Professor David Peimer | Professor David Peimer Interviews Holocaust Survivor Joanna Millan

- Well good evening everyone, and welcome to what I think will be a very, very special event. I'm very pleased and proud to introduce Joanna Millan to you. Joanna is a very close friend of mine, and we have worked together for many years, and she is an extraordinary woman. I'll tell you a story. We were teaching in China and they were desperate to meet a survivor, and we were being very sort of wussy and saying, oh, we can't ask survivors to travel to China. And Joanna was in the office and she said, "Of course, you can ask me." And as a response to that, Joanna taught with us in China for many years, and we became close friends. And what's going to happen now, is that Professor David Peimer is going to interview her about her story and many other relevant episodes in her life. So welcome, Joanna, welcome David. Thank you.

Visual slides are displayed throughout the presentation.

- Thank you so much Trudy, and thank you so much to Joanna and Judi. And may I just mentioned that in this incredibly important week, how deeply honoured I feel to have met Joanna sometime ago and to be interviewing and speaking to you today, Joanna. Thank you so much for doing this. Perhaps if you could start with just sharing with us your... Obviously there's a picture of you, a beautiful picture. And what happened in... I know you were born in Berlin in 1942, in August, 1942. If you could share with us what happened with your family yourself in those years.

- Well, thank you very much, David. I wanted to show you this picture when I was three years old, which was when I came over to England from Prague to Windermere. And I was one of six very, very young children that survived from Theresienstadt. So I arrived on August the 15th, 1945.

- And could you share with us, Joanna, when you were first... You and your mother and grandmother and father, what happened, when you were taken into the camp?

- Yes, of course. When I arrived in England, I didn't know what had happened to my family. Everyone assumed that all the family had been killed, and we were all orphans when we arrived. It took me many, many years to find out what actually happened to my family. And eventually I got pictures, documents, and information. The first person... Picture I found was of my mother's father. He was buried in the Weissensee Cemetery in Berlin. My family originated in Berlin. And he died before the war, but after the Nazis came to power. And then I found a picture of his wife, Auguste. Now she wasn't so fortunate, she was put on a train in September of 1942. First of all to Theresienstadt and eventually to Auschwitz, where she was killed on arrival. I think we all have a picture of what Auschwitz was like. But I did find this very interesting document, which was produced at the Nuremberg Trials.

This shows... The top half shows how much it costs to keep a jew alive, and the bottom half shows how much it cost to keep each person alive. So you have to think of Auschwitz as a

factory with a board of directors and accountants and the raw materials were human bodies. my grandmother was killed there in the beginning of 1943.

- So this is an example of the bureaucratization and of the industrialization of the mass murder really. And the profiteering that went with it.

- Yes, the Nazi's were desperate for money for ammunition and arms. And I think... I'm not sure the Allies realised how desperate they were for money. And so they stole or... And every way which way to make money. Now, this is a picture of my mother's family, my grandparents on the right, my mother's oldest sister in the middle, she managed to get a ship to... and landed in Ellis Island in the 1930s. Well, late 20's, 1920s. And she married in America, and I found her grandchildren in America. The sister in the front, her name was Selma. Now she was married to a a non-Jew in Lubeck in Northern Germany. And he managed to hide her in a way. Not exactly hide, but protected her and her fam... And the two girls that they had. But my mother was the little one with a big bow. She was a lot younger, but all the women in our family are very small. Her name was Else.

Now she was married to my father, Siegfried Rosenthal in November, 1941. And nine months later I was born, and I'm sure that they weren't expecting me. My mother was 40 and my father was 47. And I'm quite convinced I wasn't... It wasn't a planned birth. Both my father and my mother had to work as slave labourers. My father was sweeping the streets of Berlin and my mother was working at Siemens. It's the same company that makes electrical goods today. At that time, they were helping to build the concentration camps. So while my mother was working there, she put me in a kindergarten not far from where we were living. Now, a few years ago, I got a picture of my father and his family. My father is the little boy on the left, the one with a sticky out ears, and his name was Siegfried Rosenthal.

Until then, I didn't know he had sisters and a brother, His sister with a black sash, was married to a non-Jew in Berlin. And when the Nazis came for them, he refused to divorce her. And they were both deported to Saxon housing, just outside Berlin. And they had a terrible time, but they managed to survive. And they lived totally destitute in Berlin. Of course, some people did refuse, and a few women who had Jewish husbands marched through Berlin protesting at the arrest of their Jewish husbands. And after several days, they were actually successful in rescuing their Jewish husbands from prison in the Rosenstrasse. So it just shows you that actually was possible to protest even in Berlin. The Nazi didn't want people protesting. They wanted to believe that everyone agreed with their policies.

- Just to help for the audience, perhaps. So this was some Jewish wives or husbands with non-Jewish spouses who did protest in Berlin and the Nazis backed off.

- Yeah, that's right. It was non-Jewish wives protesting against the arrest of their Jewish husbands. The sister with the necklace, she died shortly after this photo. His little brother, Kurt, now he became an engineer. And in the 1920s he managed to get a visa to go to Australia, and

he settled in Melbourne. And there he opened up a factory making aircraft parts. And he had a son and a daughter and their grandchildren. And I went to Australia to meet the grandchildren there. And they were so excited at finding me. They named a new baby after me.

- Oh, lovely. And just to help for everyone watching, your original name was Bela Rosenthal.

- Bela Rosenthal, yes.

- [David] Yeah.

- And then the little sister in the front, her name was Paula. She was married to a Polish Jew. And in 1939, he was walking through the streets of Berlin and he was attacked by some Nazi youths and he came home injured, and the family were desperate to leave. And there they'd been trying for ages to get visas to leave. They only managed to get one visa. This was to go to South America, to Argentina. And you can imagine the conversations in the family. There were four of them, who was going to use this visa? Can you imagine only one person can leave, while three of them are going to be stuck in Berlin. Maybe her husband was elected to go. Leaving the mother and the two children behind. He earned a living in Buenos Aires making fur coats. But after two years, the situation happened changed.

He happened to have a very rich lady client who wanted to find out what has happened to his family and she was quite shocked. And she said, look, she knew people in government and perhaps she could help. So he wrote down the names of the family on a piece of paper, and he went to the government offices, and found the man that was issuing visas and on his desk was a huge pile of papers. He obviously wasn't terribly interested. And when he wasn't looking, she put this piece of paper with the names on his desk. And he stamped it with the official seal, without even realising what he'd done. And so that's how Paula and the children were able to join the husband in Buenos Aires as late as 1941. So late during the war, virtually nobody got out of Germany at that time. I mean, that was just incredible.

- [David] Incredible.

- Now, this is a photo of my father's parents in the front. This photo was taken in 1915, just after the beginning of the first World War. Kurt is in the middle, he enlisted in the German army the following year and went to fight in France and won the Iron Cross. And he managed to, at the end of the war, he was returned back to Germany. But my father wasn't in this picture, because he had already enlisted. And he was sent to fight in Russia. And in October, 1915 on the Eastern Front, he was injured and captured by the Russians and imprisoned until the end of the war. Of course, he couldn't get back to Germany at the end of the war, he was ill in hospital, and he was sent to work as an accountant on a communal farm. He'd lived there for over 20 years. He married a Russian woman. In due course she became pregnant, but when the time came for the delivery of the baby, both she and the baby died. But still couldn't get back to Germany. Until 1939, the Russian sent to my father back with just the clothes he and a travel pass.

And he arrived at his sister Paula's door. And of course, the German government, the German army, had told her that he was missing in action, presumed dead. So as far as they were concerned, he was killed in 1915. And of course, he went to live with them until they left for Buenos Aires. And of course, he had to work as a slave labourer. And not long after Paula left for Buenos Aires, my father met my mother, and they were married. And this is another photo of my mother. She was 16 in this photograph. She'd also been married before, but her first husband had just died, and they decided to get married, because they thought at least they could be deported together. But that actually didn't happen.

My father was rounded up in March of 1943 with many, many other Jews in Berlin. And one day he just didn't come home. He was killed in Auschwitz on arrival, no chance. My mother stayed in Berlin until June of 1943. There'd been some labour disputes at Siemens, and they decided to round up all the Jews working there, and they were all deported to Theresienstadt. So in June of 1943, we were both taken, I was with five other orphans. My mother was separated, she was in the woman's barracks and eventually she died of tuberculosis in Theresienstadt and cremated the beginning of 1944. So this is--

- This is all what you found out later, obviously much later.

- Yes, yes.

- What happened with with your mom.

- Yes, I have documents to show--

- Yeah.

- what happened to her. This is my mother's cremation record. Now the six of us were kept together. Women from the kitchens brought us food whenever they could.

- Sorry, sorry, can I just ask you, Joanna, so the Germans kept this kind of record of every person, the absolute extreme bureaucratization of everything?

- Everything was recorded. Everybody was counted in and everybody was counted out. We know that one in four people actually died in the camp, and the doctors listed all the illnesses that people died of. And relatively few people committed suicide. But everything was recorded.

- And I know you said when your mother died, the result and the effect on you obviously which you only found out much later, was that you couldn't be deported because...

- Because there was no one to take me.

- So they would not deport unless there was a parent to take.

- Yes, a parent or family member that would take you because we were too little to be able to... I was hardly walking. And also of course, we were very malnourished, and so we weren't able to manage on our own. So the six of us were kept together next to the baby... Where the babies were housed.

- And the six of you became a unit almost, obviously not conscious, but to survive and help each other in any way with food or...

- We helped each other, totally. Women from the kitchens brought us food as much as they could. And yes, we had to support each other. And I think if we hadn't have had each other, we probably wouldn't have survived. But we were all of a similar age, three boys and three girls.

- And all about two, three years old.

- [Joanna] Yes, yeah.

- And looking back, your sense of adults at the time, what would that be?

- So, the only thing adults were good for was to bring us food. And otherwise we hated adults, we distrusted them. And they were always telling us what to do all the time. And no, so...

- And absolutely nothing of.

- All we knew that adults did was to bring food. Otherwise, they left us alone.

- And the food, eaten with hands, absolutely nothing of what children today would obviously take for granted.

- No, we'd have some sort of watery soup and a piece of bread like everybody else. Nothing special for the little ones. So... Except that there was a lady in the camp, a Czech Jew who was working in the vegetable garden. And she smuggled vegetables in her clothes to give us. So we did have some fresh vegetables as well. So I'm sure that helped to save our lives, have the extra nutrition.

- [David] Right, right.

- And I did find her eventually it was... Which was wonderful.

- Okay. And I know you've spoken before, and obviously there's virtually no memory, but some of the things you mentioned later, when you came to England afterwards, the memory of the dogs and the trains, soldiers.

- Yeah.

- Am I right?

- Yes. This is when we came to England in the reception centre. And I remember snatches of the flights, because they were bombers and we were sitting on wooden crates, just snatches of the noise. And we didn't know what was going to happen to us. Nobody had told us we'd been liberated in a strange country. Everyone talking this very odd language, which I later discovered was English. We didn't know what was happening, nobody told us. And so we were all very, very scared. So we were taken to Windermere.

- Perhaps we can just fill in for people who haven't had a chance to watch the Windermere film, just what it was in essence, boys and girls coming across, being brought to England and so on. If you could just give that context.

- Yes well, at the end of the war when we were liberated, we were taken to what they called castles. They were really houses. And while we were there, they tried to find out what they were going to do with us, you know, where we could go. Berlin was totally ruined. None of us had family. What would they do with us? So they applied to the British government amongst others, and some sterling bombers were bringing back the Czech Air Force, that had been flying with the RAF during the war. And these planes were going back empty. And so we were taken down to Prague Airport and put on these planes.

- You were three years old at the time.

- I was three years old. Was only children 16 or under. But of course, some people cheated. And they were older than 16. But everyone tried to get on the flights. We were on the first flights out on the 15th of August, and there were 301 children altogether on the flights.

- And there were 70 girls, if I'm right.

- Well around 70 girls were on those flights altogether. So we arrived in Windermere and they hadn't expected us little ones, and they had to quickly make arrangements. When we got to Windermere they wanted to separate us like the older children, the boys and the girls, places they were going to sleep. And of course we created a big fuss because we'd always been together and we didn't want to be separated.

- And you were, in a sense... I know it's portrayed in the film, and you've mentioned it as well, in a sense the leader of the small group at the age of three. And also you used the word feral I know, before.

- Yes. Well we were. We had no concept of eating proper food. We had no concept of adults

around, we always did exactly what we wanted. We had a total... So I think freedom is an odd word to use in the camp, but within the bounds of safety, we were left alone to ourselves. So adults were always interfering. And we couldn't work it out at all, because in the camp they always left. And now they were there, they were reading, they were giving us food and we had to learn English, and we had to learn how to use a knife and fork, and all these rules and we thought, no, no, this isn't on, we don't want this. And so we were, we were totally We were making our own decisions. And I don't know why, but there was one boy and myself, we were both leaders. They looked to us and decide if it was safe or if it was wrong or... We made up our own rules as we went along.

- And I just have to mention it again for myself and everyone. You were three years old at the time?

- Yes, when...

- [David] Coming out of the camp?

- Yes.

- Yeah. Okay. And then... So this was in Windermere for some months, am I right?

- Well, the six of us were moved much more quickly. We only stayed for a couple of months. The others stayed longer. And Anna Freud, who ran the Hampton nurseries in London, knew about us. And she had a contact who owned this house called Bulldogs Bank, which was in Sussex. And a couple of German nurses came to look after us. One had been trained by Anna Freud, and that's when we started to learn English introduced to toys and games. They had a swing in the garden, even grass and trees. And that first spring it was carpeted with blue bells everywhere. And it was just, every day was an amazement. It was so new and different and new experiences. But dogs were a problem. And--

- [David] Dogs were?

- Yes, dog. Next door, they had a Jack Russell. And you know those little dogs, they bark an awful lot. And I remember that winter was quite cold, there was snow And somebody had found us some sort of toboggan, and this dog was chasing us down the hill all the time. And we were absolutely petrified of this dog.

- And it was also the sense of the dogs in Theresienstadt as well.

- I suppose so, yes. Yes, the fear of dogs. Yes.

- Yeah. And then, Joanna, after this, at some point your adoptive parents came or you met them?

- Well, we joined the other children later on. We only had a year in that place. And...

- You were a year in Windermere?

- No, two months in Windermere and a year at Bulldogs Bank.

- Oh okay at Bulldogs, right, thank you.

- And this is Weir Courtney in Lingfield. And it was from there that the Jewish community decided the six of us were still young enough to be adopted. And so perspective couples came and we spent weekends with them, which was fine. We came back and we didn't know we'd been rejected. But eventually a Jewish couple decided to keep me and took me back to London and changed my name to Joanna.

- And that's when they changed your name to Joanna Millan?

- No, Millan's my married name.

- Oh okay, right, right. So you were adopted at what age?

- I was five and a... Well, I went to live with them when I was five and a half.

- Right.

- But they didn't actually formally adopt me until I was nine.

- And what was that like? I mean, everything you've mentioned and then now being adopted to an English-Jewish family, am I right?

- Yes, yes, that's right. And... That's better now?

- [David] Okay, yep. Thank you.

- So yes, I was there for... Yeah so a Jewish family in London.

- And what was that like when you were adopted? And I know you didn't... Well, you said, when you were adopted and growing up, as a young girl.

- Well, of course I was an only child. So from having spent all my life with the five other children, I was now an only child and not allowed to keep up with them. Not allowed to contact them in any way.

- So you weren't allowed to contact any of the other children you'd been with?

- No. And all their lives they pretended I was their natural daughter. So they wouldn't talk about the past, didn't want to know about the past, even though I wanted to talk about it from time to time. I mean, obviously I knew I was adopted, but they wouldn't discuss it at all. And of course later, many years later, I found that... Because everybody knew I was adopted, but they all played the game.

- So I know that you've spoken of later in your forties, you began a voyage of discovery in a sense, and to use your phrase of a stolen identity. Obviously the Nazis, totally in the beginning. And then afterwards by your adopted parents who were Jewish-English, but not wanting to acknowledge your past.

- Totally. No, they didn't want to acknowledge it. It was like I was in hiding again. My true identity was hidden. I had to do the things that they did, to like the things that they liked. And people probably realised by now that I can be very stubborn and very sure of who I was and what I wanted to do, and what I wanted out of my life. And of course they wanted to shape me into their image. And of course that was a point of friction.

- And what was their image?

- Well, I had to be this very prim, well brought up girl who was going to marry well and... So I went to all the best parties and meet all the best people and mixed with all their friends' children and just...

- So were they trying to be... Or were they very Jewish-English, but trying to belong to the English sense of class, status, et cetera?

- Yes, they were. I went to a very posh school. And so yes, they... It was very difficult.

- So to fit into that and not allowing you space or just even validating your past and what had happened.

- Yeah, that's right. And that... Like it was something I should be ashamed of and just to forget about it. Like it's so easy. How can one forget... Why should it? Because my parents were killed, because they were Jewish. I mean, how can you forget that?

- And they did not want to acknowledge it even though they were Jewish.

- No.

- Aside from being English?

- No.

- Okay.

- And I know that you've spoken of, they had a nanny and a cook and butler and went shopping. If you can give us a sense of sort of home, family life.

- Well, I suppose they did a lot of entertaining. If they went away on holiday to somewhere smart, they wouldn't take me, I'd have to stay behind. They used to find somebody to... That I could tag along while they were away. And so I wasn't included in their life at all. And I remember spending a lot of time in the nursery. So I'm very used to entertaining myself and amusing myself, which actually is paying off at the moment.

- Okay. And then Joanna, if you could just give us a sense of the school that you were at. You said it was a pretty posh school?

- Yes. Well, it was down in Kent and lots of posh people sent their children there.

- And what was that like for you?

- Well, it was very weird, because again, I was mixing with people that I had nothing in common with. And probably there was a bit of anti-Semitism, because I tried to keep up some Jewish studies. When people went to church, I didn't go. I was given dispensation to... Which was actually quite difficult to get from the school. They weren't happy to make exceptions, but they did. And so I was just a square peg in a round hole, it was just, I...

- And you mentioned that you had... If they tried to give you rules and orders, you would go against?

- Yes. Oh, yes, yes. Everything. I used to get up very early in the morning, long before anybody in the house was awake. I used to take my bicycle and cycle around Hyde Park in the morning before going to school, just to get the sense of freedom. And as much as I could, I used to sort of say yes, yes and not do things.

- And I know you've got a--

- So it's a quiet... It was mostly a quiet resistance. Most of the time.

- Okay. And I know you mentioned a story about Lewis Carroll and detention, if I'm right or punishment at school.

- Oh, oh yes, at school, yes. You probably realised I'm not great with obeying orders. And I made a decision that I was going to break every rule once. Apart from climbing up the clock

tower, because I'm terrified of heights. And of course every so often I got caught. And the punishment was to recite a poem to the They had a common room, common room. But they never realised that I always recited the same poem. So I only had to learn it once.

- It's an incredible stupidity.

- Yes, it was a poem by Lewis Carroll, that's right.

- And I know you've often said that you've had to figure out everything for yourself. From knowing absolutely nothing from obviously what had happened before in the past and from knives and forks to everything to figure out for yourself and to rely on yourself entirely.

- Yeah. Yeah, so--

- Could you speak a bit about that?

- Well, I think these days, we would've had help from psychoanalysts and from all sorts of specialists who you could rely on to try and work out what had happened and to figure out my place in the world. And of course I'd had none of that. And I knew that I didn't belong, and yet I was trying to fit in to a certain extent, into what was expected. And I found it was very difficult. I had nobody to help me. Even growing up a mother would help with silly things like makeup and as you were growing up, all the different stages. And I didn't have any of that. I had to rely on friends, all the sort of things that young women learn about from other young girls. I didn't have that opportunity. And I remember even when I was engaged to be married, they took me to see "The killing of Sister George."

And my adoptive mother whispered into my fiance's ear, "Oh, well Joanna won't understand any of this, and I'm not sure we should have taken her to this play, 'cause it's so..." You know, it's about gays. So even in my twenties, I was still... They never talked about anything, it was... The book about the birds and bees was literally about birds and bees. It wasn't anything useful. And whenever there was any mention of any sexual matter, it was always, oh, well it's below the waist. And that was the end of the matter. That was the end of it.

- So this was really such a... I suppose almost classic upper middle class England that your adopted parents were trying so hard to fit into that.

- Yeah.

- And belong to that and force you into that mould and therefore deny everything of the past.

- Yes, and I think they thought through me, they could climb the ladder even more. made a good marriage, that would be...

- And their Judaism. Was that evidenced in your upbringing at all? With your adoptive parents?

- No, they didn't practise anything at home. The only connection to the Jewish community was that they did support financially, the Jewish community. But apart from that, they have no religious observance at all. So again, I had to go and find that out, because I thought, well, my parents died because they were Jewish. I want to find what's all this about? What is it like to be Jewish? So I went and actually learned quite a lot about what it was to be Jewish.

- And then after... You mentioned, I think you were 21, if I'm right. And you were going to get married to your husband?

- Yes.

- The man you met?

- [Joanna] Yes.

- And if you could just mention a bit about him and the relationship with your adopted parents and your husband.

- Well, my adopt... My husband to be, I was training to be a rabbi, a reform rabbi. And my adopted parents didn't think that was... That wasn't a great career. They didn't really approve of that. And they actually sent around somebody to check them out, which I didn't know at the time. But they were trying to dig up some dirt about the family. But of course they didn't. But because they didn't approve of him, they were going to do a very... Just a small reception in the flat. Initially they were going to send me away to America to see whether that would stop the marriage. But when I went to get a visa, 'cause in those days you had to get a visa even to visit.

I told them that I was born in Germany and they said, "Oh no, if you'd been born in Britain, you could have gone. But if you've got a German... If you were born in Germany, then you have to wait several months before you are allowed to go to America to study." So when I came back, my adopted mother was furious. She told me I should have lied. And I thought that would've been great. So...

- I hear you. And then when you did get married, did they ever invite your adopted Jewish parents in England, did they invite you and your children afterwards, your husband ever to come there or... I don't know

- Well, that was tricky. But the wedding itself was tricky, because we actually had four receptions, because my adoptive parents only had the very small reception. But it excluded a lot of people, like our friends, like most of my husband's family.

- Was it a lot of Jewish friends?

- Yes. And Harvey's student friends as well. So we had four wedding receptions. And so we were rushing from one reception to another. And we were so glad when it was over, it was just a total relief. And the rabbi who was marrying us said, "Smile a bit, you're supposed to be happy." And I thought, just get on with it. 'Cause we just wanted to get it over with.

- Yeah. And then Joanna as you mentioned, moving into your 40's if I may, when you began to really discover, as you said, your voyage of discovery, were all of this which you've so kindly shared with everyone today. That's really when the curtain was peeled off and you could really get on a voyage of discovery to find out everything which you've shared with us.

- Yes well, my late 40's I had a call for an American academic, who said that she was doing some research on what happened at Weir Courtney and the children. And she said that she found out what had happened to the other children and that she wanted to write a book and they want to do a chapter about me.

- This is about the Windermere children?

- Well yes, but it was the younger ones.

- [David] The six of you?

- The six of us and the ones that were slightly older. The much older ones went into hospitals and got jobs and they had a different path, if you like. I'm talking about the children that were 10 or under.

- [David] Right.

- And so she wrote a book called, "Love Despite Hate" And I mean though it was supposed to be an academic work, it's not really. So she made it all a bit sweet and sugary. But anyway she was a family therapist. That was what... And she was very insistent that I should research my family. 'Cause up to then I'd been bringing up children and my husband wasn't well, he was in and out of work. It was all a difficult situation.

- I believe he even... He was refused jobs sometimes in England because he was Jewish.

- Yes, yes he... That was before we met, he was studying to be an accountant. And it wasn't really what he wanted to do, but his father pushed him into it. And then he went for a job and he'd been offered the job. And then as an afterthought, they said, "Oh, well you aren't Jewish by any chance?" And of course when he said yes, they said, "I'm sorry, we can't. We've got a lot of Arab clients and we can't employ Jews." So...

- Can I ask you just on that line, just before perhaps we can come back to your family. Have you

experienced much anti-Semitism? I mean, when you were at school or when you were with your adopted family, just in general in England, I mean... Or minimal?

- A little bit at school, I think it was fairly hidden. They wouldn't do it outwardly, but not with my family, 'cause we tended to mix with Jewish people.

- [David] Right.

- So, yeah.

- [David] Okay.

- [Joanna] That's mostly Sephardi. Mostly Sephardi Jews

- Right.

- [Joanna] families.

- And then with your marriage... So then with your marriage, and you had how many children?

- Three children.

- [David] Boys, girls?

- Son and two daughters. And he actually gave up me being a rabbi, because he didn't like the politics. And we had various careers in the computer and engineering.

- And you did various things. You were a magistrate and other things, and a mother bringing up children.

- Yes, yes. I also had my own business buying and selling double bass's. But of course I had to... I sold out when my husband was ill. So I was a full-time carer for him.

- And are you pretty close to your children?

- Well, I'd like to think so. And...

- You said there was one thing which one of your daughters said to you, which gave you a really good feeling?

- Well, both of them actually individually, one time or another said they wanted to bring up their children the same way that I had. Because they thought that was a really good model. So I think that--

- I think that's an amazing line for any parent to hear from a child.

- Yes, it's a fantastic compliment.

- Yeah, yeah.

- And I was really worried about bringing up the children, because I had no role model at all. And everyone had this book, I think it was Dr. Spock or something or whatever, and everyone had the page, bathing baby or feeding baby. And my husband said, don't be stupid, you just do what you think and you'll be fine. And he was right. I just followed my instincts. And it was...

- As you had done for all your life to figure it out yourself.

- Absolutely.

- And work it out, figure it out.

- Yes.

- And act on it for yourself.

- Yes, yes. I'm afraid I still do that whenever I get new technology. I don't look at the manual, only when I get stuck.

- Well thank God you don't look at the manuals. If I can just ask one or two things. I know that you have a very strong aversion to the word bystander. If we just bring it into the whole bigger picture. If you could tell us.

- Yes, the word bystander, which is being used so much now, it sort of implies that somehow it was an... You're not making any decision, you're just there, but you're not there somehow. And I think, well, the bystanders, they actually saw what was going on or they knew about it. 'Cause it wasn't a secret, and it was happening in front of people's eyes. You know, Jews lined up in the streets, to be put on trains. It was all near the camps, and cities. You could smell, you could see what was going on. Even in the countryside, farmers knew what was going on. It wasn't just... And if you've gotten knowledge and you don't do anything, you're not a bystander. You've made a conscious decision that you're not interfering, that it's not your business. And so I think the word bystander is a sort of inanimate sort of... So yeah, I think I... If people stood up like those non-Jewish wives in Berlin. If enough people stood up, the Holocaust would not have happened. Because of people's... There was so much anti-Semitism around Europe, to kill a Jew wasn't a crime somehow.

- Absolutely. I know, as you said that, to use your phrase, the unique thing about it was that

every Jew had to be killed no matter what.

- Yes, yes. Not just in Germany, but throughout Europe, everywhere they went. The first thing they did was to round up Jews. And in fact towards the end, they were so preoccupied with killing Jews, that actually they probably lost the war because of it.

- And you also mentioned that everything being so bureaucratically recorded, like you showed one or two examples earlier, that in fact they had... They were almost proud with no shame.

- Yeah. Oh yes. I mean they were boasting how efficient they'd been in destroyed all the Jews in Europe, they really did.

- And they even had all the names of the English-Jews you mentioned.

- Yes, they had a whole list of British-Jews that were going to be rounded up. I mean, certainly they rounded up Jews in the Channel Islands.

- [David] Right.

- There was a concentration camp in Germany entered waiting for British-Jews.

- And you also mentioned that in... Is it Bulgaria and the Armenian example, if you could share.

- Well, the Armenians, a lot of the Armenian families actually hid Jewish children within their families. So they had three children, suddenly they had four children. And so no questions were asked or they got away with it. But in Bulgaria, the whole population actually told the government that they weren't going to deport the Jews. But eventually the Nazis insisted that they deport all their Jews and they sent trains to Bulgaria and the people actually dragged Jews off the trains. Think of the courage of that. And hardly any Jews got deported from Bulgaria because of that.

- Right. So again, goes back to that bystanding is appeasing basically.

- Yes, yes it is.

- And action is not decision. If I can just draw us now, I know that you've given talks, you've mentioned at the Liverpool Football Academy,

- [Joanna] Yes.

- The International School Online, the Windermere Film, which we've spoken about.

- Yes.

- With the EU in Brussels. You're going to speak to United Nations in February.

- [Joanna] Yeah.

- I'm not trying to embarrass you, but I do want to share this for everybody listening. And you've also spoken in Northern Ireland, with the nationalist and the unionists, am I right?

- Yes, yes. I've counted things.

- And have met South African groups who've been involved in the TRC, et cetera.

- Yes.

- And you have a British Empire medal for services to Holocaust education.

- [Joanna] Yes.

- I don't want to embarrass you, but I do want to share with everybody. Okay.

- [Trudy] Can I interrupt, because we have 54 questions. We're going to have to start them soon, David, is that all right?

- Okay, can I just say, first of all, thank you so much to Joanna for sharing what is deeply personal and yet so important, your life and your story, for sharing with us. And I'm going to be South African and I'm going to not be subtle and say that I think you're a remarkable, inspiring human being. Thank you.

- [Joanna] Thank you very much.

- [Trudy] Shall I read out the questions or you, David?

- I don't mind, I can read them. I'm just getting them up here. Best wishes from Eva, Joan, best wishes. Anonymous

- [Trudy] There's a question I really want Joanna to answer.

- [David] Okay.

- [Trudy] There's a question about... Sorry, there's a question about the proposed memorial in London, Joanna.

- Oh, right. Ah, yes. That's very controversial. I'm very worried about this proposed memorial,

because of the... Partly because of the cost. It's enormous cost. I mean about a hundred million pounds. And I think, what would people think, spending all that money when there's so many other people that are desperate, especially at the moment with Covid. And I'm worried that it actually will cause more anti-Semitism. And also, of course, somebody's going to have to guard this memorial. And who's going to pay for that? And it's bound to be a focus for graffiti, for anti-Jewish sentiment. And I think that a more modest memorial would be far more appropriate. I mean, I agree the memorial in the Hyde Park is pitiable, but I think that we need to be more moderate. And also this is a... Where they propose to have it is a park for the local people. And we are taking away And the government have rushed this through, overridden Westman, the Council, and their planning. And I think that this is wrong. And they refused a memorial for slavery. And I think that that would be much more appropriate to have a memorial for slavery than it is for the Holocaust. Memorials don't stop anti-Semitism or racism.

- Okay.

- David, David, there's so many questions.

Q&A and Comments:

- I know there's so many questions and thanks to everybody. Here, there's a question from Susie.

Q: How did you communicate when you were in the camp since you and the other five children were so young and language was so sparse at the time?

A: Well, communication amongst toddlers, which is what we are, what we were. I mean, a lot of it is non-verbal. What was there to communicate? We didn't have any toys. So there wasn't any need to communicate verbally. I remember knowing the word for soup and the word for dog, which were the two most important words in the camp. And apart from that, there wasn't any need I think. If you ever watch children in the kindergarten, most of the communication is non-verbal.

Q: Yeah. Thank you. And then another question from Dolphin, are you in contact with any of the other children who were with you?

A: I did find them again. One of the boys lives in London, so I am in touch with him. One boy died of cancer many years ago, and the other boy lives in America, his wife is sometimes in contact. But he was sent to fight in Vietnam and is a victim of Agent-Orange, now he's in a terrible state physically and mentally. And one girl's in a mental institution. And the other girl I did meet, but she's not interested in keeping in touch.

Q: And then another question here from Lindsey, did you keep in touch with your adoptive parents after your marriage?

A: Only just. They weren't the sort of people you could go and pop in and have a coffee or say hello. It was always by invitation. And we used to have an invitation a couple of times a year, and everybody, for all my family say, "Oh God, we've got to go." And it was such a performance, and we had to dress up. We had to, be polite, say nothing, keep quiet, keep your head down and make sure you don't spill any foods on the plate. So it was really an ordeal. But we did, there was no point in not.

Q: And then a question from Judith, who were your role models growing up?

A: I didn't have a role model. I had to work things out myself and I did the best I could.

Q: Yep. Okay. And then just perhaps a general note that a lot of people here in questions have said that it's going to be shown, the Windermere Children film is going to be shown, I think in Canada and the States sometime during this week. So quite a few people have just mentioned that, which I think can be really great for anybody who wants to watch it, it'd be really important. What did you think of the film?

A: Yes, I was pleased with it. Yeah, so I thought... The only issue I had with the film was that they show the bit where the clothes are taken away and new clothes were given and the doctor coming to examine, but that was actually done at the airfield and not actually at Windermere. But I spoke to the film people and they said, "Oh, well it would mean having to film at the airfield and it would be more expensive to do it." And they felt it wasn't a problem. But I think in a way I think it was, because I think it actually increased the anxiety by having it at the airfield.

Q: And then there's a question from Les. I'd like to ask, do you have any idea how you were saved in the camp when so many other children or babies were sacrificed? But I know you mentioned that with your mother, I mean, the terrible thing of your mother being deported meant that they had to leave you in the camp.

A: No, my mother died in the camp before.

- [David] Sorry.

- If she had been deported to Auschwitz like my grandmother, she would've taken me with her.

- Right.

- So the fact that she died before she could be deported to Auschwitz, meant that there was no one to take me. And it was the same with the other five children, we were all orphans. And so as long as women from the kitchens provide food, they didn't bother with us. They probably thought we'd die anyway. Why waste a bullet? So they left us alone as long as we kept quiet. And I learned quite early on that if you smiled sweetly at a adult, they usually did what you wanted.

- [David] Yeah, yeah.

- So I think they left us alone, because as I say, they probably thought we'd die so... But the lady who brought us fresh vegetables, I'm sure that was a big help.

- Yeah, yeah.

- And I'm... I'm fortunate enough that I don't need much food. I can go for a long time without eating food or feeling hungry. which is a problem for me now, 'cause you know... But then it probably saved my life too. Got very slow metabolism.

- How are you now, Joanna?

- Young people is not a problem.

Q: Okay, and how are you now? How is your health and how are you now?

A: Oh, my health is good. I mean, I'm strong... I had quite a lot of illnesses when I came out. But once I've got that sorted, I'm pretty strong. Got a good immune system and I generally don't pick things up very easily. And I've given that to my children as well, fortunately. So...

- Great, okay. Well I think... I mean, there's so many more questions, but I think we've covered a hell of a lot here. And Trudy, I don't know if anything...

Q: There's one or two if you've got time, I hope we've got a bit more time, Judi, because there's a very interesting question from Eiling Green. Was there anything special that helped you deal with the trauma of your early life and to make you the person you are today? Remember, I know you well, Joanna. How are you going to answer that?

A: Well, just I'm a very strong person myself. I have a strong belief in myself and I always question everything. In a way I brought myself up.

- [David] Yeah.

- But when--

- There's a comment here with, Sorry, sorry, Trudy.

- Go on.

- Just there's a comment from Myra, which just speaks to that. Three cheers for not only surviving, but for being so feisty.

- But Joanna, going back.

- Sorry Trudy.

Q: Can I just go back into your past when you began to find out about your family. There must have been so many surprises for you. And the story that always gets to me is when you met your cousin in Germany. Could you talk about that? Do you mind? The one who had married the non-Jew?

- Yes.

- That to me is...

A: Yes, I did find my mother's oldest sister, that was in Lubeck, she had two daughters. And they did manage to find them. And I started writing to them and I didn't realise they weren't speaking to each other. So it took me a while to realise I had to write twice. But they said, no, no, no, don't come. We don't want to see you. It's nice to... We'll write, we don't know anything about you, your mother, we never met your father, but it's nice, I'm happy to write. It took quite a while to... I kept writing and they did reply and had it... They had to reply in German of course. But my son was based in Germany with the British Army. And he decided to go and visit and he's one of these guys that don't need an invitation, he'll just drop in. So he goes in British Army uniform up to Lubeck and goes to my cousins door.

And when she opens it, she gets a terrible fright, because apparently my son is the image of their son that was killed in a car crash at about that age. And of course in uniform as well, it sort of brought back the Nazi period. So they got really scared. But anyway he explained who he was, he spoke as much German. And so in the end I did go and see them. They did relent. They weren't happy with it, but they said, "No, come, come." So I did, I visited them and that broke the ice. But my uncle was a master glazier. Not windows, it was sort of stained glass or making glassware for tables, making fancy things. And they went to the factory that doesn't actually exist anymore, but the place where it was. And he met my uncle's partner and he started... I started telling him that he was my uncle and my cousin's husband stepped in very, very quickly and tried to explain, "Well, we have cousins in Sweden" and all this. So he obviously didn't want to be asked questions without somehow this cousin appearing out of the blue.

Q: So many secrets. And there's just one more question if I may, on the issue of second generation, and I'm going to say this, 'cause I know you well. The way you've parented your children seems to be... A lot of my friends are children of survivors, let me put it this way. And they seem to have quite difficult relationships with their families. Completely understandable. And I hope you don't mind me saying this, Joanna, I just haven't seen that with you in your children. So is it because you... What was so different for you? When did you tell them about the show? I think that's another important question.

A: Well, I told them there was a very good documentary with actual live footage about the show when they were in their... My youngest was in the early teens I suppose. And my son was 15. So 13, 14, and 15. 'Cause I couldn't tell the older one without telling the younger one. So I sat them in front of this documentary and they didn't quite know why. And I said, "No, you must" They did. And at the end I told them that my parents, being involved in my family and so on. And of course I didn't know a great deal myself about it So of course they were upset and so on. But they took it and they always thought it was very odd. And of course I had told my husband before I married him that they weren't my real parents. And he said he was so relieved, because somebody had told him, when you marry a girl you've got to look at their mother, 'cause like her.

- You're so wicked, Joanna. that's my... So...

- I know, I think you can get David if... I think we've got a couple more minutes David, if you want to choose any other questions.

- Anyway, I kept them upstate with anything I'd found out and I said, you can ask questions. But I always wanted them to have their own history and their own family and not be burdened by the horrors. They should know, but that's it.

- David, are there any other questions that you think we must look at?

- No I think we've covered most of the questions and quite a few questions are around the similar themes that we've already asked in terms of the questions now.

- If anyone wants to email me, anything burning, I'm quite happy to answer.

- Thank you.

- Okay.

- So, we could do that through Judi, perhaps. Or Judi, I dunno if that's okay with you, but yeah.

- Okay, Joanna and David, can I thank you, that was fantastic. To remind our audience that we have a real treat tonight. Sometimes one does need a treat. Joanna, David, that was absolutely superb as ever. And can I just announce tonight, it's the IPO at seven o'clock. I'm correct, aren't I, Judi?

- [Judi] Yes, 7:00 PM UK.

- All right, so God bless everyone. You've got time for a quick snack. Take care.

- Okay, can I say... Can I say to Joanna, first of all, thank you so, so much. Appreciate incredibly,

not just for myself, but for sharing with everybody else. And thank you to Trudy so much and to Judi. All right, really appreciate. And stay healthy and well, Joanna?

- Yes and you. And you, thank you so much.

- Take care darling. God bless.

- Thank you.

- Thank you, take care.

- Bye Jo.

- [David] Thanks you everybody, bye bye.