



SAMS Roots Interview transcript

Debbie Hougie interviewed by Caroline Pearce, transcribed by Helen Singer

7 April 2016 at Debbie's home in Radlett

Recording length 51m37s

CP: Can we start by talking a little bit about SAMS? I see you've been a member for about 20 years now.

DH: Yes, I joined originally in '96 when I'd been ill and I'd had to go, I was living in Northwood and I got ill and I went home to my mum in Leeds for 6 months and I came back and I worked out that I'd be much better living in St Albans, or nearer to work cos I work at the University of Hertfordshire. And I had also heard about SAMS and I thought this could be the synagogue for me. And funnily enough, it was! And it's very dear to my heart. I'd then kind of come and gone a bit. So when I met Andrew, he was in West Hampstead, I was in Wheathampstead

CP: Confusing!

DH: But we kind of gravitated a bit towards his, well he did and then we moved to Radlett and we started off in Radlett but I wasn't happy in Radlett United

CP: No?

DH: So I kept coming back, but we all came as a family so that was very nice

CP: That's nice. So did you grow up with, well what kind of service did you grow up with?

DH: I would call it [Minhag](#) Anglit which is a bit like traditional equivalent of kind of United Synagogue but in Leeds. There isn't a United Synagogue in Leeds, they're all independent and they have their own [Beth Dins](#), the Leeds Beth Din, but it's traditional, women upstairs, men downstairs and I hated it. Just could never understand, I was the original Jewish feminist I think, of my time! And I felt very disengaged from it and very unhappy and didn't like going to shul but had to. I had a [Bat Chayil](#) which involved standing on the front row of the upstairs and the Rabbi looking up at us and talking to us. I was probably carving things into the wood! I was an outdoors-y girl as well so, and a bit of a tomboy, so the idea of having to wear a skirt and having someone lecture me was my ultimate nightmare so it didn't go very well! But I found myself a little bit at University, we actually ran the first, in 1986, in Manchester, I was at Birmingham University, but we set up a Jewish Feminist Group and there was the first ever women's service that was ever done under an orthodox kind of banner at Manchester in 1986.

CP: Really?

DH: We were all wearing our Jewish feminist badges! So that was quite interesting. I've always been a bit, yes

CP: Well I suppose like a lot of people of our generation find it quite difficult to be in that sort of environment, and men and women separated, no place for women in the service

DH: Absolutely. Well I'm very happy at SAMS.

CP: Yes, it's completely different

DH: I know, it feels right so it's good. We ostensibly moved, I persuaded Andrew, because of Alex's batmitzvah, I wasn't going to let her stand in Radlett United making a [Dvar Torah](#) in English when I knew she was completely capable of doing whatever she wanted. So she read from the [Megillah](#) on [Purim](#) in an egalitarian service which was fabulous, very pleased about that.

CP: And your son's coming up for barmitzvah?

DH: Yes, which is very exciting too, [oy vey!](#) Can we not talk about that?

CP: ok!

DH: No it's just that, it's just a bit stressful thinking about all the things I have to do in the next few months but it'll get there, I mean one of the reasons, he loves [Masorti](#), one of the things he said was 'When I have my barmitzvah I want my mum to be called up – not my Dad, I want to be with my Mum! I thought that was really cool.

CP: Very cool

DH: I'm pleased about that. In fact we're both going to be called up but obviously at different times, which will be lovely

CP: How do your parents feel about it if you don't mind my asking

DH: My mum and Dad love SAMS and said if they lived here or if there was an equivalent in Leeds they would definitely go to it. So they feel very comfortable. They've been coming since I joined, on and off, you know whenever I had been in shul or whenever they're down they come. And I remember my mum saying, it was really sweet, it was in the days when we were in the Friends' Meeting House and I remember it so clearly, she got called up and she said she didn't have to practise, she just knew it and she said it was, and she'd never stood by a Torah scroll, never seen anybody read from it, never held it, she didn't have a clue but she knew the [bracha](#) straight away, so she was like, oh yes, this is completely normal. So she very much enjoys it. Very good, yes, so they're very, they're happy.

CP: Yes, cos I think Masorti didn't really exist in this country until relatively recently

DH: I don't know when it started cos I don't know when the North London or New North London got going, but I'm very glad that there's one in St Albans, it works very well for us.

CP: So what else do you like about it, apart from that it's egalitarian?

DH: I like small communities, I don't like being part of something big. And I find the type of people who belong to SAMS are my kind of people if you know what I mean

CP: I know exactly what you mean!

DH: They're not flashy and they don't, you know they care about things rather than whatever is that people in Radlett care about! I can't really get my head round all of that. A very, just a very normal set of people that I feel very comfortable with and that's really important for me. I love its

egalitarianism obviously and I like its outlook, I just like the way it is, the feel of it, does that make sense?

CP: Absolutely

DH: That's why we all belong to it!

CP: Yes! Ok and Andrew likes it, he's comfortable?

DH: I think he's got used to it, I think it took a bit of time for him to actually get used to it but it was funny cos we were in Israel last week and we were talking about what we should do on Friday night. I was saying I don't really like going to the [Kotel](#) because there's no egalitarian thing and I always feel very disconnected because there's no structure for the women and I don't pray like that, it's not how I am. He said actually I quite like being with you so let's go to the shul, let's go to the conservative shul so that's what we did. So we all sat together. I think you kind of get used to it. And how you are, and when you're separated you don't quite know what to do, quite bizarre.

CP: Well it is!

DH: So I think he's got used to it, I think he's feeling very involved because he's on lots of Committees. And people value his opinion and his knowledge and I think he feels very included which is very nice.

CP: ok, so you've brought some pictures to show me.

DH: Yes I bought a map actually!

CP: Of course, I would have been disappointed if you hadn't!

DH: Actually this is how a lot of my story starts, is with a map. This is

CP: It's your profession!

DH: Yes, as a geographer maps are really important to me. I get a lot more feeling from a map than I do from a page of words. I can tell a lot more from a map. I relate to it a lot more. So maps are really important. So this, there's this first thing I've got is actually a picture of the Atlas my mum and dad have at home, it's the big Times Atlas from 1960 something. And when I was really quite small, probably 7 or 8, I used to look at this page particularly and this then relates to what happens later.

Because the story goes, with my family, that my great grandfather Yosef arrived in South Shields, this is the story, it's not all absolutely true, so the story goes he arrived in South Shields and the Customs Officer, now we know this isn't actually true cos they had to go and register later but the story is, he gets off the boat and the customs officer says 'So pet, what's your name' and my great grandfather says 'My name is Yosef Tibianski' and the customs officer says 'I'm sorry pet, I canna spell that. The guy in front was called Perlman so that's your name now.' So that is apparently how we became the Perlmans.

So what we knew, because obviously my grandfather told me, was that we were from a little place in Lithuania called Kretinga.

CP: Ok, show me this on the map

DH: This on the map here, map of Lithuania with Kretinga. And I used to look at this for hours and hours, and try and differentiate everything, and why there was dark green and light green and where the rivers were. There was no internet, there was nothing, this was the only connection I had. But I

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started to imagine the landscape, which was quite phenomenal when you are seven, eight or nine, but these stories were really alive for me, they were really alive and this brought it more alive, that somebody, somewhere, this place actually existed. How could that be? Maybe it wasn't just a story!

CP: And that's where your great grandfather

DH: That's where my great grandfather came from. So apparently, the story is that Memel, as it used to be, it's one of these places that's gone in, out, it had gone in and out of Poland, Russia, the USSR, Lithuania, the borders have changed all the time, and it was absolutely on the edge of the [Pale of Settlement](#). So the Pale of Settlement included Kalnas(?), and Vilnius which was slightly off here,

CP: That's where my grandfather came from

DH: We're probably related! I didn't realise you were a [Litvak](#)! So, but there was a huge trading arm between Memel and Newcastle. So, and it was logs going into Newcastle and coal coming out. So they all somehow managed, it was actually my great-grandfather's wife's brother who was the first one to come, he escaped from the Russian Army, got smuggled onto a boat and ended up in South Shields or Middlesbrough or somewhere in the North East.

CP: So this would have been around

DH: We're talking late 1860s though my great-grandfather came in the early 1870s, Yosef, Joseph. His wife was Rosa. And they got married I think a year after they arrived. They weren't, they must have known each other. But there was a whole load that came and a lot of the community in South Shields, particularly, and Sunderland, came from a few villages around Kretinga. So there were loads and loads of families. So I'm related to most people who come from Sunderland!

CP: Most Jewish people!

DH: Most Jewish people from Sunderland. So in fact there's one of the girls in Alex's Jewish Studies class whose mother is from Sunderland and of course we're related to each other. So Alex and Tabby are actually fourth cousins! But you know these are the things you find out. And then there's another girl she went to Israel with a few weeks ago and I'm related to this one family, called the Gillis family, it's a massive family, so and then there's a friend here in Radlett and her boyfriend is from Glasgow, I've known him for years and years and years and it was only 2 years ago we realised, it was actually through the same Gillis family that we were related to each other. So that's really nice as well. So this Gillies family was really, so they all came from Kretinga.

CP: Was it quite a small place?

DH: It was quite small but it was slightly bigger than some of these other tiny places which I'll talk about in a minute. But Kretinga was, it had quite a big Jewish population. What was interesting as well, there was a 'Who do you think you are' a few years ago where they did David Suchet, I don't know if you remember that one?

CP: I don't think I saw it....

DH: They worked out that actually his name was Shochet, but he was from Kretinga. And it was really weird because Dad and I, we never spent time together on an evening, we just happened to be in the Yorkshire Dales, we have a cottage in the Yorkshire Dales, we just happened to be together, I'm not quite sure why I was there, I don't know, and this programme, we were sitting watching and we couldn't believe it, they went to Kretinga and on this really wobbly railway line and there's this

picture of them looking at this Jewish graveyard in Kretinga, there's nothing there so there's no point in going to have a look so we thought nothing of it. So

CP: I have a feeling you are going to tell me otherwise!

DH: I'm going to tell you a little bit more! So back to the Tibianskis. We always thought that maybe it was true, maybe it wasn't so I was really quite determined to find out if this bobbe maiseh, this story

CP: This [bubbe maiseh](#)?

DH: bubbe maiseh, it's maybe a Yorkshire Yiddish word for a story. Cos a lot of our Yiddish is very different to Southern Yiddish so I'd say breigas not [broyges](#). So it's things like, there might be another word in London Yiddish

CP: I don't know that one

DH: So but bobbe maiseh I tend to make things up, no I'm pretty sure that's the right word. But it's always been at the back of my mind, always, always, always, so and it's always intrigued me, I've always wanted to change my name maybe when I was, I wanted to be a bit of a [chalutzi](#) a Zionist, to go to Israel and change my name to Deborah Tibianski to be really authentic! That never happened.

CP: It's a nice idea!

DH: It's a nice idea. But there was a kind of romance about it which was quite interesting. Obviously my dad never actually met his grandfather, he died just before he was born which was why my dad is called Joseph Joshua, so he's actually called Jerry, that's a good story in itself, do you want to hear that story?

CP: Sure!

DH: So my Dad grew up thinking that his name was Gerald. Gerald Perlman. And everybody calls him Gerald in the family, in his mother's family, everybody calls him Gerald and hence Jerry. But he was always known as Gerald until he went into the Army. And he had to produce his birth certificate and on his birth certificate it says Joseph Joshua

CP: Oh, and he didn't know that?

DH: He didn't know. Because what had happened was that my grandmother, his mother, had said 'I want to call him Gerald'. So my grandfather, they were a bit of an odd couple, he's an only child, didn't particularly like it so went and registered him under a different name

CP: Bet that helped marital harmony!

DH: Well, he married very late and he was a bit of a, well she was, I suppose she was one of the last ones of the family and she desperately needed marrying off so they married her off to a bit of a black sheep who married very late. God knows what he'd been up to! He survived the First World War but we can't find any record of him, this is my grandpa Perlman, Samuel. No record at all of him in the army. We think it's because the records have been destroyed but there really is nothing else, nothing with his regiment, so he was a bit of a black sheep.

CP: Intriguing!

DH: Very intriguing. So I'm still working on that but I haven't made any progress at all. So they were quite an interesting couple but that's why my dad is really called Joseph Joshua, he's named after his grandfather but the rest of the family call him Gerald, hence Jerry so it's a bit confusing, or JJ as we

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sometimes call him as well. And that was all happening in the North East of England. So my great grandfather Joseph, he actually turned out to be, bizarrely, he was a coal merchant so he did very well cos we think he came from very little but he actually did very well and became a coal merchant and was probably selling coal back to Russia and Lithuania which we think is quite funny

CP: Really so he wasn't carrying coals to Newcastle?!

DH: No, he was doing the opposite! Absolutely. But there's always a story, during the First World War there's a story that one of his boats got bombed and he lost his entire cargo and then it all went mechuli, do you know that word?

CP: No, I was..

DH: oh mechuli it means out of business, but we think he set himself up. Oh I don't know but there's lots of stories about him re-inventing himself in different guises in the coal merchant business. But we found some records of him trading. And I think one of the boys took over cos he had, they had 9 children, 9 children, lots of girls, twins, twin girls who married brothers, very confusing, so I get a bit confused with who married who. Yes but the story about the Tibianskis is the thing that always stuck with me. So I started looking, well my cousin in Radlett actually, Richard Perlman, who is the grandson of one of the other brothers of my grandfather so a huge differentiation in, so mine was the youngest brother, his was the one of the older brothers so he's 75 and I'm 50 and there's 25 years difference although we're the same level. So, I should have drawn that out, he was the genealogist of the family.

CP: Ok but someone's really looked into this

DH: No well thanks to Andrew as well, but we stuck to I managed to get hold of a naturalisation paper of, I might just, can I borrow a pen? I can just have a little draw so there was my greatgrandfather Joseph and he had two brothers and a sister. He had, there was Charles, and Isaac and Rebecca and they all came over at different times. Joe was mine but Charles had a son called Matthew or Mattheus, but it was something in Yiddish and we got hold of his naturalisation papers when he wanted to go in the Army in 1914 but he was clearly born in Lithuania. And it says where he was born in Kretinga and that his name was Tubianski. So very close, so there, wow, proof the story was right. So when my dad turned 80 a few years ago he said ok, it's time, I want to go back. Fine Dad, if you want to go back we'll take you!

CP: Had he ever been?

DH: No, no-one had ever been, nobody. I think actually a cousin on his other side had been because they're from one of these little places near Kalnas down here somewhere. And I think she'd been back and had done some research, my cousin on my grandmother's side, dad's mum's side, so. The Tailor side, Schneider Taylor side. So but yes, we went back and had the most amazing time. So it was mum and dad, the four of us, my sister, her husband and their son Mark. So all 9 of us went back. And we had the most amazing time. Lithuania is amazing. All those landscape imaginings I had had, there I was actually in them, through this very map! I don't know, it was just tremendous. It was amazing, we, well we only had five days but it's not a very big country, we had cars and we guided ourselves, the Perlman's are very intrepid, we don't like package holidays, we don't like people to do things for us, we always have to do them ourselves, no language barrier, who cares about language?

So were staying in, actually it was another place, not Kleipida, Pelanga which is a little place on the, it's now a very trendy little seaside town

CP: I don't know if I've spelt it

DH: That's right, Pelanga

CP: So did it look then, you said about the landscape, did it look how you imagined it would

DH: Well it did actually, that was the really bizarre thing, we were driving along the road from Pelanga to Kretinga, you could see that there was, you know I had always imagined that there were hills and there were obviously rivers, it was slightly low and slightly dry and it might have been a bit marshy and that's in fact how it was! It was amazing. From that one little imagining, my little brain there were some very old photos that Richard Perlman had had in a book, the Great Fire of Kretinga in 1880, when the shul burnt down, and all the people in Sunderland raised money to try and rebuild it and it was called the Kretinga Rescue Fund or Krottingen as it was sometimes known, in a Polish phase. Krottingen. And they raised money, all the people who had left raised money, sent it back and rebuilt the shul.

CP: Amazing.

DH: Amazing. So it was quite a bizarre story. So this is us when we got to the sign cos we were all rather excited. Here's my Dad and all his descendants, me and my sister and his 3 grandchildren. So that was really very exciting. To be you know, in this terribly modern place suddenly but you can see it is slightly low lying. It was, there's a railway going through it. We had a map and we arrived in the town square where there's a tourist information centre.

CP: Where had you flown in to?

DH: We came into Vilnius and we spent a night in Vilnius and then we visited Kalnas and then we'd been to Pelanga, we'd stayed a night in Pelanga, maybe we stayed two nights in Vilnius because I think we were there a Friday night and a Saturday night, that's right and then there's probably, then we drove, we spent a day driving cos we went to Kalnas and then went to, stayed in Pelanga, it was like day three or something. So we went into the Tourist Information Centre and we said to the woman who was very young, she must have been in her twenties, do you know where all the Jewish things are in Kretinga? And she said, no, what Jews? There have never been any Jews here. So we said, are there any plaques, anything to do with the Jews? No. All there is is in the town square, there's an interesting statue and you can see where the churches are. She knew absolutely nothing. And actually what she'd sent us to was a statue in the square about Lithuanian partisans. Now they were actually, they collaborated with the Nazis and went on nice killing sprees. So that was a bit ironic really. We've seen pictures of Kretinga market square but that all got levelled in forty four, forty two? when the Nazis came and the whole thing was bombed and burnt down. So it's now, it looks like a 1940s, 50s, Soviet town. So it's not quite what you expected. With Soviet style shops, it was all a bit weird. We had the address actually of my cousin in Glasgow, we had his mother's address because she was actually still in Kretinga during the war and was part of the ghetto in Vilnius, she was taken to Vilnius and survived, she was a Holocaust survivor. We had her address. So we went to have a look and it was a modern, it had obviously been knocked down, there was a modern house in its place. So we looked around and there's an old bit which we went to, we drove around and I had a map on, I'd found something on a site, of this cemetery that David Suchet had been to

CP: Oh, ok so that must have triggered something

DH: Yes so I managed to navigate there, it's very useful being a geographer cos you're always the one who has to navigate. But actually my sister's very good and my dad's very good so we're a great www.e-sams.org/roots

team actually, a really good team. So we found our way to where we thought this was and it was in this really lovely area of Kretinga where the houses were big and they had the most beautiful working gardens, they were full of vegetables and log piles and it was all very neat and very orderly. And there was this quite scary looking woman tending to her garden and at the exact moment we arrived it poured down, really heavy showers, we were all soaking wet and this really scary woman kind of jumped out at us and we thought Oh my God she's going to shout at us and all she was actually trying to tell us was that there's a much better way to go to the cemetery because otherwise you have to slide up this big muddy hill and she told us to drive round, told my dad to drive round but it felt like, because of this what Jews? that everybody would be very hostile, I don't know why we felt that, we just had that feeling with this hostility

CP: Because you knew that a lot of them had left as well?

DH: Well, they'd either left in the [Pogroms](#) in the 1870s, or as we later found out from when mum and dad drove round to the other side, there was a little plaque and all over Lithuania saying Jewish mass grave this way. So you know they shot everybody. So there was both types, so we really weren't quite sure how the locals would react. So but what was amazing when we just staggered up this muddy hill, mum and dad went the other way and then walked across, there's the gates of the cemetery still there, the gate is still there. It's been vandalised but the field, there is this massive open space with a bit of woodland and the sun came out, it had stopped raining and there were frogs, baba all the time, cuckoos, goats grazing, it was the most idyllic place but there was graffiti everywhere and it just felt very, very neglected. And broken bottles everywhere so you had to be quite careful. But it was bizarre because David Suchet had said there's nothing here. And he just had this picture of him looking out of the gates and looking mournful and saying there's nothing here. We started looking, there were at least 200 gravestones, at least. And of course the gravestones are very difficult because they just give their Hebrew name and you know it could be Josef ben whatever and it was really hard, all in Hebrew. Some, the later ones were in Yiddish and the Cohenim were against the wall but there were loads of them, loads. And suddenly my brother in law calls out 'Oh my goodness' and there was a Tibianski buried in the cemetery, amazing, amazing. We haven't managed to connect ourselves to him but I'll tell you that bit later. So that, it was the most amazing experience and we all put stones on the gravestone and we went to visit the mass grave but we later found out, we just went to loads of them, we spent the whole time going to Holocaust mass graves. And then we said Kaddish at the cemetery gates, not that there were ten of us, it didn't matter but we had to do it, so that was amazing.

CP: It must have been quite emotional

DH: It was, it was quite something actually. It was very deep because this landscape, it was half the fault of the landscape and the cuckoos and the frogs and the goats and it was like this is amazing, it really was quite a bizarre, surreal deep experience, it's very imprinted on me. So the imprint of that, I took with me from the map and the landscape suddenly turned real, it was quite an extraordinary experience.

CP: It sounds like it

DH: Yes, quite extraordinary.

CP: How did your kids feel, I mean they were reasonably young, do you think that they felt it too

DH: Yes I'm sure they did, they must have done. They were complaining cos they were very wet! Because the grass was very wet. But yes I think they got what was going on, definitely. And that connection, that feeling of connection

CP: How amazing for you too though to have seen this all your childhood to have that, and then to go there and actually be there

DH: Remarkable, it really was.

CP: It's so amazing that you did that

DH: How I feel though is that I'm not finished, I need to keep going. I don't know, it's really funny because it's not my kind of landscape. I like hills, I like mountains, I love big skies and it's just not like that, so why did I like it so much? I'm quite interested in, the landscape it was fascinating, absolutely fascinating but not what I normally go for

CP: But do you think it's because you've seen this map since you were a child that it meant so much to you from a very early age? It was imprinted on you

DH: Absolutely.

CP: An emotional connection to this map even if you don't feel quite the same way about the landscape

DH: Absolutely, I don't think - the landscape didn't matter that it wasn't my kind of landscape, it was still really special and really important to me, but how can, is that the map or is it something genetic, a genetic link I mean I'm fourth generation, how can that landscape, the place where everybody wanted to get out of still have some calling to me, I'm quite fascinated by that. I've never heard any stories about it, because I didn't know my great grandfather and my grandfather obviously wasn't born there, he was born in South Shields so he'd just heard stories so everybody just stories so those pictures, those connections live inside me. So it was amazing to go back, it really was. Subsequently we have had a woman from Vilnius go and look at the records and we have now concretely proved that our name was Tibianski because we found Charles and Matthew, Joseph's brother and we can go back another three or four generations. And they were paupers, they were nothing, they were absolutely nothing, just very lucky that they all got out. And weren't conscripted to the army and didn't die in some war somewhere though, that's really amazing.

CP: Did they get out cos of pogroms? Did they get out because they wanted a better life and thought that they thought that they might find it elsewhere?

DH: I think it was a combination of the two, I think there were pogroms before and after they left but I think the economic, I think they were mainly economic migrants. Although Joseph's brother in law, Fred (?) Barnet, he must have been called something else in Yiddish, when he first came out, I think he was escaping from the Army, I think he was an army escapee. He found good things and then so many other people went from Lithuania to the North East. They set up a very nice community there.

CP: So there was opportunity

DH: Yes, so quite amazing

CP: They would have had to, I mean, pay for their passage

DH: I assume so, we have nothing about that but I assume so, they all must have done so, I mean where did they get their money from? And you know, what happened to their parents? No idea...We do have, we know who their parents were but we can now go back further. So but it's, you know, with very heavy Yiddish names but the name is a bit changeable but in fact my nephew was working in Barnet doing his Psychiatry bit of his degree and he's found a psychiatrist in Barnet called Robert.

CP: Tibianski, I've spoken to him on the phone!

DH: We don't know if we're related but they are from Lithuania.

CP: I know who he is. He's South African

DH: I know, I've been in touch with him

CP: Have you?

DH: How funny!

CP: That is funny

DH: That's what he does, geriatric, yes so we've been in contact with him, in fact you reminded me that I need to, we've asked him to find out more about his family to see if we can connect the two together, how amazing would that be?

CP: I know, the South African element

DH: Because we know there are other relatives of ours from Lithuania who went to South Africa, lots of Litvacs went to South Africa. I'm not really quite sure why but trade took people everywhere, didn't they?

CP: I mean yeah, I mean in my family my great grandfather went with one of his children and that particular child stayed there and there's a lot of spawn as a result of them!

DH: So as part of this trip as well we went on a bit of a journey and we went to the other [shtetls](#) Both of my mum's great grandparents were litvacs and actually my dad's, the other side of his family were also litvacs but this actually cos this is on the map, this is a place called Seda(?) which is just not very far away but it still felt like something out of Fiddler on the Roof, these were very rural places with wooden houses with metal rooves and barns and right, they've got lamp posts and TV aerials, it felt so rural, you could just imagine it all

CP: Mm you could imagine different people, sort of superimpose them

DH: Yes, and you know the whole peasantness and this ruralness, we've all become so urban but you know it's only four generations ago that they were living as peasants in Lithuania. But it was just quite remarkable to see all of this, incredible.

CP: It's great pictures

DH: It was yes, that was quite a trip. On the plane on the way home we all joked, 'so Andrew are we going to Baghdad and Aleppo now?' Luckily he hasn't decided to go.

CP: That's fortunate.

DH: Well I'd love to go but it's not

CP: Not a safe place, that's a shame isn't it

DH: So the Perlman or the Tibianskis have done very nicely so

CP: Things changed for them

DH: All Joe's 'issue' that is 9, lots of lawyers, judges, MPs, so we've got two MPs, is it two or three judges, loads of lawyers, unbelievable, really really well in a few generations to have done that

CP: It is remarkable that they are members of the establishment, before they were

DH: Absolutely, they were peasants and its only four generations. Only one geographer though!

CP: Wonder why that is?!

DH: I don't know! I think it's this map!

CP: This fascination with maps! Maybe that's what started your journey to becoming a geographer

DH: Yes I think it was this and my Dad, he's a lawyer, solicitor but he loved two or three things that he really enjoyed doing, he loved walking, he loved geology and he was always interested in how criminal minds work so he was interested in psychology. So Friday nights in our house were debate night, it was quite terrifying really and there was an issue that was chosen, we were quite little, 8, 9, and upwards and we had to form a point of view on it

CP: Brilliant!

DH: No, I remember it, I still quake when I think about it. We did an awful lot of walking and it wasn't very trendy to go walking in those days it wasn't, and my Dad, it's actually our 50th anniversary this year, he bought a cottage in the Yorkshire Dales and I spent every summer there and virtually every weekend as a kid, I was pottering around doing things outside in the countryside, In the proper countryside, learning how to do farming, you know hill farming so I think that really made me into a geographer, that was very special. So and then he went on to advise the Ramblers Association, the Open Spaces Society. So funnily enough I became a geographer and my sister became a psychologist.

CP: Really? How interesting.

DH: Probably, and my Mum, well she's an epidemiologist. But she had an interesting thing because of course she had a younger brother and her parents who were called Olsborough(?) or Olsberg, I don't think I wrote that down, yes Olsborough but it was anglicised from Olsberg, he was six years younger, still going?

CP: This one is

DH: Has it run out?

CP: It shouldn't have it looks like it has but its ok because the other one's running

DH: ok, so once they had a son they said right, money for education is with Bernard not with Bernice

CP; Bernard and Bernice?

DH: Yes Surname Olsborough both with the initials BO! DH: My mother never forgave them! So all the money went for him. So he was the one who went to University, mum didn't go to University, she was probably the brightest of the two. So she worked, worked in labs, she worked for ICI and then she got into that sort of work, worked in labs and then Dad encouraged her in the seventies to go to the Open University, she did a biochemistry degree when we were very tiny which was, you know, early 70s, the early days of the Open University. And she got a Biochemistry degree and then

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went on to work, became an epidemiologist with the Leukaemia Research Fund and worked for them for many years doing epidemiological research.

CP: So did she get a medical degree?

DH: No, biochemistry.

CP: Just a biochemistry degree!

DH: Just a biochemistry degree! Which isn't bad when she, I think was she, she must have been working and bringing us up and I don't know how she did any of it

CP: And studying

DH: And studying. And of course in those days no internet, you had to video things, we had a video recorder in the 1970s I think which was quite exciting. And you know they were on at 3 o'clock in the morning! BBC...

CP: That's right

DH: Do you remember?

CP: Yes I do actually, BBC 2

DH: That's right, BBC2 in the middle of the night was Open University so she used to record them and then and watch the lectures and do all the units, I don't know how she did it. Actually we had great times when she went off to do summer schools and dad used to take us on amazing holidays on his own, he was rubbish at looking after us, we'd eat rubbish for a week, you know benign neglect and he'd sit at work, we were running around the beaches in Anglesey, really great times, we loved it. So that's a terrible thing to say, he looked after us very well.

CP: I'm sure he did!

DH: But you know, he was too busy working

CP: So that's why you had to sort of tag along because she was studying

DH: Absolutely, it was good. So there we go.

CP: So and what does your mum like to do in her spare time? Is she into walking as well?

DH: Now? Yes, they're both into walking, they're getting a bit old now but she plays bridge, she is Mrs Voluntary Work so she's just kind of, I think in the last ten years she's done every Committee to do with anything you can think of, volunteers, she still volunteers, no she used to manage the volunteers in the Jewish Community Centre, so she used to coordinate all of those, she does [Chevra Kaddisha](#) work, so she tears clothes when people, I've forgotten what it's called, I'll think of it. She still volunteers at the hospital, she helps people on the terminal cancer ward fill in benefit forms, she's quite amazing really. She's a what they call a, you know a visitor, somebody who always there when someone needs support, post-bereavement stuff, she does all of that so she plays bridge, looks after my father, loves puzzles, does puzzles, so very busy

CP: Quite a role model

DH: Yeah, the whole charity stuff I think that goes a way back from, I told you about my great grandfather raising money to help rebuild the shul in Kretinga, it's such a deep value in both me and my sister, she doesn't do a lot of Jewish things, she's not religious, she doesn't identify but she's the www.e-sams.org/roots

chairman of the Jewish Housing Association in Leeds. She works tirelessly for people with learning disabilities in that particular sector and she does a lot of voluntary work, but that's her way of contributing and it's something, you know, raising money for things is something we've always done, it's part of us. So I hope I've passed that onto my kids a bit, the importance of [Zedakah](#) and because it seems very important to the family to do that

CP: And it'll continue cos it's not just about telling them, it's about showing them

DH: Absolutely. So yes, interesting role model

CP: So just fill in one gap for me because South Shields and then Yorkshire?

DH: So my grandfather Sam, was born in South Shields, son of Yosef and Rosa, that's Samuel Perlman, Samuel Meyer Perlman and so he's the one who we can't find any record of in the First World War. Although we think he was in the Durham Light Infantry. He always tells this story of when he got news of his brother, funnily enough I thought he was called Jack but he was actually called Jacob, I only found that out when Jacob was about three that Jack Perlman was actually Jacob so I didn't name him, I didn't name my son after anybody. Jacob had been in the Royal Engineers and was in German East Africa which is Tanganyika, Tanzania, and he was riding his motorbike, delivering a message and got shot and he is buried in, what's the capital of Tanzania? Oh my goodness I've even got the picture of it, anyway he's there, and it completely devastated Joseph and Rosa, it was a real shock cos a lot of them, three or four of them joined up, one was in the Air Force, one was in the Army, two of them were in the Army and apparently when Sam heard, this is his story, he told me, I know he told me this, he was so angry that his brother had died, he took it upon himself to go 'over the top' of the trench, he went and killed a German with his bayonet, he told me, he never used to talk about it but he did once talk about this. And he got injured and apparently got a medal. But we have no evidence of this medal, we don't have it, there is no medal card, there's no record of anywhere so it might be another bobbe meiseh

CP: But he's the same one you don't have a record of

DH: Yes, same, no records, no nothing, no medals, nothing, no card, nothing, he wasn't in the Jewish book of honour either. So we don't know why he wasn't in the Jewish book of honour.

CP: I haven't heard about the Jewish book of honour.

DH: Oh yes it's a list of, in fact my friend here in Radlett has done her MA Dissertation on a particular soldier, a whole lot of stuff came out about why the Jewish book of honour was created because it was to show the wider society that the Jews who recently arrived from Germany and Russia and Poland were making a real contribution to British Society. And that they were integrated, it was to do with integration. So that's why it was put together. But my grandfather didn't make it, so we don't know why! Anyway, he came back from the war and then found it very difficult, I think there were lots of falling outs because if you look at the census records even before the war, he was living with his sister, why would he be living with his sister? I don't think he, he really was the real black sheep of the family, never really got to, my dad called him an enigma cos nobody really knows anything about him, the family just say he was a black sheep and that was all. So he couldn't really keep a job, we found evidence of him going bankrupt a couple of times, he ended up when he got married to my grandmother, she was called Sylvia Taylor but she was actually Sarah Rachel, she 1920s-ised her name, Sylvia so she was Sarah Rachel Taylor, they went to live in Redcar because my grandfather was a biscuit merchant

CP: Redcar in Essex
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DH: No, Redcar is in, no it's actually in, it was actually in North Yorkshire but it's by Middlesbrough, yeah, Redcar's near Middlesbrough because Sarah or Sylvia was from Middlesbrough, so another big community in Middlesbrough and then he just couldn't keep a job, I think he was completely traumatised by the First World War, completely traumatised by it, couldn't keep a job and they moved around and ended up in Leeds and then during the war they were actually in Keighley, that haven of Jewish life! And then after Keighley they went back to Leeds and then they ended up in Bishop Auckland which is in County Durham. So they went all over the place so that's the connection. And then my dad came to University, well he did his National Service, I can't remember which regiment it was, it wasn't, it was one of the more intellectual ones cos it was good for lawyers! Cos he wanted to, I can't remember if he went to University and then went into National Service or National Service and then University. But Dad came to University in Leeds to study Law and he lived with his auntie because accommodation was free. So that's how he ended up in Leeds and then met my mother. So stayed

CP: And your mother was

DH: She was born in Leeds so that's the connection with Yorkshire but my dad, they moved around a lot because it was hard for my grandfather to keep a job as I'm sure he was completely traumatised

CP: Well I'm sure that's completely accurate really, it was a horrible experience

DH: Yes, but the really funny connection, the really, really bizarre connection is that eventually when my grandparents had retired and they moved from Bishop Auckland, they moved to Leeds and they bought this 3 storey house and they lived on the bottom floor and they converted the next two into flats and a certain doctor, medical student, came to rent it, from Australia, closely followed by his brother who was a dentist, Rachel's Kaiserblueth's uncles!

CP: No?!

DH: Yep! Really weird, and I spent a lot of time, I lived in Perth for a year and I spent a lot of time with her Uncle Marcel who's the one who was the medical student who lived above so when we were in Australia for the wedding I saw all the brothers and I've known them since I was three years old! How weird is that!

CP: That's pretty amazing!

DH: Pretty random really, but there's a Perlman-Goodman connection, amazing.

CP: How bizarre! It took me a while, well it took me about 20 minutes with Rachel to work that out

DH: It took me a while, well it took me about 20 minutes with Rachel to work that out

CP: Fascinating.

DH: Well there you go! I love Jewish geography as well!

CP: Oh that's brilliant. Well thank you

DH: I think we've got it all

CP: Yes well thank you so much I'm going to switch this off now

DH: I hope it's clear.

[Interview ends.]