

1, 1A, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 6A, 10, 10A, 11, 12, 14

= Bacchewend's her parents

SA^L - 15, (p25) 17A (p34) 18 (p41) 22 (p55)
23, 24, 25, 26?, 27 (p63) 28 (p70)
29 (p85) 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 43 (p113)
44, 45, 46, 49, 51 (p130), 53,
55 (p138), 59 (p.148)

TONI:

You say you don't remember anything but what do you remember about your father and your childhood?

HILDA:

I think that I remember that I had a fairly loving atmosphere in which I grew up. And that I was very, very fond of my father and of my mother too; until I was adolescent, I was fond of my mother. And remember they, incidents like being taken to visit other people and whenever we waited for a train or an underground I was always terrified when it came in the station and he used to pick me up. I can remember little things like that.

TONI:

Can you remember some other anecdotes about him, you told me some long ago. About Christmas presents and making a Christmas stocking or something.

HILDA:

Oh yes. (There used to be all this excitement at Christmas time, tremendous excitement. And we could never wait until it was morning and so at about six o'clock in the morning we'd get hold of our stockings and there would be tremendous crackling and noise as we pulled things out, and my father so I'm told suffered from insomnia and he used to be furious about that. But there was something enjoyable about the whole thing, it wasn't something which was unpleasant.)

H (A

Father

TONI:

You were the youngest of three sisters, what was your relationship with Olga and Vera?

HILDA:

My relationship with my two older sisters was I think it as good, but my relationship was better with Vera than with Olga. Vera was a gentler person and more generous and outgoing. Olga was somebody who was more tight and more enclosed. I think that at a stage

when they were getting adolescent and I was still younger I was very jealous of both of them because they were always whispering together and I never knew what it was about. And I knew it was something that I wanted to know about and they were keeping secret from me, obviously they were talking about boys and things like that and this used to infuriate me, I was really angry about it. I remember an incident like that you see.

TONI:

Did you know anything about your father's background or his involvement in exile politics or anything like that?

HILDA:

Pages
~~I~~ I can't tell you whether I remember a lot about my father's background or whether it's things that I've learnt since. I can't separate the two. [I certainly knew that he was involved in politics and I knew that his, the friends that we went to on various occasions and so on, were from Russia, and they, from

H(2)

H) 2 cent

Feetless

the Soviet Union or whatever it was, and they were political associates of his. But I don't think we went into it very much. I can remember a very peculiar incident that's just come into my mind. We lived, this is the time when we were living in Golders Green, which as you know is a very respectable British, London suburb. And we were walking along with my father and my two sisters, and I was wanting him to explain something and I think I must have asked him what is communism. And he had tried to explain it to me; so suddenly, I was quite small, I walked along the street shouting I'm a communist, I'm a communist, to the enormous embarrassment as you can imagine. They all told me to keep quiet, keep quiet. I don't know where that incident comes from.

~~H) 2 cent~~

TONI:

Was that when you became a communist?

HILDA:

No it wasn't.

TONI:

Do you remember when, well do you remember anything about the revolution. You would have been too little then, 1917.

HILDA:

Yes. I don't remember anything no.

TONI:

Do you remember moving to Bournemouth or anything about that?

HILDA:

Yes. I remember being in Bournemouth. I remember that there was a big house with a big garden and this man who worked in the garden that Olga and Vera must have told you about. Who always used to give us apples from the tree and say eat the skin, eat the skin, it's good for you eat the skin. I don't know whether I remember that or remember being told that. I remember going to some place with my mother where there was a little artificial stream it must have been a garden of some kind, a public garden and I was playing with leaves that I said were my little

boats. And the leaves went sailing down the stream and there was a little hole and one went into the hole and I leaned over and fell into the water. And it was pretty cold and they wrapped me up in a blanket and took me home on a bus or a tram wrapped in a blanket. The humiliation of that was absolutely terrible. And this is extraordinary that you remember incidents like that or you remember remembering them and all the rest of it just goes.

TONI:

What do you know about your mother's background, do you know anything about it? Everybody seems a bit hazy about it.

HILDA:

My mother said she was born on a town which was on the border of Germany and Russia. We got the impression that she wanted to say it was in Russia because she hated the Germans so much afterwards for what they did. I don't know whether that's true or not. I know that the whole family dispersed.

Granater

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That she came to England because one of her brothers were here and her elder sister when to Johannesburg, to South Africa and other relatives went to America. And generally I suppose that's about all that I know about that.

H 3
Gut

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TONI:

What, I mean you know that she wasn't educated and that she.. can you tell me about her life, she lived in the East End of London can you sort of say.

HILDA:

Well I can remember what she told me which I found very, very moving. That she came here and was helping to look after her brother's children. She was a kind of domestic around the house, as a very young person, she must have been almost a child herself. And she used to take one of the children to school and she used to stand outside the gates hoping that, then she had to go back home again, she just had to take the child to school. And she was hoping that a teacher would come

Grandmother

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It
4 out and say little girl why aren't
you also in school.]

TONI:

And so she didn't go to school.

HILDA:

She didn't go to school and education became, of course, a tremendously important thing she always wanted education. She was not an ignorant person she read quite a lot and she understood a lot in her own way. Certainly.

TONI:

Well that's very strange, because I remember when she lived with us in Johannesburg that she told me that she hadn't learnt to read. And I decided when I was about five to teach her to read. So where did she learn to read?

HILDA:

I don't know, I don't know how she learnt to read. She must have had some education, you know a little bit of education. And she certainly, she could certainly read.

TONI:

And after school what happened to her. When she was working.

HILDA:

HS
G. model ↗ She worked in one of these sweatshops, garment factories or whatever they were in the East End. Where the Jews worked. I don't know how she met my father, I don't know anything about that. I suppose it's something to do with the whole community that they were in. *]*

TONI:

What about your father's background, what do you remember about, what do you know about how he came to be in England and why, and so on.

HILDA:

G. father
HC ~~§~~ Well what I know is probably not true. What I always believed was that he was a communist, a revolutionary, a bolshevik. And that he was a young man in the 1905 abortive revolution and he had to leave Russia because of that. That was the reason I believed that he

had come to England, come out as an exile. However, that probably wasn't so, as you know. (Probably he left because as a young Jew he would have been drafted into the Tsarist army and he left, as many did to avoid that draft. After 1917 I think that he wanted to go back, by that time our family was an established English living family living in London.) I was two after 1917, I was born in 1915, but Vera and Olga were probably going to school already and we only spoke English, we only knew England, we only knew London really. And I suppose there are all kinds of difficulties. (And he was given an appointment with the Soviet Embassy as I understood it he was appointed a Consel at that time, I don't know whether this is true or not. And he remained in Britain for many years then he was sent back to the Soviet Union. He was a member of the Bolshevik party. I think that when he got there it was a cultural shock, and a social shock and a political shock as well to him And he then didn't want us to come because he knew the

746
Gravesfield

Gravesfield
England

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(6)

conditions were too harsh to bring his family into a situation like that that existed at that time. He was very well aware of it. Later on, this is another sort of nodal point that I remember among these peculiar things, later on he wrote and said, I was very anxious to be an artist, I wanted to draw learn how to be an artist, and he wrote and said that if I came over I could get an art training. And for a long time I felt that my mother had deprived me of the right to be trained as an artist by not letting me go to the USSR at that time. I look at it differently now of course.

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TONI:

Why?

HILDA:

I think it would have been a very harsh and hard life to adapt too. And it's very hard when you come from a totally different culture and you've never known anything about that particular culture and don't know the language, very, very hard to adapt.

N^o cut
H(7)

TONI:

Can I just go back over a couple of things you told a story about Christmas but both your parents were Jewish. So what was this Christmas business?

HILDA:

My father was an atheist. My mother, I used to ask her about religion when I got older. And she said, well she thought there probably, there was something in God but she didn't believe in Jesus, she thought he was a very good man but she didn't think he was a God. This was the Jewish side, you see, of rejecting the New Testament and all that. And they, my father wanted us to be brought up and I think my mother also, to some extent, to make up our own minds about these things. And when I was younger I went to Sunday School because my friends went to Sunday School. As a result of that I went through a phase when I was about, I suppose about seven years old, when I thought I believed in God and then I thought now I don't and then I thought that's Satan

religion

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tempting me. Get thee behind me Satan I used to say. I read a book called How Paul's Penny became a Pound, which was all about a virtuous little boy who believed in God and this sort of thing influenced me. And finally one day I said out loud I don't believe in God, I don't believe in God and I was waiting for something terrible to happen and it never happened. And I don't think that I believed in God after that. [But then, you see the point about the family was that because he was an atheist, he sort of adjusted to the social customs in the country in which he lived. And because all our friends celebrated Christmas and so on, it wasn't to us a religious ceremony. And I think it had lost it's religious meaning to the majority of people.]

Walter
HG

NO

TONI:

Did the family keep Jewish .. laws or anything like that?

HILDA:

No, none at all. My family, in our family we didn't keep to any Jewish dietary laws or customs whatsoever. We didn't keep the Jewish, I didn't know the Jewish holidays the dates of them. And I didn't know what they were about until I was absolutely adult. We had bacon for breakfast and we ate just any foods, we didn't keep to any of the Jewish, I never thought of myself as being Jewish. And as a result later on I went through a phase when I really became quite anti-semitic, in wanting to reject any Jewishness in myself. And I still feel today that being Jewish is not so much a matter of who your parents are but of the way in which you're brought up and the social customs to which you become used. And for that reason in a sense, if it wasn't for anti-semitism I would say no I'm not Jewish. Because to me being Jewish is following a religion, and certain social customs and habits and things.

religion

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H 10
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TONI:

Yes, well that's very controversial I don't think we can get into that. Can you, just going back a little bit, can you tell me where you think the story about your father leaving in the 1905 uprising came from. Because Vera also believes this.

HILDA:

I really don't know where the story of my father leaving from the 1905 uprising originates. I don't know where any of that sort of thing came from. I don't know at all. I just know that I had that belief and always thought so until quite recently.

TONI:

It's quite well known about him that he was very fond of music and opera and amateur dramatics. Do you know anything about that, do you remember anything about that?

HILDA:

I remember that my father was very fond of music and I remember he liked singing. And he had

C. Gates
H (11)

ambitions for his three daughters to form a trio, and Vera would play the piano, Olga would play the violin and I would play the cello. I never got round to learning the cello. I wish that I had, I wished that I had gone in for music.]

H(11)
Gert

TONI:

Did your life change at all when he became Consel or Vice Consel or whatever he was at the time?

HILDA:

Probably, without realising it, probably our social status went up in the sense that we moved to this house in Golders Green which was quite a big house. And I suppose that there, I do remember that when we went to friends of his, that is Russian friends of his that they also had big houses. So either they were doing very well out of living in exile, or else I don't know how that all came about I really don't know.]

Consel

H(12)

NO

TONI:

But you don't remember anything else about that period?

HILDA:

No. No.

TONI:

What about school? Where did you go to school?

HILDA:

When we moved eh, [we lived in Hampstead Garden suburb first and I went to primary school there, I had forgotten about that part living in Hampstead Garden suburb. Then when we moved to Golders Green I went to a secondary school which was at the bottom of the road, which was quite near to us.] It was a different school to the ones my sisters went to they went to school in Hendon. And I went to the Golders Green school and I don't remember whether that was the primary or secondary school now. No, that was the primary school I went to, that's right. And then I went to a secondary school which was in Colindale. Kingsbury County Council school that was it, yes.

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TONI:

How old were you when your father was recalled?

HILDA:

I don't know. I must have been at secondary school.

TONI:

Do you remember anything about his going away or anything about that period?

HILDA:

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I remember that we didn't have any money. And it was extremely difficult and I got very morose and very upset about it. I didn't know why. I didn't know what was happening I really didn't know anything about that at all. I think we missed, I think I missed him very much indeed. And I try to recall but I don't recall whether I had any understanding of why he was away. I just felt in that sense we were a deprived family.

TONI:

And you never saw him again?

HILDA:

He came back once, I don't know whether it was once or twice. And then he went away and then by that time I was grown up. And we were in, *dead* I was already in South Africa when I heard about his death.]

TONI:

Ok. We'll come to South Africa in a minute. Just tell us briefly because this is not the most interesting part of your life and there is quite a lot more of it to come. What happened after you left school before you went to South Africa?

HILDA:

After I left school I can't remember whether I actually got Matric, but I went to Matric standard and I left without any qualifications of any kind. *School* [I must say that I don't think I learnt anything at all at school except how to read and write. Everything that I know about the world, everything about geography, history, people, customs anything I've learnt since I left school

through reading and through,
through living of course. I really
had no idea of what I wanted to do
or what I wanted to be. I used to
get the newspaper and look at the
wanted ads, there were lots of ads.
And I've had various jobs, the
first job I had was an assistant in
a sweet shop, a sweet shop and a
tobacconists. And I stuck that out
for a few months, then I applied
for a job, I remember this. I
applied for a job with Sainsbury's
they were advertising for girls
behind the counter and I went for
an interview and I had a cold sore
a herpes on my lip. And the man
who interviewed me said to me do
you often get sores on your face,
and I remember blushing and just
curdling inside and saying no but I
didn't get the job. And I feel
that if I hadn't had a cold sore on
my lip I might be a manageress of
one of Sainsbury's departments by
now or one of their shops. That's
the kind of thing that happens to
you. Anyway I worked also on a
telephone switchboard, I worked for
a paper pattern company taking down
orders from all the big stores for

their paper patterns every morning.
And I ~~walked~~^{worked} on a telephone
switchboard at a firm called Zenith
Carburettors, it had one of these
old fashioned switchboards that you
plug in and so on. Those were the
kind of jobs that I had.

TONI:

And what about doing art?

HILDA:

I got a scholarship when I left
school to go to Hornsy School of
Art and Crafts, but because we
didn't have any money. The
scholarship paid your fees but it
didn't support you. And it didn't
buy your materials and as a result
they transferred the scholarship to
an evening one and I used to go to
evening classes while I was
working.

TONI:

And so just coming up to the bit
where you went to South Africa, how
come you went, when was it and why,
as it were?

HILDA:

I think it was 1933.

TONI:

Can you say the whole sentence?

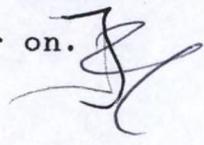
HILDA:

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I went to South Africa with my mother and she went because she had a sister there. Living in Johannesburg who wanted her to come and live with her. And because my father had not returned after all these years I think my mother felt that if she left Britain maybe she could persuade him to come there. Something of that kind. And I was the youngest and I therefore went with her. I think I was about 17. And this is where I got my cultural shock because my mother's sister was a conventional Jewish woman who kept all the customs and the holidays and it was totally alien to me. This was the time when I really just hated everything Jewish because I felt it had no part of me whatsoever. It didn't belong to me, it didn't belong to my life. And I didn't like the way she lived and I, I was terribly snobbish.

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cut

She ran a shop and she was often dirty and didn't bath very much and so on. And I just despised her for it, I look at it differently now I see her as a very hard working, very uneducated woman who had to make her way in life in very difficult circumstances. But that's something that you only see later on.



TONI:

And what about South Africa, I mean.

HILDA:

I got a job with John Orrs, I think I first, I can't remember what my first job was there. But I met a girl who was a ticket writer. Now I don't know whether you want to go into this, it needs bit of explanation. In those days they didn't have machines which, and all these kind of lettering stuff to make display tickets in the windows. And they all used to be written by hand, I learnt how to do that. This friend of mine said look it's terribly easy, you apply for a job you'll get a job. I said

I've never done it in my life, she said it's nothing, you'll learn. So I applied for the job and got it and of course I did learn doing it, and I became a ticket writer for John Orrs in Johannesburg. Later on I got a job in the advertising department of Ackermans but that was at a later stage, I can't remember now.

TONI:

But what did you feel about South Africa? I mean apart from the cultural shock of your aunt, what about the society, did it make any impression on you?

HILDA:

I, yes it did. I, [the cultural shock was our living circumstances and this Jewish set up and so on. But the other shock was the racialism. I reacted terribly violently to it, there were lots more incidents in the streets there then, than there were in later days. Really horrible things Africans pushed off bicycles and pushed aside in the street and so on and I used to get passionately

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angry, terribly upset. I used to cry over these things, but I wasn't involved in any way politically, or in any organisation. I didn't know anything about that at all, it was just as a spectator outside it all. I enjoyed certain aspects because I joined a hiking club and we used to go on long hikes on Saturdays and Sundays. And this was the kind of beautiful outdoor time that you get in South Africa when you go to lovely places and you go and swim and you're young people together and so on. [And now I remember that the hiking club was led by an older man who was known to us all as Doc. And one day we went to a very beautiful place and Doc sat us down and while we were having lunch or whatever it was he told us about Hitler and Germany and how Hitler was a wonderful man and how good he was to the children, and how all the children loved him. And as he was telling I knew that this was all wrong. And I didn't say anything but I didn't want to have anything more to do with Doc, I can't remember I probably still went to the hiking club. There

were young Germans who joined in with that hiking club too and they were Nazis.

TONI:

Was it modelled on the sort of Hitler youth thing?

HILDA:

It probably was except that there wasn't, most of us were people without any uniforms or without any knowledge of this sort of thing. There were a couple who probably just enjoyed the hiking and had attached themselves to this club. The club itself wasn't a German outfit.

TONI:

And then you went back to England. Can you tell us a bit about that? And when it was.

HILDA:

It was 1935.

TONI:

So you were there for two years.

HILDA:

I was there for two years and I very much wanted to go back to England. I went back, gosh, I went back and I got plunged into political work. [I can't bridge that gap between coming back from South Africa without any real political understanding or anything like that. I know that, I felt at that stage that everything about the world, including history and so on was incomprehensible.] Nothing fitted together, everything that I had learnt was the history of Kings and Queens and personalities and wars and battles, and things of that kind. And I began reading left wing literature. And one day I read an article which must have been on historical materialism which explained the materialist basis of history. And this seemed to make sense to me, it seemed to make a pattern. The jigsaw pieces fell into place and I felt as though I understood more about the world. That was when I began reading Marxist, not very advanced Marxist literature, but articles and magazines and things of that

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nature. [And I started having arguments with my sisters, and my sister Vera was a member of the Labour League of Youth. And one day she was telling me what the Labour League of Youth, what it's policy was, and I said I didn't agree with it. And Olga, who didn't used to participate in these political discussions said to me well if you think like that why don't you join the Young Communist League. And I had never heard of the Young Communist League. So I said right I'm going to join the Young Communist League, so I wrote to them and I joined. And that's where it all started, that was the biggest mistake I ever made in my life.

TONI:

Now you can't just say that out of context. I have to go back a bit. You went back to England leaving your mother in South Africa.

HILDA:

Yes.

TONI:

And what were you doing in England then? Were you living with your sisters then, where were you?

HILDA:

I was living with Vera. I can't remember where Olga was. I remember living with Vera in a flat in Edgware. That's was where the Communist Party used to have meetings on the street corners, on a soapbox. [Thirty five, thirty six, I became very much involved in the Spanish Civil War, with what was happening there. Had a terribly simplistic view of it all, I knew nothing about anarchism, and nothing about the real political situation in Spain I just saw the goodies and the baddies. And the baddies were Franco and the goodies of course were the republicans. Fundamentally, fundamentally I still believe this to be true. And we used to have meetings at our house and later on, Vera also joined the Communist Party,] and the Communist Party at that time, I don't know if this is of any interest to you. Used to allow

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dual membership. You could be a member of the Labour Party and a member of the Communist Party but you were a secret member of the Communist Party. We had a Communist Party faction that was inside the Labour Party.

TONI:

A bit like Militant then?

HILDA:

Yes, that's right it is. So there's a continuity there that I never realised, it went on ... and I know that we had these meetings and I know that, oh do you want to hear how I became a public speaker. Every Saturday or Sunday night, I think it was Saturday nights that right. They used to put up a soapbox somewhere in Colindale, Edgware where there were a lot of people, and have a Communist Party meeting and they said to me that we want you to speak. We want speakers, and I said I can't speak, and they said look you start off by being the Chairman, they called them Chairman in those days, and all you have to do is you have to

get up on the soapbox and say and this is a meeting of the Edgware branch of the Communist Party and I'm going to introduce the first speaker, ?? And I went home and the whole week I practiced in front of the mirror, this is the meeting of the Communist Party, finally when the evening came I got up on the box quivering all over and I said like this (very fast) this is a meeting of the Communist Party I'm going to introduce the speaker ... and I got down that's the first speech I made in public. But I suppose gradually I learnt to speak, I don't know. I became immodestly a very good speaker, I know that I was a good public speaker eventually. I don't remember whether it developed there from those street corner meetings in London or whether it developed in South Africa later on.

TONI:

You were involved in the demonstrations against the black shirts, do you remember anything about that?

HILDA:

Yes, I remember that because [I think this was one of the things that drove me into politics really.

Moseley

There was this huge demonstration when Moseley was marching the black shirts through the East End. And everybody was being rallied to come along and to stop them, it was very provocative, they were going through the Jewish areas deliberately. And everybody was rallied to stop them and I was among a crowd of young people who went, I don't remember whether I was in the Young Communist League or what it was. We went together to this meeting and we, eventually the police did a very cunning thing, they took a whole lot, a huge crowd of people and gradually pulled them into a square called Thurlow Square. Which was a no exit place, it was a square in which there was just an entrance at the top and then houses on all the sides. And in Thurlow Square they chased us with their horses, armed police and their battens. I remember clambering up the steps of one of these great big houses, you

know, and standing right against the door while the police horses were hitting people, while these armed policemen were hitting people on the pavements and everywhere, all over the place. And finally coming back on the underground, absolutely traumatised by this whole experience. And going into work the next day and wanting everybody to know what the British police had done because I couldn't believe that English policemen could behave, British police could behave in this way. Policemen had always been our friends, always. And telling people about it and they said well if you go on demonstrations on like that what do you expect. And I just couldn't take people's reaction and I think this was, this incident in Thurlo Square was one of the things more than anything else that drove me into politics, into political action.

TONI:

I don't really know much about that period of your life. So before we go back to the return to South

Africa is there anything else about that period that is relevant?

HILDA:

I suppose that that was a period in which we were really kind of boy hunting, you know. We were very keen on boys, we very much wanted to meet people that we wanted to love. I very much wanted love, I wanted to be loved. I suppose psychologically you can trace this back to the father being absent. I've wanted it always and I still want it, I still want to be loved. And want to love as well very much indeed. And I very much wanted to find somebody that I could love a great deal, and I didn't anybody except, you see I didn't know then that girls matured earlier than boys and they were always pimply youths, immature youths. Who never really had understanding or, you know what, I used to read those magazines, Home and Beauty and that kind of thing, and they had articles about how to get a boy. And they told you how to talk to a boy and how you had to be interested in what he did and you

love
HILDA

had to ask him questions about his work. And you had to project yourself always as this little clinging thing that was looking to this big chap, this big strong, always building up his ego. This was the tone of all those articles and things. And I read them and maybe I even tried them out but I didn't like the results, I didn't like what came as a result.

Such | Through the Communist Party I met an older man, this was Jack *Gathercole* Gavacole, I don't know if Vera spoke about him at all. Well I suppose this was really a kind of, this was why I went back to South Africa, he was more mature and he was intelligent and he was, he had some kind of scientific engineering job. He knew a lot about things and so on and I went out with him a few times before he told me that he was married, I didn't know that he was married. But he told me that he had left his wife, or was leaving his wife and so on. So we began having an affair. And, we wanted, I wanted to travel, I think I must tell you this, this is the most important thing. When I was

young I said there are only two ways in which to lead your life, one is to devote yourself to a cause and the other is to travel and to keep on travelling. I made this terrible mistake of devoting myself to a cause when really all I wanted to do was to travel.

TONI:

Mummy that's not true, because you've done both.

HILDA:

I wanted to travel more. Well, so Jack and I talked about travelling and he had been out to India and he said he thought that he could get work in India and we decided we'd start travelling and we'd go to India. I pretended to my mother, I told her I was married because she would never, never have, it would have upset her too much if she'd known that I was living with somebody. In those days it was quite a sort of advanced thing to do, these days it looks like nothing you see. And we tried to make arrangements to go to India and for some reason they didn't

come off, the job didn't come off.
And I said look, well I've been to
South Africa and I know, I'm sure
you can get a job in South Africa
let's go to South Africa. So we
went to Johannesburg together, me
pretending I was married to Jack,
although travelling on different
pasports and so no, my mother
didn't know about that. And in
Johannesburg we joined the South
African Communist Party. And this
was a time when I think, when I was
I got jobs doing advertising as,
doing layouts, I was a copywriter,
became a copy writer and did
advertising layouts for Ackermans
at that time. Yes, I remember that
was the time and Jack had a job.
And we stayed there from 35, that
must have been, we went back in 37,
yes. In 1937, in 1939 before, at
the beginning of 1939, for reason I
very, very much wanted to go back
on a visit to England. I don't
know what it was, there was a kind
of homesickness, I wrote a lot of
poetry. I wrote poetry about the
wind and the trees and the rain and
spring and so on. Some of it was
published in various anthologies

Jack

and things and so on. So it was agreed that I would go back for a visit and it was just before the war. And I arrived back in England and I stayed for a couple of months and then friends began writing me very peculiar letters. What had happened was Jack had taken up with a friend of mine, my friends weren't telling me directly but were sort of suggesting that it's about time I came back. I thought I'd like to get a job in England and then Jack would come back and maybe we'd go somewhere else but I couldn't get a job. It was just before the war was breaking out and eventually I wrote and said I'm returning, and I got a telegram back from Jack saying don't come, writing love Jack. And I didn't do anything, I hid it, I had already booked my passage by that time and I reckoned that I had made a, I had decided to go back and I had to go back and find out what was happening. And I sailed on the cargo boat that left from, I think it was Zebrugge, Zebrugge and we travelled all the way round to Lorenzo Marx there was only one

other passenger on that boat. It was a wonderful journey, it was, it had a cargo of timber on it and the officers and the men on the boat broached the timber and they made a Deck, Quote Deck for us and I used to play. And I had all these men it was absolutely terrific. There was one that I got on very well with who kept saying that I was such a nice girl, if I only didn't read those peculiar books. I went on reading those peculiar books. We arrived in Lorenzo Marx and from there I took a train to Johannesburg and instead of Jack meeting me at the station a friend of mine Ilsa Praga met me. And Ilsa said Jack's living with ^{Gessy} Casey, you can come....

TONI:
^{Gessy}
Casey?

HILDA:
^{Gessy}
~~Casey~~. You can come back to my flat. The Ilsa, I hadn't been very friendly with her, this was just a way in which somebody who was really a decent thoughtful person reacts. She just took it upon

herself knowing that I would come to Johannesburg without anybody meeting me, and without knowing what was happening. The blow to me was that the person that Jack had taken up with I considered much less attractive than myself in every possible way. It was a kind of, I don't know whether it was that I was so desperately, I don't think I was by that time really very much in love with him. It was a blow to my esteem, my self pride. I had in fact had quite a little bit of an affair with one of these officers that I'd met on the ship. And that's to elaborate, I can't go into all that.

HILDA:

You see I didn't believe in marriage I thought it was absolutely absurd the whole thing. And that, I thought if you loved people you just lived with them that's all.

Talk about light...

TONI:

Can we just go back to the time of your father's death and can you tell me what you remember about it, and the circumstances surrounding it, and where your mother was and what she was doing, where the others were and so on.

HILDA:

9/12/22

Vera and Olga were in London, and I was in South Africa with my mother and her sister. I don't remember now whether we lived with her sister all the time or whether we went to live somewhere else, I can't remember that. And I came home one day and she was terribly upset, and she wouldn't tell me what was wrong and I had to sort of press her for it, and then she began crying and said that your father's dead. And I began to cry too and said oh I wanted to see him, I wanted to see him. That's all I remember about it that I just said I wanted to see him. And I can remember a year later on the anniversary of that date thinking again I just wanted to see him.

H18

TONI:

Can you remember what year it was?
And how did you hear about it?

HILDA:

I think Olga must have written to my mother. Olga must have been the one who was informed about it. And she wrote to my mother and the year, I suppose it's 34. 1934 yeah. That must have been the time because it was after we'd been in South Africa for a while, on this first when I went with my mother.

TONI:

Now Olga had already been to see him do you remember anything about that? I mean how come it was her that went and not anybody else?

HILDA:

Olga had money. She was the only one, Olga was the only one in our family who had any money and that was why, she had quite a good job. And she was also very careful with her money, Vera was very profligate she used to scatter her money around, it disappeared. (And I didn't own much and Olga went,

Olga

bought herself a ticket and went to the USSR to visit my father.

That's all I know about that. On the way back she met the man whom she later joined, Henry.]

TONI:

And you don't, she didn't tell you about the visit to your father.

HILDA:

I don't remember. I don't remember her telling me, I don't remember her telling my anything about that.

TONI:

Now in the time of you coming and going from South Africa, going backwards and forwards your mother stayed there. What was she doing?

HILDA:

She kept house for her sister, my mother kept house for her sister in South Africa. And I think she helped out a little bit in the shop, they had a vegetable and fruit shop in Jobear Street. I don't remember what else she did during that period.

TONI:

Ok. Now you came back to South Africa in 1939 and the war must have broken out shortly after you returned.

HILDA:

Almost immediately, the ship that I came back on and in which I almost decided to return on was captured by the Nazis and all the people on it spent the whole of the war in some South American place where they took them. So that would have been, would have happened to me if I'd gone back. Because I seriously thought about taking the ship back again and going back to England.

TONI:

And what I haven't covered is that Olga was again in the Soviet Union by this time, she must have. She was there through the war so she must have gone there by the time you came back to England for the second time.

HILDA:

She wasn't there when I was there for the second time so therefore she was in the, Olga wasn't in England when I came back the second time so she must have been in the Soviet Union at that time. I stayed in Vera's flat with Vera and Olga was nowhere around.

TONI:

And then you were in South Africa, Vera was in England and Olga was in the Soviet Union. Wasn't that quite worrying that you were sort of on the outside of the war as it were with everybody else involved.

HILDA:

Yes it was. And I wanted to be involved. [However I was then a loyal member of the Communist Party and with some doubts and certain hesitations. I followed the then Communist Party line that this war was a phony war, that it wasn't really a war against Nazism. Until the Soviet Union came into the war in 1941 and I then Rusty joined up at that time.

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