

INTERVIEW OF STEFAN SUROWINSKI

INTERVIEWERS: MARY HYLAND and JESS HUFFMAN
AUGUST 2024

0:00:02.8 Stefan Surowinski: So Mary will ask me the question...

0:00:03.6 Jess Huffman: Mary, will ask you the questions, but we'll just start again. So it's the 25th of August 2024. We're at 52a Kings Road in Honiton. We're interviewing Stefan Surowinski about his Polish heritage. Jess Huffman, the coordinator, and Mary Hyland, who is a research volunteer on the project. And we've got, Stefan's wife, Helen, and his daughter Elise and son-in-law James here. Stefan, you were just telling us where your father was born in Poland.

0:00:34.9 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, he was born in a small village called Wolkusze is in the county of [?Sokolka] which is in the northeast of Poland, near the Belarus border. The nearest largest city was Bialystok which I think apparently now is the tenth largest city in Poland. He was brought up on a farm and he looked after the farm, and he was a carpenter as well did some carpentry. When the war broke out in 1939, Poland was divided into two halves, one controlled by the Germans, the other controlled by the Russians. Which was part of the pact between Russia and Germany, before the war, before 1939. Obviously, he was in the Army, joined up in the Army and obviously he was taken prisoner by the Russians and they were being transported to, they didn't know where, and as they were marching along, before this captain actually came up to him, and gave him his great coat because he said he won't need this where he's going. Obviously, he knew what was going to happen because all the officers were being separated from the ordinary enlisted men. Well, what happened, they were taken to [unclear name 0:02:14.7] and shot 10,000 of them.

0:02:14.7 Jess Huffman: 10,000 officers?

0:02:20.3 Stefan Surowinski: So then my father was transported to Siberia, to a work camp in Siberia, which was very tough. A lot of the men died there because it was so, you know, Siberia in the middle of winter is pretty harsh. He was there until '41 when Germany invaded Russia and then realised what had happened. The Russians said to the Poles, you could

either join the Russian Army and fight with us against the Germans, or you can join what they call the Anders' Army, and they made their way through down from Russia, down to through to what was Persia then. It was Iran, actually, it was Iran. Where he joined up in the Polish, what was left of the Polish Army there, joined the 10th Army, the British 10th Army, where they trained them, retrained them into all the British tactics and warfare. Then they were moved from there up to the 8th Army in North Africa, where he fought with the 8th Army and then to Sicily, in Italy, fought in Italy at Monte Cassino. He was wounded, and I've got a picture of him in hospital when he was wounded in Italy. Then he just fought in Italy until the end of the war. Whereupon they came back to Britain via, he was on an American troopship brought back to Britain.

I think most of them went to Scotland, and then they were gradually, sort of spread out over England and he came to Honiton. Heathfield Camp at Honiton. They had the choice of going back to Poland or staying in this country. Obviously, knowing the Russians and what they did, he didn't really want to go back to Poland. So he decided to stay in this country. He stayed in Heathfield Camp until 1948, when he was discharged or demobbed in 1948. So it was not until three years after the war he was demobbed.

0:05:05.8 Mary Hyland: What happened to your father's family in Poland? Did he have [over speaking 0:05:10.4]... brothers, sisters?

0:05:11.7 Stefan Surowinski: I don't know, I know he had four sisters, but I don't know what happened to any of his family. He never really talked about it. I know his mother survived because in 1972, I was living in Australia then, he went back to Poland for the first time, and his mother was still alive and he managed to see her, and I would imagine he'd seen his sisters. Then about two months after he came back, she died. I know I've got lots of cousins, and I did have aunties, but I don't know, because we never really discussed it. The thing is, when you've got an English mother and you're living in a town like Honiton, it's another world. You don't talk about it and you're young. Like now, when you're older, you think about God, I wish I'd asked him that. You talk about this, but when you're young, you've got your own self-interests. You're not really too concerned about what happened to your parents.

0:06:13.5 Mary Hyland: Now that's true, and I suppose, because you were born in Honiton?

0:06:20.2 Stefan Surowinski: Honiton, Marl pits Hospital.

0:06:21.9 Mary Hyland: So Poland is like another world away.

0:06:25.6 Stefan Surowinski: Absolutely, absolutely. I don't speak Polish. I think you'll find that most descendants from Polish, if their father was Polish and their mother was English, they wouldn't speak English, wouldn't speak Polish. Whereas if their mother is Polish and their father might be English, or they're both Polish, they might speak, because when you're home, you're with your mum. When you're growing up, when you're five, right up until you go to school and there's no Polish spoken there because dad didn't speak Polish to any of his friends when they came around to talk to him.

0:07:02.2 Mary Hyland: He would have no one to speak Polish to would he, in his own family group?

0:07:05.9 Stefan Surowinski: No, absolutely. Only like Stan Podsiadlo and Stan Pucovski and some other Polish people that were here, but subsequently left. He also knew people in Little Poland down near Newton Abbot. We used to go and visit there. Of course, a work friend of mine, his wife was, her parents were Polish, but they were both Polish. She was called Anna Edwards, her married name was. She could speak it fluently because both her parents were Polish. You wouldn't know, she could speak English just as good as we could.

0:08:00.6 Jess Huffman: What was your dad's English like?

0:08:03.8 Stefan Surowinski: Awful, yes. He never really lost, he had a really strong accent, didn't he Helen?

0:08:12.2 Helen Surowinski: Yes, but you could understand...

0:08:13.2 Stefan Surowinski: You could understand him, but a very strong accent.

0:08:17.5 Jess Huffman: What did your father do for work then when he settled here?

0:08:21.5 Stefan Surowinski: When he came here. His first job was, I think it was down the gasworks shovelling coal and coke, shovelling coal into make coke.

0:08:32.9 Jess Huffman: That was at the bottom of King's Street, was that right?

0:08:35.3 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, that's right. Yes, bottom King Street. Yes, where the old gasometers used to be. That was his first job because obviously his English wasn't very good. So he just got a labourer, manual labourers' job. Then because during the war he drove a Bren gun carrier...

0:08:52.4 Jess Huffman: What is that?

0:08:58.1 Stefan Surowinski: It's a very small track vehicle, but they call it a Bren gun carrier because it quite often had a Bren machine gun on it, but it was a small vehicle, track vehicle, where the driver sat at the front and you could have half a dozen men sat in the back, transporting men around. He drove that in North Africa. I don't know if he drove it in Italy, but I knew because he was telling me of some tales in North Africa. One was when he was just driving along the desert and they hit a trench, which he didn't see, and it just stopped dead. One of the guys in the back, because it had a metal partition between the driver and the people in the back, just shot forward and smashed his head against the metal partition and it blinded him. Another time he was in a convoy in the lorry, because I said to him, we were watching a film once, funnily enough, and there was a guy dying, and he was sort of muttering his last words, and I said, 'Oh, they don't do that, is that...' 'Yes, they do', he said, I was in a convoy driving a lorry once, and there's a guy hanging on the side of the lorry on the running board on the side, and the convoy came the other side, and the lorry hit him and knocked him off, and we stopped and he was lying there and he said a few last words before he died. So he said it did happen.

0:10:35.5 Jess Huffman: So your dad was amazingly well travelled just from those few years.

0:10:40.5 Stefan Surowinski: Yes. Well, mainly, like I said, I don't know exactly how they managed to get from Siberia down to Iran. I know he said it was a tough journey, and they were just scrounging whatever food they could. Going in fields and picking up turnips and anything they could eat. Then when he got to Iran, they saw all these date trees, and he said he just stuffed himself with dates, and he was really ill. They almost operated on him, but in the end, he managed to get, it came out of him, but it was tough, Siberia was really tough. Then the trip down to Iran was a tough trip as well. So like I said, we really don't know what that generation went through in the war, not only the Poles, a lot of the other soldiers as well.

0:11:52.7 Mary Hyland: I'm sort of drawing comparisons with my own father's war service, because he was in Burma fighting behind Japanese lines fighting the Chindits, and when we were children, when they were talking about the war, we'd sort of, oh, no, we're talking about the war again. You know, we'd been really bored. Now you get to this age, and you realise, no and I think when a lot of them, like your father and my father came back, they sort of put it in a box a little bit. They didn't talk about it.

0:12:31.4 Stefan Surowinski: No, no I quite agree.

0:12:32.4 Mary Hyland: To our generation and future generations their experiences were beyond horrendous.

0:12:41.6 Stefan Surowinski: Absolutely. Yes, it's like when you just see how young the fighter pilots were going up - 19 years old and putting their life on the line and in the bombers as well. So going over Germany bombing, that was really tough. Having to do that day, after day, after day, not knowing if you're coming back.

0:13:08.3 Mary Hyland: When the war was over and your father had settled in Honiton and married and raising a family. Do you think he felt that he belonged in England, or did he feel that he really belonged in Poland, or didn't he let it show?

0:13:28.5 Stefan Surowinski: He was very well known in Holton. Honiton was a lot smaller back in the '50s, when he was sort of '50s and '60s. When he was getting into the British culture, but he liked going to the pubs. He had lots of people he knew. A lot of people knew him. I don't think he really would have wanted to go back to Poland. Like I said, he went back in '72 and it had changed a bit, or changed quite a bit because it was still under Russian rule then.

0:14:05.6 Helen Surowinski: He was a very sensitive man, wasn't he.

0:14:07.6 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, he was a very emotional man. Likel said, yes, he did settle in pretty well, but I mean, you had other Poles in Honiton. They'd all settled in pretty well and they all knew each other. It was part of the community, and they settled in Honiton, there was never any animosity towards them at all. All through school never, ever had any problems because I was half Polish, not at all.

0:14:47.1 Mary Hyland: I recently read Stan; I can't say his name... *A Pole Apart* and what came through to me once he came to Honiton, and set up his garage and whatnot was how hard working, he had such a work ethic, which I think probably Polish people tended to have anyway.

0:15:08.6 Stefan Surowinski: Absolutely, yes, my father, he always was known as a hard worker. He had different jobs and everything but he was always a good worker, a hard worker. He and he kept pigs and chickens. He had a smallholding with pigs and chicken. That's a bit of his farming roots coming through. So he'd come home from work, have his dinner and then he'd be gone again. You wouldn't see him until later in the night because he'd be going out looking after his chickens and pigs.

0:15:36.3 Jess Huffman: So where did he live and were his animals somewhere else?

0:15:38.5 Stefan Surowinski: Well, yes, we lived in Marwood Place in Honiton, and he had a small field, about an acre out Weston out near The Otter.

0:15:53.2 Helen Surowinski: You've inherited as well, his...

0:15:54.5 Stefan Surowinski: Sorry?

0:15:56.4 Helen Surowinski: You've inherited his work ethic.

0:15:55.6 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, which I've, oh yes, well I've always worked hard all my life as well. Well they're well known... Obviously you get the few slackers, but the Poles are normally known for hard workers. I think it's just in their ethic.

0:16:14.8 Jess Huffman: Tell us a little bit how he came to meet your mum. Do you know much about that story?

0:16:19.7 Stefan Surowinski: I wouldn't have a clue.

0:16:23.4 Helen Surowinski: Wasn't it at a dance?

0:16:25.8 Stefan Surowinski: I suppose they just met somewhere. I don't know, they never really talked about it, to be quite honest. They never really talked it...

0:16:35.2 Helen Surowinski: I'm sure she said it was at a dance.

0:16:35.9 Stefan Surowinski: I don't know, might have been at a dance, I don't know.

0:16:40.2 Jess Huffman: Back in the day when they had dancing.

0:16:46.0 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, no I've never really, they never really talked... because I suppose people years ago, we didn't talk to your parents so much as maybe you do now. Our generation didn't know. These know a lot more about Helen and myself than ever I did know about mum and dad. I know mum was married before. She was married to somebody before she met dad, they were divorced. I think he was a gun runner in the Air Force in a bomber. Obviously, that didn't work out. Then she met dad, and that was it. I would imagine they got married in the registry office because being divorced and my dad being a Catholic, they couldn't marry in the Catholic church. I was baptised in the Catholic church. Helen and

I got married in the Catholic church, so I was brought up as a Catholic for the first, I don't know, ten years of my life and that was it. My mother wasn't at all religious. She said to dad, 'No, you don't keep making the lad go to church if he doesn't want to.' So I said, 'Right, that's it.'

0:18:29.1 Jess Huffman: So you said you think your dad had four sisters back in Poland? So there was no contact between his sisters and himself and his mother in that time?

0:18:37.8 Stefan Surowinski: Oh, yes, he used to keep in contact with them regularly and he used to send them bundles. I remember we used to get clothes and make a huge great bundle and take it down to the post office and send to them quite often because, like I said back then, they were under Russian ruling and times were pretty tough over there, under the Russians. I know it had a Polish government, but they were controlled obviously by the Russians.

0:19:09.7 Jess Huffman: What would be in these bundles?

0:19:10.4 Stefan Surowinski: Clothes.

0:19:10.8 Jess Huffman: Oh, just clothes.

0:19:11.8 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, it would be just clothes.

0:19:14.8 Jess Huffman: Things that were difficult to get hold of.

0:19:15.5 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, absolutely.

0:19:18.4 Mary Hyland: And he just made that one visit back in '72?

0:19:20.8 Stefan Surowinski: That's it, yes that's the only visit he made back. Like I said, I was living in Australia at the time, so I didn't really talk to him much about it, but he went over with a friend called [?Eric Jolt 0:19:38.6] who lived in [?unclear place name 0:19:40.9].

This is a very peculiar story, but I don't know if it's true, but he was Polish, Eric Jolt it's not a very Polish name but he spoke Polish, and his wife was Polish. My father said to me that he wasn't Polish, he was German, and he was one of the paratroopers at Monte Cassino, a German paratrooper at Monte Cassino. Now, whether that is true, I don't know but that's what my father told me. That's just another sort of thing.

0:20:28.1 Mary Hyland: Was there, when you were being brought up, was there quite a number of Polish people in Honiton when you were young?

0:20:34.2 Stefan Surowinski: What when I was very young. More so than there is now. Apart from people coming over later. The thing was, because the Catholic church, Saint Regis College, a lot of Poles were staying there as well. We used to have some older generation Poles coming and visiting us and other people, I knew one Pole that lived in an old bus up near Dunkeswell, on the side of the road, was an old converted bus. He went back to Poland and another old chap I know, I think he went back to Poland. There's Polish family in Chard, we used to go and visit a lot. I don't know how many Polish people there are in Chard, but we used to go there and visit a Polish family.

0:21:41.6 Mary Hyland: So when you were at school, did anyone comment on your surname, and where are you from?

0:21:50.4 Stefan Surowinski: No.

0:21:51.3 Mary Hyland: You never had any of that?

0:21:53.1 Stefan Surowinski: No problems at all because at primary school, never anybody bothered with that. Secondary school, in my year there was myself and [?Kapusta 0:22:09.7] that's it, because his nickname was cabbage, [laughter] yes that's right. Yes, but he was in a different form than me. I think that was the only two Polish people in our year, myself and Kapusta. There was another lad, [?Stefan Bukowski 0:22:37.6], who was in the year below or maybe two years below, but, that's the only Polish people I know that were... Like I say, we never, ever got anything, like saying, Pol or anything like that. Never, ever. Mind you, I had a good group of friends, and it just never came up. I think people respected people

more in those days. The things is you didn't have social media in those days. That is really, I think that is... I've had a comment about my name on social media. So I don't do posts on social media anymore.

0:23:33.2 Mary Hyland: Do you feel in yourself... What nationality do you feel that you are?

0:23:38.4 Stefan Surowinski: Oh, English, British.

0:23:44.0 Mary Hyland We have lots of conversations about this sort of thing.

0:23:49.0 Stefan Surowinski: Well, I feel obviously a full British because all of my friend are English and I was brought up English. If there was football match on TV, my dad and myself were watching it, obviously, he'd be supporting Poland, I'd be supporting England. That's the way it is, but I still feel very strongly about my Polish heritage. Very, very, I'm very proud of it as well.

0:24:20.9 Helen Surowinski: It's like, when we got married, I wouldn't take the Ska, because women are the A instead of the I.

0:24:29.1 Stefan Surowinski: If you're feminine, instead of the being Surowinski, like my mum and my sister were called Surowinska, because the A is the feminine. Helen didn't want that, she just wanted to keep the ski on the end.

20:24:29.1 Jess Huffman: Well I guess that in our culture you have the same name, it would seem...

0:24:49.2 Stefan Surowinski: Absolutely, yes.

0:24:52.2 Jess Huffman: Yes, that's really interesting. I had a question... I was gonna ask also, obviously you said that it made sense for you to speak English in your home, your mother was English, but were there any words or Polish sayings that you

picked up as a family that you might have learnt from [over speaking 0:25:14.4] your dad?

0:25:15.7 Stefan Surowinski: When I was younger, yes, when I was younger. Funnily enough, my father always used to swear in Russian. I know the word he used most of all, and it's a very, very vulgar term. So I won't repeat it, I won't even say it in Russian because somebody might... Oh, what does that mean, and look it up and find out what it means.

0:25:41.1 Jess Huffman: Or someone might be listening who speaks Polish.

0:25:45.2 Stefan Surowinski: Or Russian.

0:25:46.3 Jess Huffman: You spoke something in Polish as I arrived? Did you say something in Polish?

0:25:51.5 Stefan Surowinski: Oh, yes ["Dzień dobry" speaks in Polish 0:25:52.4] that's just good morning, and ["Jak się masz" speaks in Polish 0:25:54.9] is how are you, but that's about it, because when I was working in London, I was a maintenance technician at a big hotel and funnily enough I've worked there since 2000, and I retired in 2016. When I retired, when I went there, it was all English in the maintenance department. When I left, it was nearly all Polish, but mainly because of people leaving and people coming to work there, and they'd be speaking Polish. It was just one of the things I really regret not knowing the language because they were speaking it and I couldn't converse with them in Polish. Only very rarely did they speak in Polish because some of us were English, they would have spoken in English, out of courtesy. Yes, they were hard workers, very hard workers as well. I mean, otherwise the company wouldn't have kept them on.

0:27:10.9 Jess Huffman: Have you been to Poland? Have you been to the places where your family are from?

0:27:15.3 Stefan Surowinski: No, oh, I've been to Poland, funnily enough, we went, was it last year?

0:27:18.8 Helen Surowinski: Yes.

0:27:20.7 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, we visited Krakow and it's the first time I've ever been there. It was brilliant, wasn't it? It was really lovely, clean city. Everybody was polite and it was really nice there. We really enjoyed it. The thing was, where my father was born and where he lived, is very hard to get to. It's not somewhere on the tourist track, being right up northeastern Poland, right on the Belarus border. It's not somewhere where you would go on holiday, but that was the first time I've ever been back to Poland. I'm entitled to a Polish passport, obviously, if I wanted to get one, but I've got my British... I might, it would be easier to travel around the EU if I did have one.

0:28:20.5 Mary Hyland: Stefan why don't you tell us a little bit about some of the things that you've got here on the table?

0:28:24.3 Stefan Surowinski: Well, as I showed you earlier, we've got my father's... This is his original Polish, I would call it, Army paperwork, with a picture of him when he was a lot younger. This is 1933, so he would have been 21 years old there, I don't know...

0:29:02.8 Jess Huffman: And they would have issued these at the point to which he signed up?

0:29:08.2 Stefan Surowinski: I don't know if it's Polish or it could just be his identity card. I don't know what that is, you see. I would imagine more it's like an identity card because it's in his...

0:29:27.0 Jess Huffman: So it's got his photograph.

0:29:28.3 Mary Hyland: I think it's an identity card.

0:29:29.4 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, because 1933, yes, he wouldn't have been in the Army then.

0:29:31.2 Mary Hyland: It's before the war.

0:29:35.1 Jess Huffman: And then this one is his...

0:29:36.3 Stefan Surowinski: This one is his soldier's service and Army book, the British one. When he joined the actual the British Army in '41.

0:30:01.0 Stefan Surowinski: But this was dated in '43 but he would have got down to Iran in '41.

0:30:09.5 Jess Huffman: You mentioned that he was demobbed from the...

0:30:13.5 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, that his actual...

0:30:15.9 Jess Huffman: So is it up at the Heathfield, they had a centre?

0:30:18.1 Stefan Surowinski: Discharge, I think he was demobbed.

0:30:22.2 Jess Huffman: Whitley Camp it says there, doesn't it.

0:30:23.4 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, Polish resettlement core. 7th of September 1948.

0:30:33.1 Mary Hyland: 1948, service 308 days.

0:30:37.7 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, and also, but there's one year and something as well.

0:30:41.9 Helen Surowinski: Yes, service with the colours and service and same class. So it's one year, 180 days, Military [over speaking 0:30:50.1] good.

0:30:52.9 Mary Hyland: Elise, what's that you've got there?

0:30:57.0 Stefan Surowinski: That's my grandfather's, John Hooper's...

0:30:58.9 Mary Hyland: This is on your mum's side.

0:31:01.3 Stefan Surowinski: So, yes, that was on my mum's side. That was in 1903.

0:31:05.5 Jess Huffman: When he was part of the Devonshire Regiment.

0:31:07.3 Stefan Surowinski: Yes. That's where he went to South Africa just after the Boer War.

0:31:15.3 Jess Huffman: I love that you've kept all of these. It's so easy for these things to disappear at each generation.

0:31:21.3 Stefan Surowinski: Oh, absolutely, yes.

0:31:26.0 Helen Surowinski: With the photographs, you need to write on the back who they are.

0:31:29.8 Stefan Surowinski: Well, yes, I ought to.

0:31:31.8 Helen Surowinski: For people in the future.

0:31:32.4 Stefan Surowinski: Absolutely. Yes, that's a good idea. That's him, I presume it's Heathfield Camp. This is one of his first jobs he got when he was here. For [?Slades 0:31:48.6], a lorry driver for Slades in Honiton. This is in either Iran or North Africa, these other fellow soldiers.

0:32:07.1 Jess Huffman: Wow, it makes you realise how young they were, they look so young.

0:32:09.2 Helen Surowinski: Well, they were, weren't they, yes.

0:32:12.7 Jess Huffman: What are they doing there? Are they digging?

0:32:16.6 Helen Surowinski: Well, that's a spade, isn't it?

0:32:19.3 Jess Huffman: Digging something out.

0:32:24.2 Stefan Surowinski: I think, I'm not sure, but I think this was taken by the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.

0:32:38.4 Jess Huffman: Oh, gosh, wow, amazing. So he had a camera. I mean that would have been quite...

0:32:40.8 Stefan Surowinski: Well I don't know if he had a camera, but his friends would have had a camera. Yes, it's quite unusual to have quite a few photographs taken.

0:32:50.3 Helen Surowinski: There's something written on here.

0:32:54.1 Jess Huffman: Let's see.

0:32:54.2 Helen Surowinski: He's name.

0:32:54.5 Jess Huffman: But it's very faint now, isn't it?

0:33:01.9 Stefan Surowinski: There he is in the camp again.

0:33:03.4 Jess Huffman: Oh, this is him at Heathfield Camp. So this would have been his... All with a cigarette in their hand.

0:33:10.8 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, he always had a roll up cigarette in his mouth.

0:33:18.3 Helen Surowinski: But they all did in those days, didn't they. Oh, I keep looking on the back.

0:33:21.5 Stefan Surowinski: That's him in hospital in Italy in 1943. It's written on the back.

0:33:32.0 Jess Huffman: Oh, yes, Italia 1943. I don't know what... what else does it say?

0:33:37.5 Helen Surowinski: Well, he'd been shot.

0:33:38.8 Jess Huffman: Oh, it's the name of the hospital.

0:33:39.5 Stefan Surowinski: I don't know what had happened, but I think he was wounded in the neck. I think it's some shrapnel in the neck or something like that. I presume, I don't know if that was his home. That's quite an old photo.

0:33:59.8 Jess Huffman: Yes, it could be his home in Poland, do you think?

0:34:00.3 Stefan Surowinski: Could be. Yes, it could be.

0:34:05.3 Jess Huffman: Yes, it doesn't look English, does it, the woodwork.

0:34:07.4 Stefan Surowinski: Oh, no, that's my grandfather. There's another picture of him there.

0:34:15.8 Jess Huffman: Yes, so did you... I don't imagine your father brought much with him, did he? So he probably didn't have...

0:34:20.0 Stefan Surowinski: The only thing that I know he did bring into the country was a fork off, oh no, a knife off the American ship he came over, on because it had US Navy written on it, and the handle was about twice as long as the blade. It's stainless steel, a really funny looking knife. It's what they had to use on the ship.

0:34:48.4 Jess Huffman: There's one memento.

0:34:50.2 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, I don't know what happened to it.

0:34:51.6 Male: Have you still got it?

0:34:52.5 Stefan Surowinski: No, I don't know what happened to it. No, just got thrown out, I suppose, over time.

0:34:58.6 Jess Huffman: It's sort of hard to imagine, isn't it, because we're so used to having... I mean, at least we've been lucky to grow up and stay in the places that we grew up and we're surrounded by not only our family, but all the things that existed from our family's history, around us. I can't imagine what it must be like to move somewhere with nothing from what you've known.

0:35:27.0 Stefan Surowinski: Another thing I remember dad saying was that when he went to Poland, visited Poland in '72, he went to his village and his old farm where he used to live. I don't know what happened with his relations, but the farm is taken over by the state, and he was talking to somebody about the farm, some stranger there about the farm, and they said, 'Oh, yes, it was owned by some rich person in England, but the state's taken it over.' They looked on anybody in England as being rich, because another thing, he was always getting letters asking for things. Not begging letters, but, oh, could you send us this? Could you send us that? Which because after the war, it was really, we had it tough here with rationing, but over there, it must have been even worse.

0:36:33.1 Jess Huffman: Yes, so there was that assumption from within Poland that anyone that had made it here would have been prosperous and wealthy.

0:36:42.4 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, that's it, and people don't realise that a lot of Poles, especially any officers or any intellectuals that went back to Poland after the war, that came to this country, were looked on as being hostile. A lot of them were either put in detention centres or gulags or what have you and some were even shot by the Russians. It was a bit of a hazardous thing if you did go back to Poland, it wasn't just plain sailing going back there you just didn't know what to expect. That's the thing.

0:37:29.5 Jess Huffman: So am I right in thinking, so the English Government recognised that it wasn't safe for a lot of the Polish to return?

0:37:36.8 Stefan Surowinski: I would imagine they would have, yes, but just to show you what it was like after the war between governments, they had a victory parade through London with all the allied forces going through, parading, all the allied forces except the Polish, because they thought it would upset Stalin to have the Polish forces marching through London. So that was the only allied country that weren't allowed to march through London.

0:38:11.4 Mary Hyland: So they were denied the right to be a part of that celebration.

0:38:13.1 Stefan Surowinski: Yes.

0:38:16.7 Jess Huffman: Did your dad talk about that to you?

0:38:18.0 Stefan Surowinski: No, I don't think he even knew, he might not have even known about it because not very many people down in Honiton would have realised that, you know, the communications of what happened there. It's like the [?cutting 0:38:31.1] forest. Everybody always used to say, oh, it was the Germans did it because the Russians were crafty, they used German ammunition to shoot all the Poles. I knew back in, as soon as dad told me, back in the early '60s that the Russians did the atrocities, cutting, they didn't come out and admit it until the 1990s. They always said it was the Germans. I was talking to people about it and they'd say, oh, no, it's the Germans that. No, no, no, it's the Russians did it, you know.

0:39:04.9 Jess Huffman: So it sounds like Stefan that you've done quite a lot of research outside of being able to ask your dad these questions.

0:39:14.4 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, I like to sort of look at things about the Second World War, obviously. I mean, its history is our history, it's Polish history. Like I said, I read a lot about the Second World War, but I don't read very much about the First World War because it's two separate ways of fighting. I mean, the Second World War, we are doing it for a cause, from the Nazis and what they were doing, the genocides they were carrying out. The First World War was just greed by the Germans wanting more lands and wanting almost like Commonwealth like we've we got, or we had. The absolute, I don't know how to say it,

the waste of men just being sent over the top. Just mowed down by machine guns, just killed. Just for a few yards of land, it's just absolutely pointless and the way the generals just sat back and just pushed men forward like they were just a load of numbers, that was horrific.

0:40:31.7 Jess Huffman: One of the questions I always ask everyone that we're interviewing is, why do you think it's important to share your story, if that's even with us, or just with your family?

0:40:43.2 Stefan Surowinski: Well, I think it's important to share the story with people who are ignorant of the fact that somehow a lot of, especially the younger generations, how some of the Poles got here. Like, I was in hospital just before Christmas, and I was talking to the nurse and they saw my name and somebody said, 'Oh, does he speak English?' The nurse said to me, well, he speaks English just as good as me and you. So this is what you get, because I suppose when you go somewhere in this day and age, they see your name. I mean, when I went to America years ago, I was on my own with another guy, but he was in another queue, and I was with a load... I think it was Germans or something, it might have been Germans, and they were going through at the same time. There was an American looks up to me and says, so do you speak English? She had my passport there and said, do you speak English? I said, 'Yes, I am English, look.' That's what you get sometimes.

0:42:11.4 Helen Surowinski: You're English nationality, but Polish ethnicity.

0:42:16.4 Stefan Surowinski: Yes, that's it. Yes, I think so.

0:42:22.0 Jess Huffman: Oh, Stefan, thank you so much.

0:42:24.3 Stefan Surowinski: Oh, well, I've gone through something, what you wanted to know anyway?

0:42:28.0 Jess Huffman: Yes, it's been great, thank you, and it's nice that your family's here as well.

0:42:31.8 Elise: Yes, I've learned some new things as well, which is good. It's nice that we know a background because how many families have someone, a relative that went through what dad's dad went through. It's fascinating. It doesn't happen much these days, does it? Where you get history like that in your family.

0:42:52.2 Jess Huffman: We've recorded it now. It's going into the archives. We really appreciate it because, you know, it's important for us on this project to be able to actually speak to people, we're doing a lot of research. So there's a lot of stories about people that are no longer here. So it's really nice to be able to actually ask questions of people.

0:43:12.6 Stefan Surowinski: It's like I said, I'm just annoyed that I didn't ask my father and my mother the same about, I know more about my mother's life than I do my father's, but not all of it. Like I said, the family in Poland, it's a shame that we never really kept in touch. I must have cousins over there. You know, lots of relatives and I don't know what happened to the family during the war. Dad never really said what happened to them.

0:43:49.0 Jess Huffman: Well, there's still time. That's where Mary's very useful, but thank you. I'm going turn the recording off.

0:43:55.1 Stefan Surowinski: It's my pleasure.

0:43:57.1 Jess Huffman: Thanks, Stefan. Thanks Mary.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]