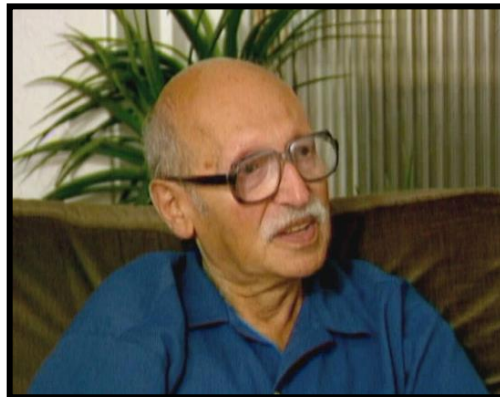


John Graham

John Ian Graham was born Jolly Iso Gismann to Helena (Grünbaum) and Hermann Gismann on May 22, 1920, in Berlin, Germany. John and his older sister, Rita, grew up in [Berlin](#) with a family tree dating back 450 years. John's father was a master tailor with a large non-Jewish clientele.

When John was ten, in 1930, he went to a grammar school where he was one of seven Jewish boys in a class of approximately forty students. Despite politics rarely being discussed at home, John became aware of the rise of [Nazism](#) and in 1931, joined the Zionist youth organization, Betar. Shortly after [Hitler](#) came to power in 1933, John began to notice changes in the attitudes and behaviors of his non-Jewish classmates but recalls his family did not feel many of the effects of [antisemitism](#) because of the respect his father held among his non-Jewish clientele. In 1935, at fifteen, John became the leader of his own Zionist youth group.

That same year, John began an apprenticeship as a toolmaker. In 1937, John was taken to [Gestapo](#) headquarters for questioning but was soon released. In 1938, after the [Kristallnacht Pogrom](#), John heeded his teacher's warning never to return to his vocational school, and soon after, Jews were banned from employment, which prevented John from taking his examination or finishing his apprenticeship.



Visual History Biographical Profile

In January 1939, John received an expulsion order from [Germany](#) and after being assisted by a local rabbi and the Jewish Aid Committee, obtained a provisional visa to England. On April 16, 1939, John boarded a train with approximately eighty other refugees who were abused and beaten at the German border town of Aachen by Gestapo and [SS](#) members also aboard the train. In England, John was taken to the Kitchener refugee camp and assigned to work in the tool shop. John's sister, Rita came to London soon after.

Just before Great Britain entered the war in 1939, John was given "friendly alien" status and left the refugee camp for a job in London. He later decided to join the British military but was denied because his tool making skills were considered more valuable. At the end of the war in 1945, John discovered that his parents had been transported to the [Lodz](#) ghetto in 1942, and had not been heard from since.

From 1949 to 1951, John worked in Israel for the Ministry of Defense and later returned to England, where he was employed as a chief mechanical engineer. Soon after, John and his first wife, Sophie, moved to London, but on July 4, 1954, Sophie passed away. John met his second wife, Herta, in 1955, and they were married the next year. At the time of John's interview in 1997, he and Herta had one son, Robert Herbert, and three grandchildren: Michael, Jacob, and Naomi.