



SAMS Roots Interview transcript

Sylvia Schloss interviewed by Caroline Pearce, transcribed by Helen Singer

13 October 2015 at Sylvia's home in Harpenden

Recording length 1h04m47s

CP: Shall we talk a little bit about SAMS to start with and what brought you to SAMS and what it means to your family.

SS: Gil and I came to Harpenden in 1993 and we were expecting a child, I was pregnant, and we weren't married and we both wanted to have a Jewish wedding and in fact we had planned. It wasn't an unexpected pregnancy or anything, we had planned to have a child. We checked with our Reform synagogue which my family were members of, that it would be ok to have a Jewish wedding if I was expecting so we'd done that research but then as it turned out we were living in Harpenden we wanted to find a community, a synagogue, nearby that we could be members of, and so we enquired and found out that there was a community in St Albans, [Masorti](#), and we discussed the possibility of the marriage taking place under their auspices and it was arranged for the following year in August 1994 and we were told that we were the first couple to be married by SAMS but there is a sort of running argument between David and Ruth Rabin who say they were the first couple and in fact they were also married at the same place at Woburn Abbey so that's the same place as we were. I don't know, we'd have to look into that, who actually was officially the first couple. We had Martin Strauss as the Marriage Secretary. Really that was the impetus to join SAMS.

CP: Who performed the ceremony?

SS: The Rabbi – we had our Rabbi from our Synagogue, the Reform Synagogue, that was Michael Leigh.

CP: So he was happy to do it under the auspices of SAMS?

SS: Yes, as I said when we checked beforehand, we checked it with him and Edgware Reform Synagogue, so it was all...

CP: Kosher!

SS: Yes, it was all kosher, exactly.

CP: And then you joined around the same time?

SS: Yes, we joined, we had to do that and

CP: It was still pretty young as a community then?

SS: Yes it was, it's grown, we've got our own place now, we've seen it develop to quite a flourishing..

CP: And your kids?

SS: Yes, they both had their [batmitzvahs](#) with SAMS

CP: So you must be amongst the most long standing members, how many people do you reckon were in the community when you joined? Have you any idea roughly?

SS: No, I don't really know. It was sort of the stalwarts you know, Jackie and Stephen, Nick and Sarah, I can't really tell you how many, but it was less than a hundred.

CP: So what did you like about it at that point?

SS: Well, I think that's what I liked, that it was like a big family, everybody really knew each other and it felt very homely, very family oriented, and that's what we liked. You know I'd come from Edgware Reform, which as you know is very, very big and even now it's much, much bigger and you know it didn't just have one building, it had overflow buildings and everything for the High Holydays, it was very, very big. But saying that, I do like, you can't say that about all Reform, there's a lot about Reform that I like and in some ways I miss. I felt that I could be part of the service in a way, I could follow it better. I could understand modern Hebrew because I had lived in Israel but I've never really followed the service that well and I also found it quite different, the songs are quite different. I was used to the way the service was..

CP: Longer?

SS: Longer, yes, we start later, I don't know it's just a very different feel to it. But there's a lot that I prefer about SAMS but there's something I missed about Reform.

CP: What are the things that you like then?

SS: Well I like the sense of being so family oriented, and just very inclusive.

CP: So did you grow up with Reform?

SS: Yes

CP: Tell me something that you'd like to share about your history, whether it's about you or your family relationships or anything you'd like to share because

CP: Your mother was the stepdaughter of Otto Frank

SS: Yes, well I supposed I could just follow on from what I was saying before about being Jewish and being part of well I suppose on the face of it my childhood was sort of ordinary North London Jewish childhood, growing up in Edgware, a very Jewish area, and yet, a) we weren't very religious but then that's probably common with quite a lot of Jewish families and b) I always knew there was something different about me and my family but I wasn't quite sure why we were different, I couldn't quite put my finger on it until I suppose I was older.

CP: How old do you reckon you were, when did you...?

SS: Well, maybe even now I don't know...it's not something black and white, you know but I mean I knew that for example my Mum had a very strong accent and none of my friends, even my Jewish friends, none of their parents, had accents at all, they were all very English, you know they'd been here for several generations and so that made me feel, sometimes I was embarrassed about that.

My Dad didn't so much and also my friends wouldn't hear my Dad so much because he was out at work. So if they came round, you know, they would hear my Mum, and her accent was always, still is, she hasn't lost it really, it was much stronger then I think and I suppose in those days, I mean nowadays things are much more multi-cultural, much more mixed in a way, and in those days it wasn't so common and that's something I felt embarrassed about, you know because there weren't other people in that situation

CP: Surprising as most Jewish people our age at least, if not the first generation above us, well certainly the second generation.

SS: Yes, it was quite strange really in that area

CP: Your mum was born in?

SS: She was born in Vienna, my Dad in Germany, near Munich in Ingolstadt But my Dad sort of lost his accent, maybe he made more effort to, I don't know he lost the accent more, his English was a lot better

CP: Some people did though, didn't they? My grandfather was born in Lithuania, and you would never know because he had actually a sort of upper crust English accent, so and he came in on a train at 9

SS: Some people want to, sort of hang on to it

CP: So do you think your mum wanted to..

SS: Well I don't know, and people used to ask her where are you from, even years after, and she'd say, she would never say Austria, she would say Holland

CP: Really?

SS: Yeah

CP: Why do you think?

SS: Because, she didn't want to have anything to do with Austria and she had lived in, you know she was in hiding in Holland, in Amsterdam, she really identified with the Dutch

CP: So she felt close to

SS: Definitely, even now she would probably say

CP: So, was she angry about what happened, is that, I mean that's obviously oversimplified

SS: Yes, yeah,

CP: She didn't want any connection to Austria

SS: Yes, that's how she felt. But I mean it's quite interesting, I think that even though I felt that, I had strong feelings about...I was embarrassed about Mum's accent, I then later on decided to study German for my degree, with English but German and you know people have asked me, why on earth

did you, and it's a difficult question, it's not something I consciously decided, oh I'm going to, you know, study German to try and deal with these issues at all. It was just, at School, I always preferred German, I just could identify with it, I was much better at it at School, I found French very difficult, much more difficult to learn, German came much more easily and naturally to me and that is probably quite understandable and I think I get that much more, I get that from my Dad, he's a great linguist, even now he can remember a lot in other languages and can still speak four languages

CP: Really?

SS: So he's a great linguist and I get this love of the German language and literature, language in general from him. My Mum's not and that's maybe why she didn't learn English as well, get rid of her accent, she's not a linguist. So, and she moved around a lot, you know when they left Austria they first went to Belgium, so she had to learn French, maybe there was even some Flemish there, and then Holland and had to learn Dutch, she had a very sort of disrupted childhood and education and so you know

CP: I suppose none of it was her doing, like that's what she chose to do, that's what she

SS: No,

CP: was forced to do, so perhaps in some way she might have put up barriers, not that I'm trying to psychoanalyse your mum!

SS: No,

CP: put up barriers because that was not what she wanted, that's what happened

SS: Yeah, so anyway people always asked me that, what made you want to study German but I always loved the language and the literature and

CP: You were connected to it

SS: and I've always felt that and it was easier to learn that than any other language for me so

CP: Do you still speak German with your Dad?

SS: Yeah, I do, and Hebrew, then I went on to learn Hebrew and he is fluent in Hebrew so you know we can talk Hebrew with each other

CP: So you haven't talked about your Dad's story

SS: Well he, as I said, was born in Ingolstadt near Munich and when he was a teenager they actually managed to get out and go to Palestine as it was before it became Israel and so they were lucky

CP: Before the war?

SS: Yeah, and so, but it was difficult, as I said they were lucky but it was very difficult and they also did have unpleasant experiences in his school in Germany. There was anti-semitism and bullying and it affected him and so they got to Palestine and it was a struggle you know, it was not like modern day Israel now, there was poverty and you know, very very difficult, and they lived in Haifa which

was an area where there was more integration with Arabs living side by side and still today I think it's quite like that. So you know, they managed to set up a life there, and his brother actually went , earlier on a sort of [Aliyah](#) sort of organised Aliyah programme and set up, was one of the founders of a [moshav](#), Moshav Regbah, where he lived until he died a few years ago. And his family were all there. So you know, we've got the whole Israeli group of relatives in that area and other areas as well, of Israel

CP: But your Dad came to England at some point, or how did your parents meet?

SS: Right, well they met... my Dad was coming over to study, or was it to work, I can't remember, maybe a bit of both, I think doing economics and then working as well, he couldn't afford to just study, he had to work as well, so he came to London but it wasn't supposed to be permanent, it was just to study and then go back to Israel. And he went to stay at a guesthouse, a Jewish lady ran this guest house specifically for young Jewish immigrants to meet up and get to know each other. And that's exactly what happened, my Mum ended up there and they got to know each other and eventually got married. So the woman had done her job well!

CP: So it was a '[shidduch](#)' house!

SS: Well, it was a bit like that, it was where they could make friends and if more came of it then all well and good so... That was in Cricklewood, Mrs Hirsch was her name

CP: How did your Mum come to be in England?

SS: She came from, she was in Amsterdam, she went back to Amsterdam after Auschwitz, and obviously was struggling to try and start her life again, a normal life again. And so she was with her mother and she'd always been interested in photography and at that point my grandma, her mother, had re-met Otto Frank. You know, they knew each other before the war because they'd been in hiding in the same area, in the same street in Amsterdam and so they met Otto again after the war in Amsterdam and they'd started to get to know each other again, and he, I think, was the one who said to my Mum, why don't you try and go to London and see if you can follow your interest in photography. And you know, so that's what she was doing. She came over and she did get a job in London. Post-war London, it was a very different place to what it is now

CP: That's a pretty brave thing to do, she was on her own presumably?

SS; Well we did have relatives, they had relatives in the North because my grandma's sister lived in Darwen, which is Lancashire and so I think she felt well we've got some relatives here and I think she went and stayed with them as well so there was a connection, it wasn't just

CP: So your mum would have been, how old...

SS: Well she was 15 when she was in Auschwitz so probably only 17, 18, yeah 18

CP: That's very, I suppose they'd been through such a lot

SS: Yes, but she was a very, at that point, very very shy and anxious, you know after everything she's been through, so to do that was a big thing, but I think she probably felt, you know, there is nothing for me here and I think she just needed to

CP: A fresh start

SS: make a go of it, try and make a go if it

CP: It must have been incredibly difficult to readjust to normal life, whatever normal is, after having been through Auschwitz and lost her father and her brother. I mean it's hard to imagine how traumatic that must have been

SS: I know

CP: And she was subjected to that awful treatment during that time

SS: Yeah

CP: Is that something that Otto and your grandmother, well they shared losses, they'd both lost family members, do you think that actually brought them together?

SS: Yeah, definitely, definitely, especially for Otto because he had nobody, he'd lost everybody in his family, I mean his immediate family, though he had a sister in Switzerland, in Basel, but his immediate family, his wife and 2 daughters, so for him to have my grandmother and mother as a new family was, you know. Helped him a lot

CP: It must have been very healing

SS: Yes, and for them to have understood, to understand exactly what he had gone through by having basically gone through

CP: the same thing

SS: was, made it all the more...it just helped both of them a lot

CP: Where was Otto from originally?

SS: He was originally from Frankfurt, that's where they came from

CP: So your parents met in London and so your grandmother and Otto were living in Holland

SS: Yes, I think they got married just before ...one or the other got very close, one set off the other getting married, I think they got Otto and Fritzi, my grandma, got married just before my mum and my dad

CP: And did they come and live in London too? Your grandmother Fritzi and

SS: No, they then went to live in Switzerland, cos as I said he had family there, he had a sister and she had sons so that was basically all the family he had

CP: So then when you and your sisters came along, what was your

SS: Actually, I'm just going to go back, I think it was the other way round, the weddings, I think it was specifically that my mum, we can check it, that my grandma felt that as my mum had got married, it was ok for her to, you know because, you know what I mean because

CP: She was settled

SS: she felt that she was looking after my, she still had to look after my mum in a way and now that she had found, got someone to look after her, she could...it was that way round. It doesn't really matter but

CP: It's very sweet though, I mean that's very considerate

SS: I mean cos they had been through so much together, they were, you know, they were all to each other, they were all they had and so, yeah

CP: So it was all the more, the reason why it was such a big thing for your mum to come and live in England and to leave her mum

SS: But I think partly she could do that because similarly she could see that she was getting on very well with Otto, she had someone with her, they cared about each other, so she could do that, and I think she needed to as well because I think because they were so close because of everything they'd gone through, I think it was fraught as well, it was a difficult relationship as well, so it was better for both to have a bit of distance in some ways as well

CP: Plus you know your mother was still so young and just setting out in her life

SS: So all in all it was probably the healthier thing to do. Anyway so

CP: And then you and your sisters came along. But you were born in Switzerland?

SS: Yes, I came along quite a bit later, they were quite a bit older than me. Switzerland but

CP: They were born here

SS: Yeah well it was my Dad went to work for an Israeli Bank Leumi in Zurich just before I was born and so they just lived there for those years and I just happened to be born there but left when I was two, but I always like to tell this story, in those two years that I was there, not that I remember much about it, but my mum told me, I've heard since that you know Zurich has a huge lake, it was one of the few years, maybe one of the only years, it happened very very rarely that the lake froze over completely and so it was a huge thing and everybody came out onto the lake, probably like they do in Holland on the canals, and people were skating on there, walking on there, you know it was just amazing and my mum says she remembers pushing my pram with me in it

CP: Do you have any photos?

SS: No, she took lots of photos cos she was a photographer, she'd filmed us a lot, but you should have, that's history you know! One of the only times that the Zurich lake froze over was when I was born basically. So I meant to look that up, probably on Google images, that's a lovely picture you

know, cos it's massive, everyone out on it, probably dangerous, even now they don't have much idea of health and safety in Switzerland, you'd think they would but not like here, anyway so

CP: They wouldn't be allowed on it here

SS: No, certainly not now. But in Holland as well they do that they have skating, you heard but there you get people falling in, it wouldn't be allowed here

CP: It's quite dangerous, you could actually die quite easily

SS: I mean it's happened,

CP: Anyway

SS: We digress but you're allowed to digress a bit

CP: That's fine. So then really most of your growing up was done here, I mean after you were two.

SS: Yes, that's right, yeah so Edgware really, that's where I grew up. So I actually went to, as I said we were members of Edgware Reform, we were very liberal, Reform liberal Jewish, you know not very religious, observant but I did go to a Jewish kindergarten, called Rosh Pinah in Edgware but apart from that no Jewish Education, no Jewish schools, thought we did go to Cheder every Sunday, hated it but were forced to go, like most other Jewish kids in North London

CP: Those Jewish kids that didn't go to Jewish primary schools went to Cheder and hated it

SS: Exactly. So you know in common with many other, most other Jewish kids, in the area

CP: Do you think that your parents, so it sounds like they had a sense of wanting to pass on knowledge of Judaism, they sent you to Cheder but they weren't religiously observant but did they observe any of the rituals?

SS: Yeah, we used to, I think nearly every Friday night we would have a Friday night meal, not every.... and we had Chanukah, we did go, we did do the High Holydays but it was very much a Reform Liberal approach and we didn't keep kosher. My mum and my Dad loved all that German Eastern European stuff which is not very kosher, I won't go into details! So yeah that was the way we were brought up. And strange you know, because even though it was a very Jewish area really, but then I went to a school in Stanmore called Aylwood which was you know, very near Edgware, and there were a lot of Jewish kids there but still a minority but I do remember about ? age, hiding my Magen David sometimes

CP: Is that because you felt there was anti-Semitism in the air or

SS: I don't know

CP: Or was it just about being different again?

SS: Yeah I think it was that

CP: Not wanting to stand out

SS: Yeah it was that. Maybe I did feel, maybe I felt that from the stories at home about anti-semitism and all that I must have picked up some of that and, but also being different, again I couldn't put my finger on why it's different but I didn't want to stand out and you know

CP: Like most kids you want to fit in at that age

SS: Exactly and even though as I say there were other Jewish kids there and I remember they even had kosher dinners at lunchtime and then a whole group of them would go off to have kosher dinners and I had mixed feelings about that, I used to feel, you know, why am I not doing that? Do I want to do that? And you know I wasn't sure, do I want to do that, you know, go off and be different with that small group or am I happy with horrible meals and then sometimes they used to come back and say we had this and that and it sounded really nice and sometimes they'd come back and say it was horrible, you know. I was very torn about where I stood.

CP: Where you fit in, which group, you wanted to fit into one of them but you didn't know

SS: But most of my best friends were Jewish

CP: You mentioned earlier about these parties that Otto used to have, I mean what was your relationship like with him, can we talk about that?

SS: Well, you know he was my grandpa so and actually my only grandpa because on my father's side he didn't survive, I mean he died, I didn't know him

CP: Did he die in the war then?

SS: No he died in Israel, so, young, I mean he, the whole trauma of, he had actually been sent to a camp in Germany, Dachau

CP: This is your father's father

SS: My father's father, yeah, and managed, he'd got out. His, my grandma, my dad's mum had sent letters and managed to persuade them to let him go and so he was released. I mean it wasn't a camp, well I suppose it was, more like a sort of prison camp, not like a concentration camp, Dachau at that point, it might have become that later I think, I don't know. But, so, you know and that sort of made them more desperate to get out and that's why they made that big effort to get out and that's why they managed to get to Israel. So that weakened him you know

CP: What about your grandmother, I mean how did she manage to not, I mean that's pretty incredible, was she Jewish

SS: Yes

CP: And she managed to not get into a concentration camp and get her husband out

SS: I can't remember how she did it, may have been letters about his health

CP: Sounds like one heck of a story. So they went to live in Israel

SS: Yeah, they went and my father was actually there for Independence in Israel so, anyway so his father had set up a business there, it was, I think he just went round houses recycling things, it wasn't, he didn't have a great job, money was difficult and I don't think, you know, he'd every really recovered from the war, having been to Dachau and all that and so he died young and his mother came back to Germany and really lived the rest of her life in Germany in Munich, she just didn't feel at home there in Israel, it was an alien place for her. Germany was what she was used to.

CP: That's remarkable

SS: I always thought that was a very strange thing to do but you know there were quite a few that did do that, came back to Austria and Germany, because it's the life they knew.

CP: So at that point when she went back to Germany, so your dad, did he go with her or was he in Israel?

SS: No, he was, I think it was already when he was here in England that she'd come back

CP: And did she have much of a relationship

SS: He was supposed to go back to Israel and then he met my mum and he had actually thought that, you know he often said to my mum let's go and live in Israel, I've set up my new life and everything but she didn't want to. Also, and this gives you a taste of the type of women, my grandma and my mum, very sort of strong women and my grandma said you can marry Eva but you can't take her to Israel, you know cos he probably asked her, and she said yes but for her that would have been too far

CP: And probably the hardship because Israel was in its infancy, it was never going to be an easy life living there, it would have been a challenging one so maybe she didn't want that for her daughter either

SS: Yeah probably

CP: The distance

SS: Lots of things

CP: She wanted to, she saw her daughter having a better chance of a good life in England?

SS: So, they were in England and his mother was in Germany, yes so he was my grandfather, Otto Frank though my other grandmother did have another partner, they did get married later on and he was called Opa Peter but we didn't see him that much. So basically Otto Frank was my grandfather or my main grandpa. So the relationship was a very very good relationship. I really looked up to him and as I say we used to have these family holidays every Christmas / New Year we'd go to Switzerland. They were living in Basel, Switzerland, we used to go there and from there travel to the mountains and go skiing and stay sometimes in a chalet and sometimes in a hotel. I'd always love it if we stayed in a hotel and he would organise these New Year's Eve party bingo nights, where it was called Lotto and he'd invite all the children in the hotel and we'd all get these little Lotto bingo cards and play bingo and there would be prizes and I was just so proud that it was my grandpa who was

organising all this and you know he was very charismatic, he'd sort of run the thing. There was a whole table set aside where all the prizes were, if you won. And it was just amazing. And it was a great highlight of the year, the holiday. And yes, he did this quite a few years, we came to expect it in a way.

CP: He sounds very generous, a very warm person.

SS: You know, and then we had holidays in Italy as well, we'd go there quite often in the summer. And he I remember hired bikes and he taught me how to ride a bike when I was seven, eight, so you know, which is a lovely thing to do with your grandchild.

CP: Must have been wonderful for him too to have this second chance

SS: Exactly

CP: Somewhere to direct all this generosity

SS: Yes, it helped him a lot I think, you know and I didn't realise all that of course but of course there were these other aspects to the relationship where I did get an insight into what he'd been through, what had happened and that was, sometimes he would take me aside and talk to me about Anne and sometimes he would say you know, he wouldn't say in so many words, you remind me of her but I used to like writing so he would say do you write a diary and you know it's very important, it's a good thing to do and then he would talk about Anne and her diary and the pressure of that, I didn't quite grasp it properly but I was aware of it, sort of the enormity of it all, the burden of it, and you know I was scared as well and I used to have nightmares and when, as I say we used to go to Switzerland and we'd go the mountains but when we used to stay in their place in Basel I found that really, really hard. I didn't really like staying there when I was young, until I was quite a lot older I found it very difficult to sleep and I'd have nightmares there because it was full of pictures, books, it was a bit like a museum to the past, you know it was really very scary

CP: Almost too close

SS: Yes, I used to sort of dread that part of the whole trip in a way and I even felt that Basel itself was quite a ghostly town, you know, it was quite Basel part of it was quite intimidating for me and that lasted, it stayed with me most of my life really

CP: Because you were in his home at that point whereas if you were staying in a hotel or somewhere different it was neutral territory, rather than staying in his home I guess you were more aware of the kind of the ghosts that surrounded him. And did you know, I mean, what your mum had been through similar experiences?

SS: Yes, but she really understood and she always tried to comfort me. But then sometimes I was there and she wasn't there when I'd gone, when I was older and sometimes when we were younger we would go and stay with them on our own, we'd be there on our own which was difficult. And I mean I used to say in the daytime I love it here, there were lovely things about it too and I used to like it, I just used to dread it getting dark in the evening.

CP: Do you suppose that had to do with the fact that you know, Anne's story was so public and you know it was something that a lot of people knew

SS: I mean as I got older I realised, I was more and more aware about the diary and yeah, it was just a very difficult thing to grow up with

CP: Sure, did your sisters feel the same way do you think?

SS: Mm, yeah. They probably felt more than I did, I mean. I know my older sister never really wanted to have anything to do with it and even now with my mum's involvement with it all, she's stood back from it. And my middle sister, she often goes on trips with my mum, she's quite involved with it all. She was never, she never wanted to get too involved in the whole Anne Frank thing with Otto you know. And the other thing was that he was our grandfather and we wanted him to be part of our family and he wanted to be part of our family and yet there was always this, they spent so much of their time, he and my grandma, I mean their lives were devoted to the diary and answering, they got hundreds of letters you know, every week that they answered, they insisted on answering them all personally so they wrote them together, my grandma sat at her typewriter, he dictated, she contributed as well. She corrected and added her ideas and that took up their lives and so my mum often felt that she was in competition with all that for her mother's attention and then we felt that as well because often they'd stay with us and during that time they would have people coming over to visit them, you know, pay homage to them and it was like that, you know, and they.... It was like fans you know a fan club, and often we felt second best, or you know we're not important. So there was all that, you know, two sides...

CP: Competing with ghosts in a way

SS: And my mum often felt, you know she said that I went through it and my brother and he died and nobody's remembering him and that's why she's, partly why she's, written the books and given talks. She's done a lot recently about trying to get his pictures, he painted, and her father painted as well in hiding. In fact he never painted before, her brother had painted, he was very artistic and musical but her father had never painted until he was in hiding because there was nothing to do and he'd do like a picture of his wife Fritzi and painted it from that

CP: Very talented

SS: So she's now, that's just like a postcard version that he painted from a photo

CP: That's remarkable isn't it, I'd love to have a picture of that, a version of that too, that would be lovely

SS: So my mum is now, in Amsterdam they've had exhibitions of her brother Heinz's work, and her father's and the Japanese have taken them and made prints of them, this is from a print, you know they've had exhibitions with prints of all the originals, America's had exhibitions, so my mum now feels, it's important for her to show that

CP: This is more like, that's the untold story, Anne Frank is the one that most people know, but how lovely that she's doing that now

SS: Yes, the picture section of, maybe it's the first one

CP: So is that more what that book is about?

SS: No, this one, The Promise, is about her relationship with her brother, that's got pictures in by her brother. They are very dark, he knew what was afoot, very foreboding but then also some brighter

CP: That's lovely, that's beautiful

SS: That one, my sister had that in her children's room

CP: That's so bright, although the sea does look a little bit strong

SS: That's right, impending storm

CP: Remarkable, and he did those while in hiding

SS: No, these weren't all done in hiding, some were. Yeah and he played guitar, very creative

CP: Does your mum feel now that she's done a good job of bringing that story to light?

SS: Yes I think she does. In fact this book, funnily enough, Sophie (Sylvia's daughter) did the illustrations when she was younger. And that's the whole point, it's like a link, a chain linking so in a way it has with Sophie illustrating it

CP: How lovely

SS: It's been a family affair

CP: So the generations are linked through that

SS: Which is sort of the message of this book, cos that's what their father said to them

CP: What did he say?

SS: He said I promise you this, everything you do you leave something behind, nothing is lost. Because I think Heinz had said to his father, what happens if I die? He said you live on through your children and he said what happens if I don't have children and he said Everything you do, something will stay and there'll be a link, there'll be a chain, something will be left behind. So that's why the paintings, that's why my mum thinks, in that sense that's why it will be the paintings that will be the link that's been left behind. And he wrote some poems as well but it's mainly the paintings

CP: So I mean your mum, I guess it took her quite a long time before she was able to do that then, she's doing it now

SS: Yes I know and I mean it's so lucky that they've got the paintings and that's a story in itself because I think that is in the books, the story of how on the train he actually tells her where he's hidden them in their place in hiding

CP: on their way to Auschwitz

SS: Yes because that was the last time she saw him. He said I've hidden them under floorboards in the place where we were hiding

CP: And she went back and found them?

SS: Mm, and there was a note with them, I can't remember what the note says, I think it said you know

CP: So did she feel then this is her promise to him that she would find the paintings to bring them to light to tell his story

SS: Yes I think so, I think it's also the promise that the father made that they will stay linked, the memory

CP: Amazing story. So does Sophie still draw?

SS: Yes, she does draw and paint, in fact she now told me that she's doing a painting class at Warwick

CP: Really?

SS: Yes, I don't know much about it. She did Art GCSE, that little portrait there

CP: So that's kind of stayed in the family, there's a link there. The link continues...

SS: Yes

CP: So is there anything else you'd particularly like to talk about? I might come back to that once I go through all this material.

SS: Well, not really, I mean

CP: You wanted to tell me about your work

SS: Oh yeah, cos I was at Leeds University and then I went to Israel for four years and it was partly a sort of, in a way an act of rebellion to go because my dad was quite happy because it was almost you know I can't live there but maybe through you

CP: Yes, he wasn't allowed to! He had to keep your mother in England

SS: But my mum didn't want me to go, couldn't understand why, and I was going with the idea of making Aliyah and I had worked with a left-wing Jewish sort of Zionist group at University, I got quite involved in student politics cos it was the heyday of student politics in the 80s, not like now, and I'd got very involved in lefty Jewish politics, was quite Zionist, supporting left-wing groups there. And so I worked in London after I left, I worked for a left-wing Israeli organisation called Mapam and through them I went to Israel and went on a kibbutz and went and did an [Ulpan](#) and you know was just deciding whether to make my life there. And I loved it, I loved the kibbutz and everything but I didn't really see myself living and staying on the kibbutz so I went to Tel Aviv and enjoyed that, that was great to be a young single person in Tel Aviv at that time. It was great, you know it was a Mediterranean city and I loved it. Eventually I got a really fun job being the editor of a tourist magazine called Hello Israel and was just paid to go and do advertorials for restaurants and shows, I know I thought I'll pay you to do this! It was brilliant. I cycled to work along the sea front and then in the evening meet my friends in cafes and things, it was fantastic. I thought I could stay here, I could

live like this, no problem. But, always in the back of my mind I thought, you know, there's an army, the political situation, the Lebanon war was going on at that time when I was there. You know at the kibbutz I used to see the planes going over cos it was quite far north where I was, going over to Lebanon.

CP: That's a bit disconcerting

SS: So you know there was always that shadow, overshadowing my enjoyment of my life there. And so I thought, you know, if I was going to have children here and they would be fodder for the army, I don't know if I can do that. You know I wasn't born here, why would I do that? So I was having big doubts, four years I was there and then I was starting to have real doubts and then Gil came along and he was visiting. He came to Israel and a friend of ours, through this organisation that I was working for, she just said Oh go and visit Sylvia in Tel Aviv. She hadn't really intended it to be a shidduch but that is how it ended up. And he was just coming for a visit and was coming back to England. So that put, I'd already decided but that put the final touches to me leaving Israel really. But that's where I started working in editing and publications and things and so when I came back I followed that career path even though I hadn't had any training in editing or journalism, I just fell into it really, which was a struggle sometimes and I was telling you earlier when I got this job at the Industrial Society and was thrown in at the deep end to have to be the editor of the magazine I thought, you know, I don't really know what I'm doing! But

CP: Great experience

SS: Exactly so sometimes that's the way to

CP: Sink or swim

SS: Exactly and usually I think there were a few cock-ups but on the whole...

CP: And you interviewed Tony Blair

SS: Yes, I interviewed Tony Blair, that was a highlight, before he was Prime Minister, when he was still a nice guy

CP: It must have been interesting to look back on it later and think how his career progressed after you met him, maybe it was because

SS: Yes, I think so! I think that was key to his success!

CP: Good experience for you to have though

SS: Yeah and I enjoyed it

CP: Well much as I'd like to carry on I'd like to know what happened next

SS: Next instalment

CP: I'm going to turn this off now

[Interview ends.]