what you could have done. It's what you have lived through.' And he said, 'I want to ask you one more favour, just do one more.' I said 'OK.' Did another one, now I knew what it *was* like, so it was, I said to him 'It's a little bit less horrible, but what's the point? What is the point of stopping all activities for twenty-five hours?' So then he said, 'OK, one more. Just...the last time. If it was horrible, I will never ask you again.'

[12:28]

So I said, 'No, no way. I know' by then I knew a little bit that said when you do something for three times, it becomes whatever it is, in Jewish, you know it becomes a tradition or, you have to keep it. I said, 'Zero. Zero, and you know what Rabbi? I'm off to Manchester for a party because I was invited to that party. And, nothing will stop me. I'm sorry.' So, here I am driving, on the next Friday, with a partner, and I was on the M1 in my sports car, and the sun was setting. And, I said to my partner, 'Do you know soon I will be zapped by God?' in a very joke-y way. And she said. And I said, 'Well you know, for the last two Fridays, every time the sun set, I stopped working, I stopped activities, I stopped doing and now we are driving, so I will be zapped.' Just as I was saying that, I actually lost complete control of the car. The car, the engine just stopped functioning. I was literally on, on, on, on empty, on neutral. It was...something so, so unbelievable, that a car suddenly goes on neutral. And I'm pressing the pedals. Absolutely nothing is happening. I manoeuvred my way to the hard shoulder and, having to cross four lanes without, without any power. And we called the, the AA. And the guy came in, and it was pelting with rain, it was dark, Friday night, and I'm on the hard shoulder with a, with a junk of a car and the feeling that, 'this is something beyond me'. And the, the man just, I still use his word, is like, 'Major job, Sir. Major job.' He said to me, 'I have been working in this business. I have no idea. How can this car cut off completely, without any warning sign, without any red lights coming on? It... I don't know how.' So I said to him, 'Well I know.' And I left it there. And ...in a way I, I, I had no choice but to keep Shabbat in a way. I felt, that last years of, of getting close to myself and to my inner truth. I actually found that there is something called *Hashgaha Peratit* [divine providence] and that actually, there is a God that hears, and listens, and actually deals with you directly. So it's not a fable, and it's not ... superstition and it's not just a, just a, a story. It actually, there is a God that actually answers you directly.

[15:18]

Did you then negotiate with God?

I did, I still do. I still negotiate with God and I obviously...I don't, I mean I'm sort of simplifying it. I don't see him as a, an old man with a white beard that I talk to. I, as

you grow older and as you learn more you develop a concept of what God is and that's private. Each person has his own God and talks to him but, I have absolutely no doubt, that, I'm blessed and I'm, I have somebody keeping an eye on me. And in this world, type of thing.

Did this, this transformation lead you to Esther?

No. That was way, way, many, many years before.

What came between this road trip as it were, and Esther?

Well this road trip, I am not going to... I mean, I had a couple more of those, supernatural moments, almost to, just to prove to me that it wasn't a one-off. I remember...driving in the rain as well, at night, in the East End of London. A terrible night with, lightning and thunder, and I had, I had a, as I was driving, I did not see a bollard in the street, a stone bollard. And I hit that stone bollard. And I hit it on the side of the wheel, so the wheel collapsed, and I actually was trapped in the car that I was driving at speed, without any way of controlling it. My, it collapsed on my leg, so my feet was not; I, I was not able to do anything. And I was, the car was travelling at speed, in a, as the road bent, I actually became on the other side of the road, facing traffic, coming in, in the rain, with lights glaring at in my eyes. And I am absolutely totally and completely trapped in this vehicle, going opposite people coming towards me. And you could see them... you could I guess just see people in disbelief, for trying to avoid hitting me.

[17:48]

And that for me that was a, a moment of revelation that lasted as far as I'm concerned, hours, suddenly. I mean it probably was three or four seconds, but for me the clarity was there. And I remember bargaining with God at the time, and I remember almost a conversation with him. So, I don't know whether I want to say it all but I, I remember saying to him, 'OK, first of all, I don't know why you're doing this for me, to me. And also, I actually don't want to be injured. I don't want to, to suffer anything.' And, I just

don't know why I'm remembering it now. I was sort of saying, bargaining with him, and then I said, 'I'm not even willing, for one, for the top of a finger, for me to lose. I'm not willing to give you that.' And, the car just found its way; kept on hitting the kerb, and slowing down, and... it finally, very gently, hit a, a wall, extremely gently. And I remember people abandoning their cars and coming to, to save me. And they broke the, the sort of the door for me, to get out. And, and I got out. And I don't think I even needed to send my suit to the drycleaner. I was just - walked. And we, that was the times when there was no mobiles or, or anything like that. And I was in the East End. It was a horrible night. It was, it was not a place to walk, but I just remembered... I just walked. I just kept on walking in the rain, and celebrating that moment.

The, the celebration, how did that then lead to, to you coming, getting more involved in Jewish life?

[20:04]

Well, one of the reasons why, I was being pushed by this supernatural force, to go to Jerusalem. Because the idea was planted in, in my mind by the Rabbi, who said to me, 'Really, you need to educate yourself. You are...trying, but you can't do it while you're doing all this work and... Guess what, take a year off, and go to, to a *Yeshiva*.' So he suggested a certain *Yeshiva*, which was called The Jerusalem Academy of Higher Learning for a wonderful reason, in Hebrew was *Dvar Yerusala'im*. And he said, 'Treat yourself.' So I applied. But you know, the pull of my work, my car, my shares, my poker nights, my womanising, all this was, was very strong. So it was, yes, I would ask for the brochure, I would ask for that, and...I was taking my time. And suddenly, everything started happening to push me towards Jerusalem including this car accident. I never lose in poker, until I started losing amazingly. I mean, again, really it might be, I mean for me that was every time a message. I mean I, I- one night I said, 'This time I'm not going to lose in poker. I'm just gonna play the safest possible game.' So here I am, winning, seventy-eighty pounds, and we are finishing, and there was one last hand, to finish. And I'm saying, 'Well, I beat you God.' And I actually looked around, and I have three Aces. And, and I said, 'Well, ok God, so now I'm going to get a bonus. I'm going to win even more.' Because three Aces is unbeatable. The first three cards. And

...I decided I'm not going to play it like I should be playing it. I, I, but I'll just finish the game. So it comes my, my turn and I say, 'A hundred Pounds', which was an unbelievable fortune. Just wanted everybody out; I'm just gonna get the pot. And there's this idiot who says, 'Ok, I'll see you.' And, and he got a straight! After five cards! I mean it was like that and I've got, I left wiped out. So, so that night I just said, 'I can't beat you, God. And I'll do it.' So I went to Jerusalem. I cleared everything. I stopped my business. I sold my car. Sold my shares. I didn't want anything left. Zero. Z E R O. I left with my clothes on. And, and, and basic clothes and I took myself and I went to Jerusalem.

[23:00]

Which year was that?

Which year?

Year.

That was 1980.

And what happened in Jerusalem?

In Jerusalem I had... a most fantastic year. I had a year where I combined what I learnt in the cult, what I wanted to, to pass on to people, and I combined that with Judaism. So everything I've learnt, everything, was translated into Jewish...learning and formulated something for myself. Formulate what *Shabbat* means for me, what *modeh ani* [morning prayer] means, what *brachot* on the, on the, that we do daily are, and what do they mean for me. And I form--formulated a way of life. I also... I, I, I went for the school of Mussar, which is the ethical school, and I, I was every single night I had a *cheshbon nefesh* [soul accounting]. I would sit at night, for one hour, and I would write down everything that happened to me that day from the absolute smallest thing, that, you know the one of the teachers said something and I felt, jealousy, that he had praised somebody else, or the smallest tiniest thing that happened to me I would analyse it. I

also followed the positive way of thinking. I never, ever dwell on anything negative. I never dwelt on, on, on past, so I always looked for a positive future and for a positive way of dealing with everything. It's not always have been helpful, this approach, but, but it, on the whole I'm very happy that I actually took it. There are more, more hits than misses, basically, i.e. sometimes to now, I find it difficult to deal with negativity. I'd rather not. I'd rather just move on and, and produce positive results that covers the negativity rather than actually having to deal with it.

[25:13]

In your Mussar practice, often Mussar practice is where one takes a particular... exercise... jealousy, enthusiasm, courage, these different kinds of exercises one can do in Mussar. Did, do you remember focussing on any one in particular?

No, I, I, I focussed on becoming a, a person who walks in God's image. I focussed on somebody who has zero negative traits. I was very harsh on extracting everything which is negative in my trait. The smallest tiniest, as, as my growth, as my diary you know became more detailed and I started concentrating on the smaller and smaller and smaller, and removing the bigger negativity whatever they were and concentrating on, on becoming a very, very good person, almost a divine...person. And I had of course, being a year in the, in a *Yeshiva* surrounding, and it was ultra-basic *Yeshiva*. It was hilariously, I mean we were five people in one room the size of this room. We had no, not even a wardrobe for the hanging of clothes. There was no place. We had just our, each one had a suitcase and in that suitcase, his whole life was there. It wasn't by design; it was simply a very, very poor *Yeshiva*. And, the food was so basic, we they used to have like *tzedakah*, the charity, the shops that doesn't sell, you know tomatoes or rotten cucumber, whatever left at the end of that day, they would put it to us and we would fight for, for, for this sort of basic food. And, it wasn't pretence; it was really this is how we live for the year. But then that removed me from all the trappings of, of, of, of materialistic...life.

Your Yeshiva was Ashkenazi, in terms of the training?

Purely Ashkenazi.

[27:23]

Did you associate with any Sephardi? Were they part of the Yeshiva? Did you, was there any Sephardi custom or any...?

There was a mystical rabbi that ...that came to visit the *Yeshiva*. He was a very Sephardi, very Iraqi. I didn't know how famous he was. And, as I, he came to the *Yeshiva* to perform...I think it was circumcision, but I'm not sure. He wasn't the *mohel*, but he was reading the...And, and he looked at me and I looked at him, and...he just, his eyes penetrated my innards, and he said to me, 'Who are you?' So I said to him my name. And he said, 'What's your mother's name?' And I told him. And he said, 'What was her family name?' And that was just so weird in the middle of this *Yeshiva* with hundreds of people crowding, that he would ask me about... And then he says to me, 'I taught your mother in Baghdad.' And...I thought, 'This guy is totally senile.' And I said to him...'Oh yeah', he said, 'Send her my regards. Tell her Samuel Darsi sends her his regards.' I said, 'Are you, are we talking the same language here? Are you...?' He said, 'Your mother is Victoria, her brother is Eddie?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'I taught them, back home.' And so I built this relationship with this unbelievable man, and I used to go and study with him privately from then on during the *Yeshiva* time. And that connected me with my, I felt suddenly how much I missed my, my Iraqism, my Orientalism, and that I actually was almost a fish out of water in this intellectual Ashkenazi, cold, world. That is actually a much learned, much more learned than me, but it was not, it doesn't have the heart that I wanted. So I actually felt, I belonged to both sides. I am a bridge. I am the cross section of the world. I came to the conclusion that Israel was a cross section, was a microcosm of the whole universe, and I felt I was that, put in that place because I could...very happily move between Ashkenazi and Sephardi. I'm learning Ashkenazi; I have a heart in the Sephardi world. I am left and right and I'm straight and bent and I'm ethical and, and cult and the whole world was, I felt, I felt it was in me.

[30:30]

So at the end of the year, you have to make a decision, do you stay in Israel, or do you leave?

Yes. At the end of the year as I...was waiting for, and I still do, I still wait for God to tell me what to do. And I miss him when he doesn't and I shout at him when he doesn't and sometimes he goes away for, for a, couple of weeks, sometimes a couple of years. But I, I almost am able to do big decisions without him telling me what to do. And so my world was in limbo. People were saying goodbye. And, lo and behold on the dot somebody comes to me and he says to me, 'My name is Rabbi Kassin. I heard about you, that you are a Sephardi boy in this Yeshiva. And I want to, to suggest something for you.' I said 'OK.' And he said, 'I want you to come and run the Sephardic Educational Centre.' I said, 'What is that?' So he said, 'Come and see me in the Old City tomorrow.' I go to see him, in this incredible place right at the car park of the Old City. Absolutely gorgeous home, with a courtyard and a tree in the middle. And tens and tens and tens of rooms and, you know, how many, fifty, sixty, right in the heart of the Old City. And I said, 'What do you want me to do here?' He said 'Well, this belongs to, to a, to an American Sephardi guy, by the name of Dr Hossein Nissim who has taken now a lease on it from the Var Daidar. And he has a dream, to do something called Sephardic Educational Centre. And I think you can do it.' I said, 'Do what? What is there?' He said, 'Oh, there is absolutely nothing here.'

[32:36]

'What's the, what's the budget? What's the money? Where is...what do you want me to do?' 'There is no money. You'll have to create, you'll have to create the content and the money and everything. But you have this house. This whole thing and these are the keys. And, really there is no one else.' So I took it. I took the challenge. [Phone rings] Well, I had no choice, as, as in with all the big decisions of my life. I absolutely had no choice. I never, like when I go now to ...to Baghdad or to...to do something. I don't ask Esther or I don't ask myself...or I don't ask the children. I just, *have* to do it.

So you, you, how long did you run the Centre for?

I ran the Centre for seven years.

And, did you meet; did Nissim come from LA and meet you? Did you go to LA?

Yes! Of course. Of course. He was, very much a hands-on. And...he was a personality. Let's put it that way; a personality. Positive and negative. But...mostly... he had a charisma and a, and a -what can I say- just, whenever he goes into somewhere you know, people have to stop, and look up to him.

The Sephardic Educational Centre...Tell, tell us a bit about it. It's the core institution that... trains Rabbis. That train Rabbis, sends Rabbis out, that coordinates with Rabbis that does all kinds of educational programmes.

No that wasn't, that wasn't the case. There is an offshoot. Rabbi Kassin that I mentioned before, he was in a way, too religious, to take on what Dr Nassim wanted to do which is, reaching the children of the Sephardic world. The lost children in LA and New York, in London, in Mexico and Panama. The kids who are not being brought up as Sephardi, or with the Sephardi spirit. So Rabbi Kassin, having run the first such programme of children, could not do it any more, because these kids come in half-naked and ...you know probably smoking, *hashish* and probably and, and no exper-- they are here on the pretext that they're here to spend the summer. And for them summer is, a summer camp, you know, you have, you dance and you go out with a girl and, and, and you, you smoke and, and that's what a summer camp is. So he took a side, and then he went and opened a *Yeshiva* at the back of that huge place. And left me with actually becoming the Director of the Sephardic Centre, which is which really deals with kids.

[35:53]

And the kids who come from outside Israel?

The kids come *all* from outside Israel.

And just for the summer?

Summer, or winter, when the summer of the South Americans.

And what was your vision of, of your Sephardic programme? What was the vision that you put together?

Very, very simple. I was going to change people's lives. That was the, that was the laboratory. I was going to put everything I'd learnt into that...number one. I understood exactly what he meant by 'Sephardic Educational Centre' by the word 'Sephardic'. By then I saw both sides, and I saw...that the Jewish persona in Israel, and in Diaspora, is not mixing the true personalities and forming a new personality which is what I thought should happen. I saw how Ashkenazim have kept their Ashkenazi approach to religion. They are learned, they are versed in, in, in, in Gemara, they are extremely rigid, and they live sometimes in bubbles of Orthodoxy or Reform or Conservatism.

[37:32]

The Sephardic world on the other hand, had a huge amount to offer, but it was cut off now from their sources. There is no more *Halab* [Aleppo] and no more Baghdad and no more of any of those things. The children have a choice. The children who were growing up in America, either they're going to become; they want to be Jews, in which case they will join B'nei Akiva. They want to be religious, they're going to be joining the Ashkenazi world and wear these funny hats and, and become- and don't eat in their parents houses. Or, beside- or leave Judaism. There is, there was no other, middle of the road. And there is no Sephardi movement that will show them, that there's some value in their parents' and their grandparents' houses. But later on, later on, I, rather than I changed, rather than wanting to preserve them as Sephardi, cause what I did not like, is the fact that some of the people that were teaching, were trying to teach them Sephardic pride. And therefore 'we are the Sephardim' and that really was quite, revolting for me, that sort of approach. That, my approach would be that we need to formulate a new Jew, now, before it's too late. We needed to form- a, a Jew embedded in the, imbued with Sephardic values, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, so that he can combine that emotion

and the, the hospitality and the, and the, the heart into the other side, into the brain. And this has been what I think since then, or since the early 80s till now. I have not moved from that position.

And what would be a typical program of how you would do that?

What, then?

Yeah.

[39:39]

Oh, then, I, I, I had ... I lived few years as a conduit, a pure conduit of God's will almost, how I, as I saw it. I simply lost my ego, for a few years, completely. And I just went with the, with the flow as I could, as every hour, every minute, I would know what to do next. Because it would be very clear, and it would be, only one option. There was - a very clarity in my mind. I was reading, I was studying, but the clarity was, something I have never re-captured...where every decision is right or wrong. There was no, nothing in between. And so for years, not too many but for the when I was on that, I was just following the right. Right, wrong, of course, go right. Choose life. And continuously, and so, continuously, as you take on the right option, the next decision becomes easier and easier, becomes even more clear. And then suddenly my day would be drawn out for me.

The... when you were there in the mid-80s, was also the time that Shass was beginning, it was also the time that the American Sephardic Federation was having its heyday, was coming back into its own. Nissim was doing his, his great work in California and LA. Was this a time that you were also social networking and meeting all these people and building up...?

Oh, *par excellence*! I was probably at one stage I was the most networked person in the Sephardic world, because, I took upon myself to go around the world, because I love travelling, I love people, I love places like Singapore and Taiwan, and so, and God

loved me, and so every time I knew exactly where I'm going next. And I built what I did, I kept going to the same places, and I remember my first round the world trip, and I remember going to Singapore, and I had only two names with me. I mean, the world has changed so much. Even now, if I were to live again, that period, I would just go on the internet, and be so utterly knowledgeable before reaching that place. I cannot tell you what the world was only twenty years ago, thirty years ago.

[42:35]

Manila, where would I find what Manila looks like? Where will I find - who is there? What is there? Nowhere, absolutely nowhere. And you arrive there, and you're lucky before your trip that somebody tells you, 'Oh, this Ezra is in Manila, I know. I don't know whether he's still alive, but last time I was there this was his number.' So you, you reached this, this city that you, you know, and you go there and he says, 'Right, I've got only two shots, Ezra and, and, and Shaul. And if this doesn't work, then I'm dead.' You know, I'm feeling that trip is dead meat. So, you call Ezra and Ezra answers the phone, and you have this three minute slot to convince Ezra to see you. And the minute they hear, 'Hi, I'm Edwin Shuker and I come from Jerusalem.' They immediately say, 'Oh, nice to talk to you. I'm actually leaving Manila tomorrow morning for a trip.' They immediately associated my trip with *storung* exercise; this guy wants money, and, this one. And it was just miraculous to be able to go to the third sentence and say, 'Just, I don't want nothing from you. Just want to introduce myself. See me, because I'm here to help you.' And the words would come out from my mouth and then they'd say, 'Ok. Come over, but it's gotta be five o'clock.' 'Of course!' Five o'clock you go there and you stand there and for the and, and for the first time, basically I would say to them, for the first time they would see somebody who really cares about who they are, their children, what is their problem. And I would make a note of it, and I could see the cynicism in their eyes. Because they must have seen that so many times; a Jewish Agency guy comes in, makes a note and they never hear about it again. But I actually came in six months later, and made sure that literally every single thing that they've asked for, was delivered, like, reading books or Hebrew books for the kids. So I'd buy twelve books from Hebrew books and with pictures. I don't know if you can have a few *mezuzot*, *mezuzot* were there. And so, when I called next time and say, 'Ezra,

you remember?’ He’d say, ‘No, I don’t remember.’ ‘You remember last time?’ ‘Well I’m trying...’ ‘Ok but can I just meet you because I’ve got some books for the kids and some, some *mezuzot* covers.’ And he was like, ‘Oh! Maybe you come for dinner to us tonight.’ And so I built this network.

[45:20]

So, the network. So this network that you’re talking about?

Yes, so I, I really...was a connecting, the Sephardic world. Some of them had been cut off Israel and the Sephardism for years. For decades. I was now connecting them back to the core, to Jerusalem. And I was, trusted, by them. And I was then becoming, getting calls 24/7. I lived for, my life was that. And there was never a ‘No’ it was always, done. Turkey, Spain... India, China, Malaysia, Taiwan, wherever there is five Jews, I was there. And, and, and then my greatest project of my life project was India; how, through the Sephardic Centre, when we brought more than 500 Indians to Israel, without them paying a single penny. It took twenty trips of mine, over three years. It stretched every single fibre of everything I’ve ever learnt, and done, in my whole life, into this one project. While running everything else, but that was the one thing that I, I always remember with such fondness.

These 500 Indians. Did they come just for the Centre or did they make Aliyah?

[47:04]

No, they, those people first of all, imagine the enormity of actually raising a sum like maybe, I don’t know, a million and a half dollars? To get kids into Israel on a non-committal basis. It was an enormous task. And I did it with such ease, that I actually had sometimes a lot more money than I can even handle. So these people, I actually instead of coming for the three weeks that all the, they came for six weeks, and then they are allowed to stay another six weeks at their own, with their own relatives. So it was a, and then if they want to do Aliya of course, we were there, to do that for them. The way things worked, was, I was simply I felt, simply a conduit. I would look at a

person, and whatever that person wanted, I was a reflection of his desire. And I was just there to do it for him. So whether he, there was no ideology. It was not, 'I'm looking at you. I need to you be counted as number seventeen...person who made *Aliyah* through me.' It was never like this. It was at that moment that I'm looking at Henry Green, I was Henry Green's angel. I was the one who would fulfil his desires. And whatever he says, it will happen, because I have the strength to do it. I mean I ...I believed that any person, that I have ever and will ever encounter, was sent just for me, and for me, and I'm for him. I was really working on that level at the time. I mean I can only just now tell you a story and remember how it was but I, I, I don't know whether I can ever, ever recount- you can never say never, but that was a period when, when I when it was, I was like Harry Potter, I don't know. I was just a magician. And ...and the people that, we changed their lives, overnight. Because I would pick the people would come, and he would ask me a question, a kid. And I would just tell him the answer. And I would challenge him through the newly acquired knowledge that I had, to try something for one morning, and if it doesn't work, then he should abandon Judaism and become whatever he wants. And it works. Because I was saying to them, you know, 'Try this tomorrow morning. When it works you're going to come to me, and I'm going to teach you the next thing. But if it doesn't work, just leave it. It's not for you.'

[50:00]

Did you go to the States during this time?

I went to the States.

And who did you meet in the States?

It was less the States, because the States...Nissim was there, and, and he had his crowd with him, and they were doing fine work in LA, and...and there was really no need for me. I was going to the States only to report back, to, to him and to try and get money for the next project, rather than working in the States.

Did you ever attend the American Sephardi Federation, the...their conventions or other kinds of..?

I really can't remember. Of course I attended everything that was in Jerusalem. The...you know the Gaon's and the Shalom's, and all that sort of, these people that, they were the pioneers of that time and, and we used to visit, David Levy was there at the time and...these were, were extraordinary days where the Sephardim were flexing their muscles for the first time. The, the Black Panthers and the ...everything was suddenly an awakening. And they, it was, for the first time they, they, they felt the confidence to complain and to ask, and to want, to, to do this. I was less involved with that work...but, more involved with what I had to do, which was presented to me, for me to do and that was not part of it.

Did, did Iraq play any role in your consciousness at this time?

No.

Did...as you got older did you feel like you needed a partner? That there should be a partner in this part of your life?

I felt absolutely no need for anything. I was totally and absolutely a complete person. I did not need...at times I didn't feel I needed to eat. And I went without food sometimes. I didn't feel I needed sex, I didn't feel I needed love, money or anything. I just felt complete, total and absolute. I just...I was reading a book, and...I was I don't know if you've heard of Richard Bach, but, books called 'Illusion' and 'Jonathan Seagull'; and, and that I was in that spirit, that I, and one of the books was about the Messiah, a real man, you know, a real person becoming a Messiah. And that's what I thought. I thought I was a Messiah. I didn't think that I was, special. I thought that everyone, like the book says, everyone could be the Messiah, but I thought. 'I know how to be the Messiah, and I am the Messiah now. I've reached it.' And I...I was just, just absolutely floating.

[53:12]

Eighty-six after the seven years, you decide to move on, or was there some... negotiation again?

No, I had a conflict with [Joe] Nissim at the time, and ...and I left the Centre...I left the Centre at the time. It was...and I set up my next step in life which was...I created something called Kehillot, I created the name, I created the concept. And the concept was, that all my contacts are purely, it's, it's my contacts. They did not care about anything else, or anybody else. They trusted Edwin Shuker, they trusted them by calling me and saying 'I'm sending my mother to an old age home in Herzliya. She's arriving on the plane, but for some reason I cannot go with her. Edwin, help me.' They'd say, 'Edwin, will organise everything else.' And this is the type of thing that would come in, in a, in a, any day, so many times or like that. And I thought, 'My next step is to be a service centre for the world, for the Sephardi world'. So set up on my own, and...and I connected. I had files about every community. I had the most up-to-date files that anyone in the world would have, for obvious reasons. I am the one who is in touch with them by phone. I'm the one who goes to see them. I'm the one who accumulated the information about them. Turkey, Spain, and these people were beginning to actually write to the Jewish Agency saying, 'We have a representative in Israel, called Edwin Shuker and we don't want you to send anyone to fact finding, to see what's going on, what we need. We don't, we are fed up of this. We don't need anything. He, he, he will, he knows what we need. And you should see him.' And so this little, nothing thing, with just a, an idea and Esther was, I was not married to her, I was not even thinking about marrying her. My sister had married her brother. That was our connection. She was just the two of us. I, I would be dictating all these things. She would be putting in, and filing them and I had these files about every country. And then suddenly it became ...a powerhouse.

[55:59]

Because, when I know the Foreign Ministry wanted to send a, a Minister going to, to, to Spain or to, to, to, Singapore, the people there would say, 'Go to see Edwin. He will, he will build for you who and what and what to see.' And so I started enjoying that. I was building, I was, even when the President of the Indian Community would come to Jerusalem, and nobody would know him or care for him, but I would. And I would invite fifteen people from the Foreign Ministry, from the Ambassador and this little

house, became a, a hub, of a fantastic idea. Of an idea where these people want something. They've got the money for it and they'll get it now. And so I don't know, I don't know where I was going with this idea. I don't know. I don't know where it's gonna, every day I wake up there's a new challenge and then I'll do the challenge and I wait for the next thing to happen.

And Esther was one of those things?

Um, it wasn't in my mind at the time anything, at all. Certainly nothing personal, as I didn't, I didn't think I would marry. I didn't want children. I didn't want a home, I didn't want a mortgage, I didn't want...I did not want to live like human beings.

How did Esther come into the picture then? I mean, she is your wife.

[57:30]

What happened was...a catastrophe happened. Disaster happened. On a personal level. That ended the whole, this whole dream. This whole lifestyle.

Do you want to share this, or...are we going to...

I don't know. I...it's very, very difficult for me to, to speak about it. ...I don't know.
[Pause] What do you think?

I think that... this is part of the negotiation with God. Your, your stories.

I...em...I was living like this, and I had contacts with the Jewish Agency at its highest. I had contacts with the Foreign Ministry, I had contacts with all the...you know the Jewish leaders, and I...everything was going like magic. I was basking with the, the, the Indian Project was coming to end only because there was not one single more person to bring. We ran out. And that gave me huge kudos in the, in the Jewish world, especially the organised Jewish world, the Jewish Agency, this. I was bringing more children, through the Sephardic Centre and through the, than all of the Jewish Agency

with their five-hundred million dollar budget. We had hundreds of Mexican kids because as the...word went back that this is the greatest place. This is fun. Of course I am not taking all the credit. We had a fantastic team. We had Rabbi Baruch Garcon, who is a just magic person. I mean, just...can't think of somebody that I would want to be at his feet more than that person. We had Rabbi Kassim. Next door to us we had, we had a very dedicated staff. We had people who just stayed with the project.

[01:00:10]

And so these kids would come in, totally physical, totally, spoiled brats. We had thirteen, twelve year-old kids from Mexico coming in with 2-3,000 Dollars in their pocket, that's on top of everything else. And, they would come in to me and he says, 'But I need to spend the *massari* [Arabic: money]. I need to, to spend. You are not giving us a chance.' And they are actually, honestly, I mean I was the most popular man in the whole city - why - because these kids would go to the Arab market, and buy...*chanukiah* for six hundred dollars when it was probably worth sixty pence or two dollars fifty. And they would say, 'Look, this is the real thing. They actually discovered it underneath the ...' these thirteen year-old kids with thousands and thousands of dollars. So, we were very popular. So one day, I, I was doing this Kehillot from my workplace where I was living in Mapu. And, and one day I, I got a knock on the door, an angry knock on the door about seven in the morning. And, I opened the door, and I had two guns on my head. I had somebody with a gun. And...so I was, was so out of, my comfort zone, that I was traumatised, stunned, which was the... objective of them doing this. And... they were flashing things on me like their IDs and they were, they were actually police; a special unit, anti -corruption unit. And... they just went in, and they had a warrant. I couldn't, I couldn't even work out what they were talking about.

[01:02:28]

And ...and they just, I literally remember slamming on the chair, and I remember this...I even remember they cut up the chair, just slumped with open mouth. And these guys were, if anybody had encountered such, you know, the FBI, they all behave the same thing, it's a kind of a sadistic, power-mad people, that love these jobs. And so

these guys said, 'You are under arrest.' My Hebrew wasn't that good and I wasn't following most of what they were saying, but they were rampaging through these wonderful filing cabinets that I had got. I had [a] wall-to-wall filing cabinets with every person, and every city and every country, and... And they were just rampaging; they were actually pulling these files out. And it's and they're just pulling it, and they're throwing it on the floor. They would look at something and it's...and it was...They were...smiling with such evil smiles, like you know...like 'You've got your day, here.' And, 'You thought you got away with...' and I am just...totally traumatised. Totally. I just, not sure whether this is real or this is a nightmare and I'm going to wake up from this nightmare and, and ...and then they said, 'Well, you've got to come with us. You are under arrest.' And, 'For what?' And they said, I actually just remembered now. I, there was a few things that happened to me, a couple of months beforehand that were very, very strange. And so in the back of my mind there was...anxiety that something is happening in terms...but I actually... First of all I never believed it would develop into anything, purely because I am a pure force for good. I'm the one who goes around the world bringing kids to Israel. I'm the, the Jew who never worked - never earned a penny in Israel.

[01:05:12]

I was not even a citizen. I was just a tourist... in all sorts of ways, a tourist. You know, I was transit in this world! So what could possibly there be a problem? And then I remember them taking me in the car, and telling me that I'm arrested because I have bribed a, a, a senior Jewish Agency official, that really I am an accomplice rather than the main. They-- He was their target, and I'm the accomplice. I'm the one who bribed him. And for bribing him, I received, i.e. the Centre has received, half a million, or I really can't remember the figure but certainly hundreds of thousands of Dollars, from the Jewish Agency, in help to the grants to the Sephardic Centre. But that was received because I was bribing him. And I remember me, they took me to his house, and I was downstairs in the car when they did the same thing to him. And this giant of a man, this father figure for me, this ... the man I respected most, is being led ...with these scum, into their cars and we were driven to, high speed, back to Tel Aviv for, for, we were arrested. We were put in prison, we were put overnight. And...I - it was not one night.

I think it was like, do you know actually when it was? It was today's date. It was September 13th. How's that for...for a coincidence? It was today. So. That's when the whole world collapsed. My entire world collapsed. I think we were, we were in, in isolated jail for ...we were isolated from each other for...for five, six days...with drug addicts, with criminals, with lowlifes. I was even denied praying. I was asking for, to pray. I didn't have my *tefillin* with me. And they said, 'Where do you think you are? In a hotel? There's no *tefillin* here.'

[01:07:41]

And they were trying to basically dest - wipe, destroy my, my self-worth so that they probably tactics of interrogation, you know it's like, you know like, now, you know 'you pray from one side and you bribe people and from the other side' -type of needling. Well, you know I mean I'm not gonna take longer than that with this incident. It's just that, that incident was the end of my chapter in Israel. My...my life as a messiah.

And you went where then?

It- I couldn't leave the country. I was under, you know they took my passport. I...I saw another world. I had a world of, I had a whole different universe of prisoners, and having to queue to get your rights and having to ...I have to mention it as well, I mean I, at one stage they actually were taking me to court for remand and they handcuffed me. And, it was a very, very difficult period to fall from grace, and to feel that the people who actually... I, I had many encounters with intelligence service and, before, in the Arab world when I was passing by, bringing Indian kids, and I brought them through Egypt. And I was arrested in Egypt and I was led into interrogation. I could take that, and it was wonderful stories. I had, I dined and wined on that story of the Egyptian intelligence arresting me and ...and wanting me to be, to ask the Iraqi Ambassador, and life and death situation. And I, I loved, I loved the excitement of telling that story. But it's one thing *they* do it to me, and another thing is my own people! The people I have...lived for.

So...

[01:09:58]

So. It took, it took...it took a few months...before I could even communicate and move and, you could...me being such a, such a naturally hospitable person, and I had the Centre, the whole Centre. So I had invited, I invite people for dinners, and you know I, 'did they want to stay over Shabbat?' I, I, I had that whole thing. And imagine all these people who would stay in Shabbat, totally now, starting to think, 'Was that- if I call Edwin now, will they think I've been bribed here?' Because the, I mean it was *so* ludicrous at the end, the, because they actually were recording me and, and, and this person Chaim Zohar, and they just misunderstood the English, some of it, and actually, they, they, it was...literally a comedy. They actually didn't understand English and they, they, they understood it wrongly, and then they were, when I was explaining it to them, first of all they didn't want any of it, it was...then they said, 'Oh, you did a party for him...*Bar Mitzvah* or something...and instead of charging nine dollars per person, you charged seven dollars per person.' I said, 'Yes, and?' 'So it's bribery. You're bribing an official.' And, and so what happened was, all the people and all the contacts and all the Israelis I, suddenly neither would they dare contacting me, neither would I dare contacting them. And this man who lived on networking and all that, suddenly he was he was a man on his own. Just by myself. And Esther.

So the charges are dropped...in the end.

Yes.

You come to, you marry Esther there?

Yes I do because Esther stood by me. And Esther...who was, as always whenever she is needed she's, like an angel. And I was actually almost losing my mind at that time. I was really on the verge of losing my mind. I was feeling, I could not cope with that speed of things, how it happened.

And you come back to London?

[01:12:33]

I come back to London, yes.

And why do you choose London?

In 1988. Oh, my parent lived here. My life was here, pre-...

And did you come back and live with your parents?

No, I came - I married by then. I married...

Esther

...Esther in late, in, in November '87. And, by the time they allowed me to come out, was in, I think April or something like that, April '88.

And you come to London.

So I came to London. And by then I was married and I...we, we had to...I mean, it was, it was, I mean she stood by me. We had no money. I, I had no money. And, and I married her...even my parents, my mother was not invited to the wedding. And I was, I was ashamed of myself, at that time. I was, I didn't want to do anything. I didn't want to see anybody to see me, or to be seen, or to talk or, to be talked and... And it was in the newspapers. It was...You know, it was, here was a big shot, and actually...you know, it's a...so it was a difficult period. I had lost contact with God which was the worst thing. I, I cursed him every day. I...but there was no response.

So you're...you're angry, you're cut off, you're no longer connected to God. You come to London. You don't have a cent in your pocket. What did you do?

[01:14:21]

I, I was brought to London by a, a life-long friend who's, not brought to London, but said to me, and I'll never forget that, because I was... He said to me, 'Look, what you have, and what you always had, you have not lost. It's still there. It's in, it's your mind. It's the way you communicate with people, and the way you conduct yourself.' He was not spiritual at all. He said, 'What you have, it's your brain. That is still there. The question is, if you lose that, then you might as well jump.' Literally he said to me, literally, 'I have to say, there's nothing left for you. Your name, your reputation, your, you, you are just nothing now. And if you don't have your brain then...that's it. Go. Jump.' And that's how he said it. 'If you want though, you're gonna have to re-build. But you're gonna need your mind. You're gonna need your brain. You're gonna need to be fully functional and you're gonna have to start from minus zero. But, you have a job with me. And...you know you can make a livelihood and you can start again.' And that's what I did.

And the job was?

Well he runs, he had...a chain of...twelve, fourteen shops in the West End, in Oxford Street and Regent Street. And the job was, 'Be my right-hand man. Manage the whole thing.'

And where did you go from there?

Where I went from there, I learnt the, the trade. I learned the business that I was by his side. I immersed myself in learning everything. And I slept sometimes in the job itself, literally. I would finish at ten, eleven at night, and I would be starting at eight, so there was no point, and I would actually sleep on the chair. But I produced...I, I, I forgot all my sorrows and my, lost life through, through hard work, through literally exhausting myself to sleep.

And did you stay with this business, or did you move on...?

I stayed til, til the business was hit by a recession and then that recession, I, at the end of it, I knew enough about business, that I actually knew that I had to leave him as well, because he could not afford any more to do that. And I started...buying tiny little shop, because it was total recession, it was like, almost going for anyone who's got a few pennies. So I borrowed and bought a shop and, managed to rent it and... And I thought that was good and worked very well, then I bought another one and another one and ...the rest is history. I, I...I had breaks. I...took a few years now to, to recover my connection with God. And even then I didn't, even when he was connected and things were happening I didn't want to talk to him again. And...with Esther of course my life was completely, you know we lived for each other at that time and, when you're, you know you just, we took about three, three years, four years actually before she was able to be pregnant. We tried, and then when you know once you've got your child then life becomes a different... thing and then ...slowly I rebuilt.

[01:18:07]

As you rebuilt, where did...Sephardi fit into this? You came to this community again and, you're...not connecting to God in the same way. You're, do you become a member of a synagogue? Do you, do you have Sephardic customs at home, in terms of cooking or Shabbat or...?

Well, first of all, I was known, very well known, by the Sephardic world. So I abandoned it, but I was still known. Still knew Rabbi Abraham Levy still knows who Edwin Shuker is. And in fact almost every Sephardi of a certain age knows who, you know, Leon Tamman and, all these people. So, especially that the case, there was no case, and everybody knew that the whole thing was this one. This was a feeling from inside me.

Hmmn.

And, I remember obviously my speciality is the Sephardic world, and my story, you know which I was, I have always used in order to reach an audience, how I escaped from Iraq and how I lived in Iraq and...and it's a very exciting story. And then, once

you capture the imagination, then you can go to the next thing whether you want to sell the Sephardic Centre or a way of life or whatever. And the...as I, as, as I became successful in business and as I became, I had money and my family was beautiful and, we moved to a house and, I became an outstanding member of the Ashkenazi community. And I ...was...you know I, I, I also I, I, I started, testing coming back to the Jewish community and, and I'm, I'm good. I'm good at what I do. I'm good at... so, just my being a, a one person in the religious Sephardic Rabbi, no sorry, Rabbi Sachs had a, a new concept called Jewish Continuity. So I joined it as one of the people, but as I opened my mouth and as I, as I discovered, as they discovered this when I was... I was appointed the Chair of the Israel Experience, which is the entire Israel experience for the whole of the UK, all the groups that go to Israel, so I became the Chair of that. And then one day, they, I was offered to be on the Board of Jewish Continuity, which was the, *the* greatest energy thing. And then this...then I was called overnight, to come to the place, and... and they said, 'Listen, you know we have received some very, very serious information from people who have your name. And we just need to clarify because we just want to announce you as a Board member, but we understand that you were jailed and...' you know, the usual good Samaritans who contributed that. And, once I overcame that, then I gained back my confidence and I felt I could face the world again now. I, you know, I am not keeping a secret any more, or don't have to hide it. And then, I was giving a talk in the...early 90s and my usual talk about the Jews of Iraq and somebody walked in, a senior member, a staff press, and they said, 'This is a fascinating story. I didn't even know there were Jews in Iraq.' And somehow this sentence just was...something so enormous, and still plays a huge part in my life. But... that opened my eyes that I am, I have that huge responsibility. I am a capable person. I am a networked person. I am a star, if I want to be. And, I have a story to tell, that all my compatriots and colleagues, and friends are just incapable. They are too small to be able to go on a, on an international stage and tell their story.

[01:22:53]

They don't care; they don't see. They don't feel what's happening. They don't feel that the entire history of Sephardi's and...rests on this generation. That this man, in my lifetime has not heard that there were Jews in Iraq. That my child would never know.

And if they know they will be laughed at. And that the story like, you, Henry, told me, if you tell it from your father or your grandfather, it's never, ever the same as, as *I* was there. And *I* saw. And I did see, and I *have* something to convey and therefore I said, 'The hell with all the hang-ups and all the hiding and all that. I, I, I will come back. I will tell the story again.'

Did you become a member of Sephardic synagogue?

I, I embraced everything which is Sephardi. I, I, I am *Shomer Shabbat* and so, naturally, my kids grow up, we are all *Shomer Shabbat* you know we are at least Ashkenazi and there is no Sephardi synagogue within walking distance. But I embraced it again. I...back connected with them. And then one day, I had a call from Leo Levy, which...I've met of course from before, and I helped his daughter...in every way possible. His daughter was a total, totally lost, at certain stage of her life, and Leon called me up from, New York and said, 'I want you to save my daughter. I don't know how, but she is lost and I want you to do it.' And so, 'What do you want Leon?' He said to me, 'Offer her a job.' I said, 'You've got it.' I offered her a job and the Centre, and Janet came, and I told her my history, not my history, I told her my philosophy. And I worked on her like I worked on the other kids. And Janet now is, is an absolute star of a lawyer, with [ph. Yacov Neman's] firm, Senior Partner, married an Israeli, gorgeous children, wonderful life; just a dream. And Leon, who has not contacted me for like ten years, suddenly calls me up and he said, 'I want you to take a plane tomorrow morning and come to New York.' He said, 'I'm emailing you...faxing you the, the ticket.' And I got there, and he said to me, 'I've been appointed as the Chairman of the Conference of Major Jewish Organisations. I want you to leave everything and come and work with me.' I did. Long story, but I did. I left my work, I froze everything. I left Esther with two little children. And halfway through the mission I had, she was pregnant again. And I left all that and I worked with Leon until he finished his mandate.

[01:26:01]

Living in New York?

Living in New York, for about eighteen months.

Did you ever go down to Miami and play tennis when he used to come down?

No I didn't. I held...I was guarding the shop. And, obviously that now, I was fully rehabilitated in the Jewish world. I was, I was coming in from high up.

So your, your second life, in a way, in terms of coming back to London. Israel being one kind of Sephardic experience, London being a different experience, a married man, family, the issue of Jewish Continuity in the 1990s being an issue in which the, the, the theme was, 'How do you really build for the next generation?' In, in, in organisational life, you were involved in all kinds of things: Board of Deputies, and, and then later on JJAC...

...and Sephardi Congress, the works ...

How did you, how did all these come into play?

Well I mean... I, I absolutely love this work, all organisational work; all Jewish work. I love the Jewish people...to bits. I also don't see things, in day to day things. I always see them, in perspective. For me to go to Jerusalem, and complain about 'the soup is cold', doesn't happen. Because when I am in Jerusalem, I think 'every Jew over the last 2,000 years would have given two years of their lives' just to be where I was. And that's how I see things all the time. So therefore, with that vision, I, I have a free entry to whichever organisation, wants to use my services. And I believe again, that if somebody asks for me then that's my destiny to be there and I put everything I have in that service. So I, I don't see the difference between all the people, all the ones that you mentioned. They would ask me and I'm, I'm there, and I create and I, and I just give everything that I have. And I enjoy it immensely. JJAC, Congress of President, for me it's just a need, a demand, a service, and I just do it. And if I feel I cannot contribute, which happens in certain organisations, then I just pull out and I just...that, it's not that it was not for me, it's just that I have nothing to give any more to that particular organisation and it's time to go. To move.

Some of these organisations, like...the Board of Deputies let's say or, or JJAC or... you sit on the European Jewish Council. Do you see yourself as bringing a Sephardic voice?

One-hundred and fifty percent.

And what, what's your, your thrust in terms of the message you want to bring to these organisations, in terms of that Sephardic voice?

[01:29:35]

First of all, the original...Doctor Nissim's vision, of a world of Sephardi culture, tolerance, comfort, ease, that is being lost now, through the Yeshivot, the Ashkenazi Yeshivot. So all the brightest young people are, are, are becoming polarised into the Orthodox camp and into the other camps, when actually, Sephardim never, ever had adjectives as Rabbi Levi used to say, to describe them. We were just Jews. And that's what I'd love to be. I'd love to be 'just a Jew'. And we go to the synagogue and the Rabbi we insist on him being...very learned and very... adhere to the laws, but everybody else can do what they want to. And then they leave the synagogue and their car's outside and they have no embarrassment about it. And they feel, 'We belong to the *Shul*.' And, maybe I can't today keep *Shabbat* or even think about keeping *Shabbat*, but that's where I want to be, away from that strict interpretation of the law. And... So that's a huge part to pass on, before it's lost. That tolerance. That you come to me over *Shabbat*, and if you feel you need to put, to take your mobile and answer a call, I'm not mortally offended and I don't think I need to kick you out of the house and, and, and, and wipe your memory and never invite you again, that's your problem. You are more than welcome; you are my guest, and that sort of thing. And ...so that's, that's how I grew up and that's what I want to in, to, to give back a taste of, to people who have not seen that. Secondly, is the, relationship between Jew and Arab which are such, so central to my life, in so many ways. I, I deal with Arabs all day every day from morning til night, and, I'm loved and I love. And I feel Israel has missed out immensely, and the Jewish world, the Ashkenazi Jewish organised world has missed out immensely, on this contact between a Jew and an Arab. It would not matter if the Arab was not surrounding

Israel. If it would not matter... If I was born in Peru, I would not dedicate my life to introduce to you how Jews lived with Peruvians. But with Arabs, I have to... Because our destiny is to be with them, for the rest of... eternity, till *Mashiach* [Messiah] will come I hope. Therefore, it is *so* important that we understand them and they understand us. And, we're not recreating the wheel. We lived like that for 1,400 years, and there are no secrets. I could teach it to you; I can practice it to you, in my sleep. And so can *all* the Jewish form Arab countries, the original ones.

[01:33:05]

And so, why are we not in a position to A - teach this, and B - to actually live it, and to bring this young state of Israel to a peaceful coexistence with its neighbours? So, that and the connection, the awareness of God's presence and the inner truth with- inside each person, that really are the pillars of my life. I see religion also now, in, in a way also in... I study mysticism, but I'm not, nowhere near a practitioner of the art. But I kept a flavour of what it means to read beyond the...the, the words and, and so that's, that's Edwin Shuker. And that's what Edwin Shuker wants to convey to the world and to whatever organisations he works. On the, on the plain simple interpretation, yes, I am on the Board of Deputies because I report back about what's happening in the Arab world and what's happening in the Jews of the Arab world inside and outside. And, and I have a niche market, so to speak. But I see well beyond an imparting of information gleaned from newspapers. I, I have a role, and I have a mission and I want to do that. And I carry that with me whichever organisation I work. And then if the organisation is not receptive, or does not want to hear that story, then it's time for me to go.

You do have a, a special optic, as it were, because you travel to the Arab world. You travel to, to Iraq or to Libya or to Egypt. How did this come about that you can travel to these countries?

[01:34:58]

It is to prove to myself, that I'm not talking rubbish, that I'm not talking *shtuyot* [Hebrew: nonsense] and if I say, the Arab world, we have a mutual respect, and they

realise and they actually feel that the Jew is...carries with him a secret. Has the blessing, has contact with, with the Almighty, although they do not say it, and I cannot expect them to say it, and it's part of the deal that they don't say it, they actually feel it. And actually know it. And actually want it. And so how do I prove that this is not in my imagination? That this is not, I'm not talking rubbish? I have to go. I have to go there and I say, 'I am the Jew. And I am under, I am under your protection, but I bring you a blessing.' And if it works, and it works every single time, then I can go and say it, not in so many words but actually act it and behave it and, and hope for the day when I actually have a stage. And I know it will happen, if God wants me to. He will give me the stage, where I can carry that message, right up to the leaders who are controlling things. And they will hear me and they will listen to me. An every time something happens in my life, a problem, a conflict with an organisation, I'm out in the cold, I'm doomed, I'm removed...I'm back to being nobody and nothing, and that happens every year, I don't know, every few months. You know the Jewish world and you know the conflicts within. I know they fight, I know they seek; I know they create another organisation; I simply wait for my next mission. And sure, like hell it comes, right on the dot. When the time is right, I'm suddenly picked up from nowhere and this President calls me up, or this Minister calls me up, because he met a friend and he told him 'Edwin is your man'. And suddenly I'm back in the, in the limelight and I'm back conveying my mission on a, on a higher scale. And what happened? What happened one day that I would be able to, to talk to, to talk on a level where people will sit and listen and understand. That there is a, the time is ticking, and that soon there will be no Edwin Shuker. I mean Edwin Shuker and all that he represents and all the hundreds and thousands like him, that he is in the front, opening your eyes, because he's connected and he wants to be connected and he cares. And he cares more than anything else, and when the message is there, he doesn't say, '*Shtuyot* [Hebrew: nonsense] What, God is talking to me? What rubbish.' Or, 'Yes', the message is to go to Baghdad, or to go to Iraq or to go to Libya. But 'Hey, I've got three little kids and my wife and ...I'm not going to do it. I'll do it next time.' No. He says, 'This is it. It's mine, I'm off.' And so Edwin is ready to put himself, right on that line, because when you doubt that message then that message doesn't come back to you, and doesn't come back that strong. And you start doubting everything and you start thinking it's a coincidence that I'm seeing Henry Green after twenty-five years, when he met me with Leah or something,

whatever happens, it's just damn coincidence. I don't see anything, *anything* as a coincidence. I don't see daily life as a coincidence. And so, the day will come when my message will be articulated and be able to be transmitted. And if I could be ...a, factor, in making Jews live with Arabs, like we lived back home, for 1,400 years, then maybe this is, I would like, that's now ego playing, but I would love to be that person who bring that message and for that message to be understood and accepted.

What, what kind of impact do you think all your YouTubes have on people who see it?

[01:39:10]

Immense. And I think that ...these are the days of... we're approaching days of, of, of, awe. We're approaching even the end of the world as we know it. And ...and YouTube, and ...and what will develop in the next few years are just manifestations of God's will to speed up things, nothing else. It's not Steve Jobs who can make a little tablet, a plate, a plastic little thing becomes the conduit of everything we've ever known in the whole of history and mankind. And just rub it, and there it is, in picture, in sound, in voice, and probably in smell and touch soon. It's not Steve Jobs.

Well, does, at a more concrete level, do, when you speak about Iraqi Jews, which is how your conduit into the Sephardi world in many ways, people see this. Do you think that that gives them more pride? Do you think that it... helps with Jewish the Jewish Sephardi refugee issue? Do you...what kind of impact? How do you think it plays out for them? Will they do more testimonies where they reach out to us, because they hear your YouTube piece?

I, I, I'm a natural salesman. And I see that, it comes to me. I just don't know how to explain it, but if I go to Portugal, for the next two months, everyone I speak to wants to go to Portugal, and wants to go tomorrow. And I think, 'God', I mean, it's twenty-five Dollars to Lisbon and thousands of people have done that trip. But somehow, when I go, and I talk about it, everyone wants to do it. And I could, and I've done that even in business. And I just have...this, this ability. And it comes in, naturally. And in business,

I started from absolutely nothing and in just an hour of communication and an hour of convincing, that, that comes without me even planning it, that is unstoppable.

There are some projects that you're involved in, that, that are ...very closely tied to your identity such as the, the artefacts that were taken out of Iraq and brought to United States to be preserved and saved. Are, are you involved in this in any way? Do you have an opinion about it?

[01:42:17]

I, first of all I'm a collector of ...incredible rare documents, books...files, whatever comes from Iraq, at the moment, or anything else actually, because I'm known there and I have got Arabs who are my friends and I visit there regularly, so, it's safe for me. And I either buy it or get given that or something like that. So I am collecting what I think is an exceptional collection of, of documentation and stories and objects. The artefacts in America I know a lot about. And...I think that it can be used to actually... I apply when talking about these artefacts and talking about, I apply what I told you before about how Jews worked with Arabs before. And I think that... many people do not understand how this worked. And I feel sad about it. I feel sad that people have lost that knack that we used to have, to get our way, and now wants to be confrontational or posing, or, or, nationalistic and feel, 'Well now that I'm a free person and I'm... I can tell the Iraqis where to go and I can demand. I can do that.' And I feel that is also the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, is this approach. That some people feel it's weakness, or *dhimmi*-style or something like that. The way I would have approached these artefacts would be very simple. I would form a delegation, I would go to the Iraqis, and I would say to them, 'You know what, we trust you. We've brought these things to America, for preservation. You want them back. Why don't we just sit down and discuss how to, at the end of the day, you've been our, we've been under your protection for 14,000 years. You've always been good to us. You've protected our shrines. You've protected our, our, our prophets. And we want you to protect these things as well, and we trust you will take custody of these things.' I would say to them, 'Let's talk about practicalities. Do you have the means to actually preserve them, or should we give it to these Americans, who actually have, have developed things? And if you have the

means, why don't we, together, let's see them. Let's together go to the Americans and say to the Americans 'Look, these Iraqis have got the means. They will do it. They will preserve it. They will digitalise it'. And basically we will do whatever we have done throughout our lives.

[01:45:27]

We will give them the solution, but we will not impose it on them. We will solve the problem for them how *we* want it to be resolved, and we will give them the *respect* that is coming from them as well.' And that's really *all* there is to it. And then you will have, the Iraqis themselves joining hand in hand, going to the Americans and saying, 'Look my Jewish brother, here with me, supporting me. However, I actually would like you to send the technicians. I would like you to, to provide the money. At the end of the day this is a project that needs the Arab, Iraqi, Muslim and my dear friend the Jewish one, and so we resolve it. They have their pride back. They have their respect back. We have our documents digitalised either by the Americans or by the Iraqis. And the world is a better place. And from that, you move on to the next project, and the next project, and the next project. I could make Iraq...welcome embrace its Jewish...history with, with the Jews. And I would have the Jews singing the praise of the Iraqis without compromising, and without lying and without being *dhimmi*s and without hiding the bad parts. But *together* we could, we could do a truth and reconciliation with no time. No time!

Where do you consider home?

Home? Home is God. I rest in God's presence wherever he wants me to be there. That's the honest truth. Physical place makes no difference. I love, I love being in Jerusalem only for the, for, for the feeling that we pray for that one place. But, I could be anywhere.

Do you consider yourself a refugee? A migrant? What, how do you see yourself?

I consider myself someone who spent 2,600 years in one place, where he lived because God put us there. I believe that this period has finished. I believe this period was not for nothing, or for waste. And just as the Jews lived thousands of years on the memory of being in Egypt, on the lessons we learnt from Egypt, hardly any command comes in without they say, 'Please remember that you were in Egypt for whenever as a stranger, or a, or a this one or whatever, *zecher l'yetziat Mitzrayim* [in remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt], every single *brachah* we make on Shabbat it's a *zecher l'yetziat Mitzrayim* and I believe that we need [to say] *zecher l'yetziat Babylon* [in remembrance of the Exodus from Babylon] and *zecher l'yetziat Medinot Arav* [in remembrance of the Exodus from the Arab Lands] and *zecher l'yetziat ma'arav* and *tsarfat* [in remembrance of the Exodus from the West and Spain] or America, because this is our time to be back in, in Israel, and to fulfil our mission. But do not leave behind what we've learnt in our countries. And if I can achieve this, being a refugee, or being an immigrant, or being a displaced person, or being a kicked out person, whatever means I will, what takes for the world, and for Iraq, and for the Jews to hear me, I will use.

[01:49:02]

And how does this then pass on to your children? How, how do you pass this on to your children? What, what identity do you want to pass on to them?

I want to pass on to them that they were not born as Jews by accident. That they did not have a Sephardi and an Ashkenazi father by accident – mother – father and mother. That actually there's a purpose in life, and that they actually whether they want it or not, they're in the heart of that path. And the Jews have a mission. And whether, and I always have, Yona [Jonah] one of my heroes...And I feel like him and I pass this message also to my children. If your day is here and you have to deliver something and you have to be part of history and part of, part of humanity, and play an active and key role, whether you like it or not, this is your optimum. And whether you're gonna escape, the world will vomit you out. You might as well give that...make a, might as well take on the challenge and do it.

And what message would you like to give to anyone who would be listening, to this interview?

The message is clear your mind, connect, be aware. Your inner truth is talking to you all the time. But it's coming out with mixed signals because you are mixing the inner truth with the chatter of the mind. With whatever you read in the newspaper. With the prejudice, with whatever your girlfriend told you or whether your neighbour chatted to you the gossip. Everything is mixed up, always, in all our brains, and, and we hear dozens of messages at all times. First thing: work on yourself. Work so that you clear the rubbish, and you just hear the message. And when you hear the message, just do it. The rest...is plain sailing. The rest is open door to eternal happiness.

I want to thank you, Edwin, for taking so much time over two different days, to share your story for Sephardi Voices. We're very, very grateful. Thank you.

Thank you.

[01:51:56]

[End of interview, Part Two]

[Photographs]

This is my great grandfather. This picture was 1922. I just love the dignity and pride they have in these old pictures.

This is Moshe, the son of my – this is my grandfather - the son of the previous picture. His wife Khatoun and my father Shaul. These are my grandparents that I never knew existed until I escaped from Iraq in 1971. They left in 1951.

[01:52:31]

This is Papa Sion and Mama Violet, my maternal grandparents. They were the only relatives we had in Iraq. This ID card is my...Mama Violet's Iraqi nation- -nationality.

This is Papa Zion, and Mama Violet, my maternal grandparents, our only relatives in Iraq.

This is the Iraqi National ID. This one is my grandmother's.

Every year, we, the family would go and have a formal picture. This is me, my two sisters Rita and Linda, and my father Shaul and my mother Victoria.

What date is it please?

1965, 1966.

This is our yellow ID card. Exclusively for Jews. 1963, every Jew had to produce one of this whenever he went, after that date.

This is Edwin Shuker as a cool teenager. I love this picture. It's a whole period of my life in Baghdad.

[Cameraman] And that would have been what time?

This is 1967.

Salahaddin, North Iraq. 1970. Summer vacation. Happiest week...for many, many years. That was the time when we were there, before we were, pretending to be on holiday and managing to ...to escape, making contact with the smugglers and, and... it was, after the hangings and the tortures and all that. And then suddenly we had one week, where we just forgot the whole world. And this is probably in last, since '63 to '71, the only week where I, because it was not in Iraq, it was not in Baghdad, it was not at home. We were just free youngsters in North Iraq. Just, no police, no intelligence...

Jerusalem 30th of November 1987, twenty five years ago. My wedding day. The hills of Jerusalem at sunset.

[01:55:16]

And my most treasured moment with the President Massoud Barzani, the very person who saved our lives back in 1971, and drove us personally through the mountains of Kurdistan to freedom and into Iran. I meet him thirty-two years later. He's the President. And I'm a grateful Jew from, London.

My father's, Shaul's, missing Certificate. My father passed away in September 2003. Two weeks later I was in Baghdad, and with an incredible miracle, I find his, the archives of the...of my father. And there it was, the Certificate, the missing Certificate. I bring it back, two weeks too late.

[End]

[01:56:33]