

EAT, PRAY, NACHES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Waverley Council, NSW

Oral History Transcript

Interviewee: Andrew Havas

Interviewer: Ashley Roan

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Interviewer: Can you tell me your name and when and where you were born?

Andrew Havas: My name is Andrew Havas. I was born in Budapest, in 12th of March, 1949. Must have been a good year.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what was happening in your country and the circumstances behind why you left?

Andrew Havas: Both my parents were Holocaust survivors, and they had both lost each other's spouse. My father lost his wife and my mother lost her husband, she was 24 when he was 26. It was the second marriage for both of them, so when I arrived in 1949, it was obviously a great joy for them. They'd always wanted children, and particularly for my father, because he was in a camp called Mauthausen and in that camp they did a lot of experimentation and he only had half a breast and they did all sorts of experimentation on him. So when I came along, it was an enormous joy for the family. I'm an only son.

My parents were extremely wealthy, I have deeds for 48 properties still in Budapest and all over Hungary, and having come back from the war, and they were actually given everything back, which was quite interesting. I've never really researched it, exactly how come. But then the communists came in 1950 and in 1952 we were deported, meaning that we were deported to a tiny little village called Dunaharaszti, which was closer to the Russian border. I was two. It meant that we weren't allowed to go out of that area at all. I'm told this story that at 2 1/2 I developed some sickness and my father took me to Budapest, to the hospital, and it was so strict, I'm now talking about the police, that he was put in jail for six months for breaking the bond that he was not supposed to go outside of the area where they lived.

My mother used to have servants and she wasn't used to housekeeping and all that. However, in this little place, Dunaharaszti, we had a well and there was no running water, and she had to go and pull her own water, and we lived with a peasant family and three other families in one room. In 1956, the revolution broke out, there really was no need to stay and they wanted to just get away as far as possible. There was no way that they were going to get their property back because of communism, and the escape itself was quite remarkable. I was seven at the time.

What happened was my father had organised and bribed an ambulance to pick my mother and me up because he had already gone forward and he was actually involved in the revolution. He'd never go back to Hungary because he couldn't until the communists were no longer there because he was quite involved in the revolution. The ambulance came, picked my mother and myself up, and the idea was that we were going to go from the Russian border further towards Austria.

When the ambulance came to pick us up, there was a driver, there was a doctor, and there was my mother and I was sitting on my mother's lap. I can't remember how long the journey was, but as we approached a chain bridge, I still don't know who, but somebody opened fire on us. They killed the driver, they killed the doctor, the car went straight into the bridge, and my mother and I were totally unscathed. We ran across the bridge as we were being fired upon, and often I get recurring memories of that because I had blood all over me from the doctor and that's something that I found quite traumatic as a seven-year-old. Anyhow, we escaped, the snow in October was so

tall that I had to go in the wake of my parents and it took us two days to escape because there were flares coming up all the time and for many hours we had to lie in the snow.

We got into Austria, we went to a camp in Salzburg and we stayed there for a few months until we got papers to come to Australia. We had a pick of America, Australia, or Canada, and my mother had her brother already here in Australia, so her first choice was always Australia, and we were very lucky and very pleased to have got that. We left on a ship called the Fair Sea from Bremerhaven and the trip was quite horrendous because we got caught up in the Suez Canal when the Middle East Crisis broke out in 1956. The trip took much longer than it should have, but we ended up getting out of the Suez Canal and we went around the Cape of Good Hope, and we arrived in Perth.

This is going to be really something some people will not like. We arrived in Perth and the Jewish community came out in wonderful ... they gave us food and they looked after us and everything else, and my father thought to himself, "This might be a good place to stay". So he made these comments to the people there. Well, the lady there gave him 50 pounds to make sure that he moved on, because they didn't want little European Hungarians to muck up their Anglo-Australian way of life. Anyway, cut a long story short, we arrived on this ship called Fair Sea in May 1957, so it was quite a long journey. We arrived in Melbourne, and we were...

By the way I have to say, the ship was quite awful. I had a great time being a young person, but there were 300 men on one side and 300 women on the other side, and the children were with the women; it was a troop ship. We arrived in Melbourne and the first thing that my father heard from the officials was that we all had to go to Bonegilla Camp. He didn't speak any English but he knew the word camp, so he grabbed my mother and me and we took the first train that we could possibly get onto. So we arrived in Sydney. Even the trip was quite funny because I still remember, I was then eight by that stage, and I remember that in Albury we had to get off the train in the middle of the night, and we got scones and biscuits and a cup of tea. We had to change trains because the tracks were different.

Having arrived, we were very welcome by the Sydney Jewish community and particularly, I must say, by Syd Einfeld who I think was just the most remarkable man. The Jewish Welfare Society gave us 50 pounds and they got us accommodation. We lived in 169 Victoria Street, King's Cross. But that was quite interesting. It was an old terrace house and we lived on the top floor next to a pub, so it was a very good education for me in Darlinghurst Kings Cross. They found work for my mother and my father. My mother went out cleaning, my father worked in the wool factory.

Andrew Havas: So what then transpired was that I was enrolled in Darlinghurst Public School. I have to tell you, that Darlinghurst Public School was probably one of the roughest schools you could go to at that time, in 1957. There was never a day in my life I wasn't called a wog, there was never a day in my life that I didn't have, or a week I should say possibly that I didn't have a fight, my buttons were off my shirt. But somehow it made me stronger. A lot of people these days, particularly, you would sue, you'd do something different. As far as I was concerned, it really made me stronger and I think that's one of the reasons that I got involved with a program which I'll talk about later on called Courage to Care.

The other interesting thing was that I was the only non-English-speaking person there until another boy came who was Russian. Because of the Hungarian revolution, we used to hate each other's guts. We used to fight all the time, and all the school kids would get around, and they'd all say, "Come on, wogs, kill each other. Come on, kill each other!" Anyway after a while we learned not to do that.

One other very interesting aspect was that I was always dressed absolutely immaculately. I had long socks, I had a jumper and I had a tie, and I had everything else. All the other boys used to go in thongs, they used to have a t-shirt and no school uniform. So after about a week, I cottoned on to this, so I'd walk around the corner, make sure my mother wasn't watching, and I would quickly take off the paraphernalia that I would be known for and I would just put on my t-shirt and I'd put on my thongs, and I'd go to school like that. I think we're at that time we're desperate to fit in. It was a good time.

I was the inaugural president of the Syd Einfeld unit of B'nai B'rith which I named in honour of Syd Einfeld, because of the work that he had done. But I also had other personal dealings with him which were just fantastic. We would have lived in King's Cross in Darlinghurst at 169 Victoria Street next to this pub, which as I said was quite an education. We stayed there for about a year and a half, and my father had two jobs, as I said, and my mother went out cleaning, and we were able to save enough money to get a small mortgage and we were able to buy a tiny little semi-cottage at number 5 Arden Street in Waverley, and I had a fantastic time there.

I had a very good friend across the road, his name was Colin Beecroft, and Colin's father was a Qantas engineer. He and I used to make a fortune. He taught me how to check valves. In the olden days we used to have radio valves, and his father had a test bed. We used to take our billy carts wherever there was a council clean-up and we'd take the old radios. We'd make sure that the valves would work, throw away the ones that didn't work, and we would then sell them for one and six pence. A shilling and six pence -that was a fortune for us. We made a heap of money and from that money we both bought bikes. I had a lovely childhood growing up. I used to go down to Clovelly Beach all the time, used to ride our bikes all around the area Bronte Beach and Coogee Beach, and I've got very fond memories of that particular time.

It was quite tough for my parents, however. My mother stopped the job that she had and she became a businesswoman, and that's what she was. She was the first person in Australia to import Lindt chocolates and she was the first person to import all sorts of Austrian cakes and biscuits and things like that. She started a business and the business grew so big that my father left his job and we all got behind the business.

However, in the first few years, I do remember that our house, which was originally where we kept all the goods, - the hallway was absolutely chock-a-block full of biscuits and things. After school I'd come home and I'd have my milk and whatever, and then I'd have the orders and we would go and place all the orders and put all the goodies in the box. This went on for quite a while.

Something very interesting which I think was interesting - my mother never drove, neither did my father. When I turned 18 I got a car immediately, and we had a delivery person who would deliver it and then they got a warehouse and it grew bigger and bigger and bigger. That was just a lovely experience.

The other thing I forgot to mention was my grandmother came out to Australia. She came out six years after us. She joined the family and she was able to bring out a lot of papers, a lot of photographs, a lot of things, because we escaped with absolutely nothing. I mean absolutely nothing, not even a bag - just the clothes that we had on our backs. The Austrian people in Salzburg were just marvellous. I've got the best memories of the Austrian people. They would give us gifts at Christmastime - I've never forgotten this - I got this beautiful ... it was like a doll's house but it was actually a store. It had 50, 60 little shelves and little drawers, and in each drawer there was either pepper or salt or all these condiments and anyway it was just a wonderful time.

Female: You moved to Arden Street?

Andrew Havas: Okay, whilst living in Arden Street, two doors down, very convenient, was Clovelly Public School. My first taste of meeting Aussie kids properly and going to a really good school was in Clovelly Public School. I've got fond memories of hearing the bell going and I'd just jump over the fence and go to school. From fourth class onwards, to sixth class, I went to Clovelly Public School.

My parents thought that I really needed some Jewish education, so they enrolled me in the second only ever high school of Moriah College. People will dispute this, but in my view, Moriah at that time was really ... I didn't have very good experiences in Moriah College, mainly because there were very few teachers. We only had one teacher for English and History, and we had a different teacher for Maths and Science. But basically there were only eight students or nine students from memory in the class at that particular time.

I went there till first, second and third year, I did my Intermediate Certificate. I was still under the old Leaving Certificate scheme. The next year after that in 1966, I think, the Leaving Certificate stopped. I was there for the first three years of my high schooling and from then on I went to Vaucluse Boys' High School. Vaucluse Boys' High School was quite far from where we lived in Arden Street. I used to take my bike and I still remember going through Bondi Junction with all the tram lines, because we still had all the trams in those days. My mother and my parents were very worried about me going through on my bike because [Moriah] was in Vivian Street, Bellevue Hill...

Interviewer: Okay

Andrew Havas: I joined the cadets in school. Already at quite an early stage, I decided that I really wanted to give back something to this country. I thought Australia was just absolutely fantastic and it's given beautiful opportunities to myself, to my parents. Even though my parents were Holocaust survivors, they never made a big deal of it. They weren't people who hoarded food; they talked openly about it. If I asked questions, they would tell me openly. I always felt that I had the most normal upbringing. I had everything that anybody wanted. We weren't well-off at all, particularly at the beginning, but anything that I wanted, I was able to get or actually I would save up for it. I was never wanting for anything at all.

Interviewer: Your first impressions of the Waverley area?

Andrew Havas: My first impressions of the Waverley area was just fantastic. I loved the beaches - every time I go overseas, I always miss the beaches. People were friendly, we had wonderful neighbours and really it was just a wonderful part of the world. That's all I could really say on that.

Interviewer: Why was the local area a popular place for settlement for Jewish people, do you think?

Andrew Havas: It's really interesting because we always wanted to get away from the ghetto. We actually lived on the fringe of the so-called Jewish ghetto. I guess culturally ... well this is where the synagogues were, this is where the tradition was. My mother actually was quite religious and for a long time and even later on in her life, she kept kosher. The kosher butchers were here.

Culturally I joined an organisation called Habonim which is a Jewish Zionist organisation which was probably one of the best things I could have ever done. I was about 15, 16. All my life that stood me in good stead, I learned just about all my management skills that I then later on in life used in Telstra and in IBM.

I used all of those skills basically that I had learned then. As a youth leader I had to take a youth group, I had to go to Wollongong and take a group there, I had to prepare lesson plans, I had to organise functions for them and games, and really it was a wonderful time in Habonim. I really have very fond memories of that time.

Interviewer: How do you think that the Jewish community has shaped the area?

Andrew Havas: The Jewish community in the whole area started off with having different cake shops, for example the Wellington Cake Shop. We had a club here which was the Hakoah Club, a place where my parents would meet friends. I think we introduced some tremendous things into this whole area. I think the culture, the coffee houses ... the Jews really originated these and it was like a little Europe going down to Bondi Beach, going to the Gelato Bar. My parents used to love to take us down there. It was very welcoming from that point of view. A little bit of old Europe I guess came back and we shaped it in that particular way

Interviewer: The Gelato Bar.....

Andrew Havas: Both Andrew and his brother Peter Berger - we both came out on the same ship, the Fair Sea. Although I didn't know them well back then, my parents knew them very well but we got to know them much better when we came to Australia.

Interviewer: Can you talk about one of the challenges you and your family had when you first arrived in Australia?

Andrew Havas: The biggest challenge that we had was the language. It was quite interesting. I used to translate for my parents. Even at age nine, when we bought our first house, I was the one who was translating in solicitor's places which I think now seems crazy. My father was always very good in written language and he could write very well in English and had very good vocabulary but he had a terrible accent. It was completely reversed with my mother. Her vocabulary wasn't so good but her accent was much much better. I guess the biggest challenge was the language really. They found it very difficult even though we had language classes on the ship and even back in Salzburg in the camps. I think that was basically the biggest challenge.

Also there were lots of things that were very different. For example, I remember the ice cube man, the man delivering ice. We didn't have a proper refrigerator, so the guy would have a

horse; he'd whistle to the horse and the horse would go to the next house and he'd take a cube of ice or two and carry them inside. My parents couldn't communicate with the ice man and so one day, the ice man put the ice in the laundry tubs instead of the ice box. That was because of the communication problem. That was just something that I recall as an eight year old.

Interviewer: How do you think the Jewish community has shaped you as an individual?

Andrew Havas: I think I was very much shaped by my background and very much shaped by Habonim. It was an area of my life that wasn't more ... I'm very traditional. I'm a very traditional Jew. I'm not religious, although my mother was reasonably religious, but I think I got most of my so-called Jewishness from going to Habonim. We learnt to speak Hebrew; and we learnt how to do farming - we did a lot of things and as a matter of fact, I was going to make aliyah as a result of that. This means that I was going to migrate to Israel and I did spend nine months in Israel but my father died and I came back from Israel.

I was involved with Habonim in a garin of more than 50 people, a garin called Haruach. Most of them were professional people and we went to Israel and lived on Kibbutz Yisrael for various periods of time. I think that that shaped me more in the Jewish way than anything else - the actual Zionist youth movement and that taught me how to give back to society and taught me a lot of lessons along those lines.

Interviewer: How's your sense of culture and lifestyle changed through living in Australia?

Andrew Havas: Living in Australia, my whole sensibility of being free, of being able to speak out, has really shaped me. I remember again being in Habonim, when the Springboks came out to Australia. We were very much against what was happening in South Africa. I was very much involved in some of the protests. We felt an affinity to the indigenous people and one of my best friends, a lady called Denise Langman, who is here in Australia - she was adopted by Jewish parents. She is an indigenous lady and we just broke down all the barriers. I never thought of her as anything different growing up and I think that that's a marvellous thing that has happened and I think that's made a very big difference to us.

Interviewer: Food is obviously an important part of Jewish culture, so can you tell about your previous native country's foods and a memory about eating your favourite food.

Andrew Havas: The first time I've ever had an orange was when we went to Austria – never had an orange in my life. On the ship, the Fair Sea, we'd been given bananas, of all things. My mother cooked very much Hungarian type meals. She cooked this meat and rice meal which was my favourite. I still miss it even till this day. Basically, I had never had a salad, a proper salad, until I got married, when I was 25. The first real salad that I ever had was when my wife, who is Jewish but was born in Australia. She cooks very differently. I love her cooking. My whole eating habits have changed from my childhood.

I love things like sushi. I like lamb and one of the issues with lamb was on the ship. We used to get was mutton and it stank. It was mutton that was there for weeks and weeks and weeks and it was just absolutely awful. A lot of Europeans, a lot of people on that ship and a lot of my friends who are Hungarian will not touch it, they can't even stand the smell of sheep, of mutton, of lamb. To this day, I've got a very good friend who I won't name, who won't touch lamb at all.

I think as far as food is concerned I think cakes are very important. We love cakes and very often with my wife we go to a particular place in Vaucluse that has Hungarian food and I really enjoy that but I'm really very much eat Australianised normal food.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit more about the food that you ate as a child?

Andrew Havas: Having been deported, there wasn't a lot of opportunity. It was very stodgy food. There was a thing my mother used to make called rantash which was like a base and everything is made from that. She used to make a lot of spinach. She used to make a lot of split peas - there are no real words in English but it was like a ragu. So we had a lot of those sort of foods. I remember eating things like rabbit because meat was very scarce. We had quite a bit of chicken but nothing like veal or anything like that. Obviously, we were deported when I was two so all my memories start from five onwards. I have bad memories of Hungarian food and basically bad memories of stodgy food so I don't have good memories of Hungarian food.

Interviewer: How did that change when you came to Australia?

Andrew Havas: It was a land of plenty. We had lots of meat and chicken. My mother was able to cook what she would have normally eaten as a child. My wife has made a big change in the food that we eat. Melissa is really a wonderful cook and she cooks very healthy food but she cooks not so much European style. I guess the thing that I do remember is my mother's beautiful chicken noodle soup and I think all kids love their chicken noodle soup. That was one thing that I do remember that she made some wonderful chicken noodle soup.

Interviewer: When you eat something now, are there any dishes that trigger memories of your childhood?

Andrew Havas: No.

Interviewer: Have you been to 21 lately?

Andrew Havas: Actually, I should have mentioned 21. My mother-in-law loves 21.

Interviewer: We'll just re-explore a little bit of what you thought of Australian food when you first arrived and how that has changed across the years?

Andrew Havas: When I first arrived the Australian food was very bland. Particularly my parents had always sort of complained about it and they had terrible trouble getting spices of different types, things like paprika. A lot of foods in Hungary use paprika and capsicums and other things like that and they were quite hard to get. There was one particular delicatessen that I remember my mother used to go miles into town, on the tram and on the buses – Cyril's Delicatessen close to Eddy Avenue [near Central Railway, Sydney] which used to have all the European foods. She'd go miles and buy half their stock and then bring them home.

Actually, I've never liked pies or anything like that but over time going to friends' places who weren't European, who were Aussie kids, I would have steak and I would have salads and so really quite quickly I would say that I got used to good old fashioned Australian food. Initially, it was a very sort of British food and it was really bland.

Interviewer: How does that compare to current day?

Andrew Havas: There's no comparison. There's nothing that you can't get, it doesn't matter what style and as I mentioned, we often go to Japanese. I love my raw fish. I think my mother would curl up in her grave if she saw me eating the raw fish that I eat these days; the sashimi. We've just come back from Japan and we just actually went on a cultural and eating tour which was marvellous and the food was just incredible - the variety of foods that you can get, the number of coffee lounges that you can go to.

My father used to have a little coffee percolator and he would make his own coffee. We'd go to Elbon Coffee Lounge and get the raw coffee and he'd ground it all up himself by hand and make coffee. Those days are gone because every corner's got terrific coffee and coffee lounges and things like that. There's been major changes and everything is available these days.

Interviewer: Tell us why you don't like Vegemite?

Andrew Havas: Yuck, yuck and yuck. Vegemite is absolutely the most disgusting thing I've tasted it twice in my life - I just cannot stand that particular taste. It's a particular taste that just like my friends who don't like lamb and don't like sheep. When it's in the fridge, I ask my wife to put it in a different shelf so it's not even near something! A lot of Europeans don't like Vegemite. I can't tell you the scientific reason of why not.

Interviewer: Sorry, let me just catch up to where we were.

Andrew Havas: Actually, I didn't talk about the local area from the point of view that we've only been in three houses in the area all our lives here for 50 years. Do you want me to say something about that?

Interviewer: Why don't we talk about that now then.

Andrew Havas: Something quite interesting if I think back on it. We've been in the local area all our lives. Having moved out from Kings Cross, we then moved to Arden Street, Waverley and lived there for ten years. Then from there we went to 240 Old South Head Road, Bondi and that was a lovely house and we stayed there until I got married. Then when we got married we bought a little semi cottage, my wife and I, in McLennan Avenue, Randwick and we lived there for ten years and then from there we moved to where I'm living now in Bronte. So really we've been locals from 1957 onwards, we've been in the eastern suburbs, if you can consider Kings Cross the eastern suburbs.

Interviewer: How do you think your migration wave has influenced food in the local area?

Andrew Havas: I think the migrants into Australia have completely influenced the food. I mean, you've got Korean, you've got Japanese, and you've got every culture - European, Hungarian, Czech, every type of food. I think that the food has just completely expanded out, the quality of food, the type of food that you can get. If you look around the number of different restaurants that you have with just the most fantastic - it's just remarkable.

Interviewer: What about the Jewish influence in particular?

Andrew Havas: I think the Jewish influence has filtered through a whole range of different restaurants, of different foods. People have got used to kugelhopfs, got used to cinnamon and other spices and things that weren't really here before, from all the cakes and all the different foods that we have. Food is not something I'm very good at. I couldn't cook if my life depended on it.

Interviewer: I know that you said you're not religious.

Andrew Havas: Yep.

Interviewer: In general, in regards to your family, were there any special food that will be prepared or eaten during family get togethers or Jewish holidays?

Andrew Havas: As with traditional Jews we would always have the normal seder [at Passover]. We would have mixed seders. We would have 30, 40 people. Every second year it's our turn to have the religious holidays here in our house. We would have an open house and there's always all the traditional foods,

Interviewer: Can you tell me what sort of food you have?

Andrew Havas: What's on the plate? I don't know what's on the plate. Matzah ball soup is something that everybody has. I guess one of my favourites is Wiener schnitzel - I love my veal. That's not particularly what we have on those holidays but it's one of the favourites. I love my soups, I like virtually any soups at all but I think that the matzah ball chicken soup is probably the predominant soup.

Interviewer: And on Shabbat?

Andrew Havas: We do every Shabbat. Melissa cooks Australian style Shabbat. The family gets together at one of three places. We either have it with our son and daughter-in-law and granddaughter here at our place, or we go to Melissa's mother's place or we go to my son's place. Every third Friday night we're in a different place. Obviously the foods are quite different but I think it's basically Australian style foods mainly.

Interviewer: Would you like to discuss a little bit of your military history?

Andrew Havas: I really felt very strongly about giving back to the country and for all that it has done for my family. As a result, I joined the CMF, the Citizen's Military Force. However, something that was probably the worst thing that has ever happened to me as an Australian citizen. We got our citizenship papers in 1962 - as soon as we possibly could we became Australian citizens. The Australian Army sent me an information sheet and asked me a number of questions. One of the questions was, do I still communicate with people back in Hungary? I answered all the questions correctly and the answer was yes.

About five or six months later I got a note to say that I wasn't allowed to be in the military police, I wasn't allowed to be in the Signal Corps and a whole range of different things that I wasn't allowed to be in because, I imagine, they thought that I could be a communist spy. When somebody tells me that I can't do something then the red flag goes up and I thought to myself, "Well, I'm just not going to let this happen," so a very long story short, I went and joined the

Commandos of the First Royal New South Wales Regiment at Georges Heights. Now they were still Citizen's Military Force but it was a totally different kettle of fish.

They had a Signal Corps within the actual Commando unit. I joined this Signal Corps and they sent me on many, many courses. I went to Special Air Services and did lots of courses with them. It was around Vietnam time and one of the things that I was doing was there was something called a One Time Letter Pad. We had different levels of information coming through from Vietnam and we would translate these One Time Letter Pads and send them back to Canberra or somewhere. My security level was obviously quite high to be able to do this. I took great pride in going back to my old commanding officer in the CMF and showing him what I had done and he was absolutely shocked that I had actually reached the level that we worked on. I felt very good about that and I think it's very important to give something back to this country and I still feel very strongly, very patriotic Australian and I would do anything for this country. I think it's the best country in the world.

Interviewer: Very nice. We're going to move on to the pray section. The essence of Judaism is in its rituals and observances. In this section we would love to hear about mitzvot and traditions, how it shapes your identity or not, and the passing down from generation to generation. How are your religious practices now compared to before you migrated as a family?

Andrew Havas: I consider myself to be a very traditional Jew. I keep all the High Holidays and there is something about going to synagogue which I enjoy. I've been a member of The Great Synagogue for at least the last 45 years. We were married there; my father-in-law was a founding member of The Great Synagogue; I have a seat there; my children both were bar mitzvahed at The Great Synagogue; Simon, my son, was married there. I think that there is something terrific about being traditional. You have certain values and certain things that you carry out.

I feel something special when I enter a synagogue and it doesn't matter where. Even when you're overseas you go to a particular synagogue, something connects you back to your past and something connects you to your heritage. You hear the same sort of songs and the same on High Holidays and I really love that that side of it.

Interviewer: And how are your religious practices now compared to before you migrated?

Andrew Havas: Well, I don't know because I was such a young person. Actually, I will say something. One of the things we really couldn't practice is religion in Hungary, particularly when we were living with a peasant family, it was almost impossible. We didn't hide that we were Jewish, they knew that we were Jews but I don't even think that we kept virtually anything because it just wasn't the thing to do. When we came out to Australia it was really wonderful because my mother could then be kosher, get her kosher food. She would be able to mix with other Jews and she could identify herself much more so than she could in the little village where we lived.

There wasn't overt anti-Semitism but it was more and more covert with anti-Semitism. It wasn't prudent to make a big thing of you being a Jew in the time that we lived there. When we came here my father would take me to a synagogue and I had my Bar Mitzvah at Central Synagogue in Bon Accord Avenue. It does play quite an important part but from a traditional point of view more so than from a religious point of view.

Interviewer: That's very nice. What learnings or traditions are the most important to you or that you feel most passionate about?

Andrew Havas: I think tzedakah, giving back. I think that's the most important. I think we've been very fortunate. I feel very fortunate - I've got two wonderful sons, I've got two wonderful daughter-in-laws, I've got a wonderful family. I think giving back into the community. I did have a health scare when I was 40. This is really my second life. I won't go into it too much but I think that every day is precious and I think that if, as the religious saying says, you save one life you save the world. Well, I had an absolute profound experience. I run a major anti-racism, anti-bullying program called Courage to Care. I was the founding chairman of the program in New South Wales.

I was on a plane to Melbourne visiting my other son and grandchildren and daughter-in-law and I had this young man next to me in civilian clothes but he had an army hat on his lap. I just asked him what he does in the army and he told me a few things. Then, he said "What do you do?" I said, "I was one of the general managers in IBM but now, since I've retired, I run a major anti-racism, anti-bullying program called Courage to Care." That's when he jumped up - I thought he was going to kiss me! I had to jump back and this is what he said, "I am of Samoan Fijian origin. All my friends are either in jail or dead. They are drug takers. In Year Ten in Liverpool, this little old Holocaust lady told me her story and I decided to change my life."

He became the school captain of Liverpool Boys High School. He joined the army because he needed discipline. He is now doing an electrical engineering course and he said, "You guys and what you've done, you've completely saved my life." He said, "You've changed my life and turned it around." To me, giving back and in the Jewish saying, if you save one life, you save the world. Well, to me that's probably the essence and that's what I've learned and that's probably one of the most important things.

Interviewer: How does it feel to belong to a group of people with a common history and traditions?

Andrew Havas: Well, the Jewish nation, being the oldest religion in the world, there's a lot that you can learn from that. I think that I'm very proud to be a Jew. I used to work for Telstra and the PMG when I was very young and whenever certain holidays would come I would make a big deal of it. At Passover when I wasn't eating bread I had matzoh, I would make a big thing of it. I would take my matzoh into the lunch room. The people would ask me why I was doing that. I've always been very proud, I'm very proud of being Jewish, I'm very proud of my religion and I'm very lucky that in this country we can practice it in the way that we do.

Interviewer: That's nice. What Jewish traditions have your parents and grandparents passed on to you?

Andrew Havas: Superstitions, too many superstitions. My parents and grandparents had superstitions all the way along. I don't think that they've actually passed too many religious things on. I can say all the prayers, I can do all the things that I normally do. But my father died quite young when I was just 20 - really, he didn't pass on too many traditions. But there were all sorts of very strange things like when my mother used to sew button on my shirt, I would have to have a cotton

thread in my mouth. Don't ask me why. Things like you wouldn't grow if you step over somebody, all sorts of funny things like that which I thought were very European.

Interviewer: What traditions are you passing on to your own children and grandchildren?

Andrew Havas: I think the main tradition is to be a good citizen, to be a good person, to respect everybody. I think the most important thing is that we're all the same and we should all respect everybody. I've learned in life that everybody has a story and you don't know why people are doing certain things because they all have a reason for doing what they're doing. I think that's what I'd like to pass on. If you're thinking about it from a religious aspect, as I've said, we're very traditional. We keep all the High Holidays. I think the values of the Jewish religion - I think that's what I'd like to pass on to them. The most important part to me is family. Family is everything and I think you need to support family.

Interviewer: What's the best thing about being Jewish in the Waverley region?

Andrew Havas: I don't like living in a ghetto and I don't like living on the fringe and I guess that's why we live where we live. The good part is that you can meet a lot of like-minded people but also it's very interesting to be meeting different people as well. I think the whole of the area is a melting pot. From every point of view there is so much going on, so much to do in this particular area. This whole eastern suburbs is just a wonderful place to live. Again, I go back to the beaches and the food and the restaurants and just the style of living, the easy living.

My son lives in Melbourne. I could never live in Melbourne, not because there's anything wrong with Melbourne, I love the boulevards and all that but I think I like a more outdoor style of life and I love the Australian outdoor type life.

Interviewer: Do you think Bondi has become a melting pot for different cultures and has this influenced the character of the local area?

Andrew Havas: I think Bondi has totally been changed and transposed and I think it's a positive - I think it's fantastic. Culturally, I think it's very diverse and I think that each different culture brings another level of enrichment to society. I think that we are culturally probably the most diverse country in the world and there's probably something close to 212 languages that we speak in the eastern suburbs which I've done some research into. I think it's a wonderful melting pot. I am very sorry about the immigration issue but I won't get into politics. .

Interviewer: Now we've got the fun bit which is naches. Every Jewish person wants naches in their life. Naches can also be seen as success in learning, giving back to the community. What does the word naches mean to you?

Andrew Havas: Well, I thought about naches and I think naches means family to me and I think of the joy seeing your kids grow up and they are doing the right thing. And grandchildren. Again, I think giving back to society is very important to me. I think we, as Jews, punch way above our weight in volunteering, in giving back to society. If I look at every facet of Jewish life it's very rich. I think we punch way above our weight in what we do.

Interviewer: I think that's fair to say. How do you think you would describe naches to someone who doesn't know what it means?

Andrew Havas: Naches to somebody who doesn't know what it means.. is that it's joy, it's life, it's giving.

I guess that's one of the reasons that I did start the Courage to Care program. I had a very interesting experience. I was offered a particular program that was already running in Victoria. The Melbourne Jewish Museum started an exhibition called Courage to Care. They travelled the program to Perth, to Adelaide and then it went back and forth until about 1996 in Victoria and Melbourne. I was asked in 1998 to have a look at this program. We, in New South Wales, saw a wonderful opportunity to bolt on a major education component to it and that's what we did. We've now had 200,000 people through the program and we've had 98,500 schoolchildren that have gone through to our workshops. We're involved with the Queensland Police and each cadet in Queensland Police is going through the program. I originally thought it would have maybe a three to five year use by date but this is its 16th year and it's going stronger than it ever has. That's what I mean by giving back.

I joined an organisation and, again, this comes out of my Habonim experience, called B'nai B'rith. B'nai B'rith is in 51 countries and it's the oldest Jewish service organisation. It's the oldest service organisation in the world actually. It was founded in 1853 and it even preceded the Red Cross. It was all founded by nine Jewish men in a coffee lounge who wanted to help the immigrants who were coming into America at that time and it spread to Australia.

I belong to B'nai B'rith. I was the past president. I think that you have a lot of naches when you have stories that return back to you. The type of things that the organisation does is that we collect funds for the Paediatric Nephrology Department of the Children's Hospital and Bush Fire Brigade. I consider it exactly the same as a rotary group, it's very similar. Courage to Care is another program like that which is extremely powerful and very important.

Interviewer: As a general question, what do you hope for your children and grandchildren?

Andrew Havas: I hope that they are successful in life and that they carry on the traditions. But one thing, if I'm going to be very honest, is that I think that having hardship, a little bit of hardship, makes you stronger. I think these days kids, have it very easy. I am not wishing any bad things on my children but I think that having a little bit of hardship is always very good and is very character building. I hope that they carry on the tradition. But they're very good citizens, they're in good jobs. I think the most important thing is your health. If you haven't got health you've got nothing.

Interviewer: What do you think your grandparents would make of your life in Australia?

Andrew Havas: I never knew my grandparents. I don't know how to answer that. I think we live in an era that is so different that my grandparents would have a very difficult time grasping what we do here. I didn't know either grandparent on my father's side. My mother's side - my grandmother did come out to Australia but I was very young when she died and so I really have not had very much to do with grandparents. I think that's one of the things that is so fortunate with my kid's children that they both have both sets of grandparents and I think that makes it very rich.

Interviewer: What is your biggest achievement in life and why?

Andrew Havas: I think that we've touched a lot of kids through this Courage to Care program. I'm very passionate about the particular program. I know that we have prevented a considerable number of self-harms. That young boy that I mentioned before on the aeroplane who said that we changed his life. I think that that's been a very major achievement. I'm very proud of my whole team and the work that we do in Courage to Care. I'm very proud of B'nai B'rith. I think B'nai B'rith is just a wonderful organisation.

One of the things in Courage to Care now is that we have completely broken down barriers. We have the Evangelical Sisters of Mary who are my best guides and facilitators. In Kogarah we even have five Arabic people who were guiding in the Holocaust exhibition so I think that the whole idea is that we're breaking down barriers. We've had some major effects with the indigenous and I think that we've worked very hard in Moree, Dubbo and in Broken Hill with the indigenous community. I think that if I leave nothing else that's a legacy - that we've touched a lot of people. One of the things that I want to make sure is that even though I didn't feel that terrible about being bullied, I just think that these days bullying is such a terrible thing and can be so harmful to students and so if we explain to kids what and how far you can go with bullying and how it does affect people, then I think we've achieved a lot.

Interviewer: How do you feel about your place not just in the Jewish community but the community overall?

Andrew Havas: I'm extremely proud that having been in B'nai B'rith, also doing the Courage to Care program I get invited to Ramadan with the Arab community. I meet the most incredible people across the board. I have a lot of dealings with asylum seekers and I think about 52% of the general population of Australia has got some sort of background from another country. I think that the way that we live together so harmoniously is probably a great achievement and so I feel really, really happy with living in the community.

Interviewer: I think a good overview of Courage to Care really would be a good thing to talk about.

Andrew Havas: Courage to Care, being a major anti-racism and anti-bullying program was founded in 1999 here in New South Wales. We've had 45 exhibitions to date as far afield as Western Australia, Queensland and every part of New South Wales including country New South Wales and country Victoria. We've had 200,000 people through the program of which we've had about 98,500 school children. The program is an interesting program. It's run in this particular way.

Sixty students come to an exhibition which is held in an exhibition space or gallery. The last place we were was in Liverpool – we were there for five weeks. The students would arrive in a bus. They'd be met and greeted by a coordinator who shows them an eight-minute anti-bullying DVD which shows the effects of bullying. Then they would be introduced to the team and divided into groups of 20. The first group would go through an exhibition of precious objects. The interesting part is that we have Holocaust survivors within the program but we also have the people who saved them. We have a man called Adrian Vanas. Adrian's story is just the most remarkable story. I don't have a lot of time now to go through it but I'll just go very, very quickly.

A Dutch man born in Indonesia to Indonesian parents, he travelled to Trieste in Italy because he was wanting to go to university when he was 18. He landed in Amsterdam but saw all the atrocities on the way because he went by train. He joined the underground and was planted by them in a camp called Westerbork. He was in charge of food distribution which meant he had a unique office -he had a door to the outside world and he had a door to the camp. Any two people who would be in the camp or close to his door he would usher them in. He had the record book of the entire camp. He would strike them out as if they had die, and a lot of people died, and his wife on a wooden bicycle would bring civilian clothes. In this way in two and a half years he spirited 1,188 people from the camp.

Now he comes to every one of the exhibitions and every one of their programs. He stands next to the survivor who he saved and they have panels in there. So the first group would go through the exhibition. The second group would then listen to a positive talk of a Holocaust survivor: It's because you gave me a loaf of bread, I'm alive today. Something very basic, very simple. Then we would have a workshop about how is this story relevant to you in your life.

This is where the students come out with a lot of issues, a lot of things. We are not psychologists; we are not psychiatrists - we don't deal with those things. Some of them want to self-harm, we hand that back to the school. An enormous number of things come out regarding a lot of issues. I have witnessed personally many times an entire class apologising to one student who they've been bullying. They didn't realise how hurtful just by calling them names, stupid, and idiot, whatever, over year and years, how harmful that was. Somehow the penny seems to drop in the program and in the formula. At the end of it, they get together and there's a de-brief.

When that is finished, they then leave and a month later, we have a program whereby they either write a piece of poem they put in a poster. In other words, there's a follow up program that we run and that's basically, in a very quick way, Courage to Care.