

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Tom Veres
June 22, 1994
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Tom Veres, conducted on June 22, 1992 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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TOM VERES

June 22, 1994

Tape 1

1:01:22

Q: Tom, could you give us just a sense of your family background, a little bit of where you came from.

A: Well, I came from Budapest, Hungary; my father had eight – seven brothers. There were eight brothers altogether. And my mother had 12 sisters and brothers. But I didn't know them. I knew only one of them because by the time I was born after World War II – World War I, I'm sorry, there were only one of my mother's sister alive. And my father, he had brothers, and some of them died in World War I. And as I mentioned to you, big family, they were. Now, what else would you like to know? What my father did? My father was photographer, and he was the official photographer for the Hapsburg family, was the king that time. And after that he was the official photographer of Admiral Horthy¹ whom he knew from World War I, from Vienna. They were together in the so-called “war minisztérium.”² And he had a very well known photography studio in Budapest, at that time, for the upper class, princes and barons and so forth.

01:03:06

And besides it also, he was a high society photographer, let's put it, in short.

Q: What was his name?

A: Paul.

Q: Did you learn photography with him?

A: Yes. I grew up in photography, and I had a brother of mine who was also a photographer, and – but he was 11 years older than I am. And I learned photography from my father, which his famous saying was, "I'm not teaching you. You just watch me." I was just watching him. And when he died, he was right, because I knew most of it from him. Naturally, I had studying, but the actual photography I learned from him; just watching. Besides, speaking about photography, he was mostly doing portraits, studio portraits, and he wanted to – me to go out and do outside work, which I loved to do. As a matter of fact, I didn't want to be a photographer until I was 15, and that's when I – excuse me – that's when I had the feeling that I want to be a photographer. And he also had a photography shop; small, elegant photography shop with cameras. And I decided I want to be a photographer. And I took the first camera, which was a Leica from the shelf. And he wasn't there, but he just came in and he said that, "What are you doing?" I said, "I want to be a photographer. I took this camera I'm starting with." He took the camera out of my

¹ Miklós Horthy

² Ministry (Hungarian)

hand; he put it back on the shelf. He took the oldest camera that exists which – not with films, with plates – and he said, "That's where you start, with the oldest camera." He said, "If you want to know photography, you have to start from scratch."

Q: What kind of photography did he do for Admiral Horthy?

A: He sent to do Admiral Horthy – I don't know if you've ever seen his pictures. They were done by him and he did his portraits. Also, he did all the new – well, that wasn't personal for Admiral, or the new Secretary of State or Secretary of War or this or that, you know?

01:06:00

The official photography for the cabinet. Later on, I was quite young, he sent me up to do it.

Q: What was the impact, then, given the Horthy's position obviously changed with the Nazi movement into Hungary? What happened in terms of his work and the relationship to Horthy?

A: Nothing happened. It was going on until quite – the end of the war. I mean, end of Horthy. I have a funny story to tell you if – I don't know if it belongs here or not, but as I said, every time there was a new cabinet member, he was called up until maybe I was 16 or 17, he started to send me up to the palace to do the picture. So one morning, he got the call, and that was during the war already, maybe in the mid– around 1943, I would say, which was close to the end of the war – but we didn't know that then – that the new Secretary of War will be coming. They changed, because Hungary was starting to get slowly out of the war. So anyway, he got the phone call to send – to go up. So he said, "In the afternoon you have to go up to the palace to do the new Secretary of War." I said, "I cannot do it." "Why not?" I said, "Because" – it's hard to explain it, at that time in Hungary from the early '20s, there was a so-called paramilitary. It was a paramilitary organization which you had to go. It was a must. And they were practicing every week outside the outskirts of Hungary, no Budapest. So I said to him, "Because I have this obligation." He said, "The hell. You don't go there." I said, "I have to, because – Okay. Then ask the head of there what you have to do and he will release you." All right. So I went out there, and there's a train, tram, and at the beginning you had to – is it interesting at all, what I'm saying? At the beginning you had to go to him and ask for permission to leave. He said, "What is the reason?" I said, "Because I have to take the picture of the new Secretary of War." He looked at me and said, "You." I said, "Me."

01:09:00

He said, "Well, I let you do it, because that's the biggest lie I have ever heard. I'll let you do it. But you bring me a paper where you have been Tuesday afternoon between 3:00 and 5:00," because that's – So I went. I did the pictures. And after the picture taking, I knew he was the head of the cabinet, miniszterium for PR and so forth, and I went to him in the building, and I said, "I need the paper that I – he was laughing, and he gave me the official paper of the Hungarian cabinet stating that Thomas Veres was, between 3:00 and 5:00, taking picture of the new Secretary of War. Next time I showed it to him, and he flipped. That's the end of that story.

Q: Tom, could you give me some sense, then, of the first impact of the Nazis when things began to change.

A: Well, certain things did begin to change, and don't call it "the Nazis," because actually – wait. You call Nazis the German Nazis or the Hungarian Nazis?

Q: That's a good question.

A: I know. That's why I'm asking. Which one do you want? Because that was two different period. Because Hungary not necessarily was on the German side, and the historical background comes out now in today's days because of World War I mistake when the biggest part of Hungary was taken away. And Hitler was the only one who was supporting, because he himself was Germany's leader, to get back what was taken away. Now, I don't in history – I have to give you the historical background, which I think it's important because that made Hungary on the side of the Axis.

01:12:03

And that made Horthy on the side of the Axis, because Hungary's part was taken most. Now, today, and in recent history, when Yugoslavia's breaking apart, one and a half million Hungarians were living there, then the Rumania, the Transylvania was taken away when two million Hungarians lived there, and just two days ago when Czechoslovakia, Slovakia, the upper part of Slovakia was – the lower part of Slovakia was mostly Hungarian, a million and a half. And that was the reason. And they were not Hungarian. It was a first only rightist government, and then it became more sliding to the right, more to the right, and at the end it became a Nazi government. But it was not a Nazi government until October – even then it wasn't called, because the Germans occupied Hungary in March 19th, 1944. And from March 19, '44, Horthy lost his power. He was just a figurehead. And in October 15th, when the government was taken over, those are the Hungarian Nazis. Then it became actual Nazi government. Does it answer your question?

Q: It's a good background to it all.

Q: So you came from a Jewish family; correct?

A: Yes.

Q: So there must have been some danger at some point that had an impact on you or your photographic activities were not exactly normal, I presume.

A: No. In all honesty, you know, there were Jewish laws which started in 1939, I think. But there were one, two, three different kind of Jewish laws. But, personally, I was not affected by it direct. Not the photography, and not in personal life. But you knew what was coming. At least you thought you knew what was coming.

01:15:00

And, let me put it this way. My brother, who was 11 years old – 11 years older than I am, he married an American which was accidental. It had nothing to do with Jewish or not Jewish. And he came to the States in 1939. And two days later or three days later, actually, he was called up for labor camp, to serve in labor camp. But he wasn't there. I was there. Except the bad rumors. There were people who were affected; but, personally, I wasn't.

Q: Were you ever called in to labor service?

A: Yes, I was. It was after the Germans came in. 1944, they came, 19 – March 19, and I was called up April 7th, 1944. I went. What happens is a long story, but I went to the upper part of Hungary, and I – I was sent to the huge camp for – which was for only putting together the different outfits and sending either to Russia or Yugoslavia or – I had the luck of the fate that I was sent to a city, which was – Miskolc is the name, and I was there from March – no, from April to August. And in August, another luck of fate was that I was sent – the whole outfit was sent to Budapest. And I worked in a – it's a wood factory making ammunition boxes until – and that was from August till October when the Hungarian Nazis took over. And that's when this outfit was – the word came that the outfit is sending – was sent to Germany. And I said goodbye.

Q: How?

A: How? I knew the captain, and by then we had – I don't know if you read it or – we had exemption for my father and his whole family for the Jewish laws.

01:18:07

And I was in the labor camp but not as a Jew. Exempt and with different armband, and I was in very good friendship with the captain. And I said to the captain, "Goodbye. I'm not going to Germany." And I was stepping down to the left. And that's when I went to Wallenberg,³ who I didn't know it exist, to the Swedish legation.

Q: How did that happen? How did you come into contact with Wallenberg?

A: My father's studio, which I told you, did also foreign legations, people and so forth. And he, at least three years before, two years before, he took picture of Per Anger, who you mentioned. And—

[Technical conversation]

Q: All right. So let's just start again with how you came to make contact with Wallenberg.

A: Yes. My father took his family pictures. He was a young man then, Per Anger, and his wife and little baby and it's about. I would say, two years before, this happened. And he also bought a Leica camera at that time, and I was teaching his wife how to use the camera because of the new baby and so forth. And then, I have seen them weekly as – not friends, but in a friendly

³ Raoul Wallenberg

atmosphere. I – every week I – we used to live in the – it's a well-known building in Budapest, the Gerbeaud palace, or the Gerbeaud building, which was the most famous confectionery in all of Budapest. And in the war, naturally, there was not too many chocolate, and I got a box of chocolate every week, which I gave to his wife, wife, because she loved it. And when I actually – and it was an escape from the labor camp, though I took it easy and I call it I just stepped aside. I, you know – all I knew, my father also had the Swedish passport because he had Swedish friends.

01:21:00

And very little, because I wasn't too much in contact by then with them, but I was able to go home. And he told me about it. He told me, "You have also Swedish passport." And that gave me the idea that I go, when I escape the labor camp, to – right away, next morning, to go to the Swedish legation and look for Per Anger. Now, the way it actually happened was there were hundreds of people, that was on the Buda side, hundreds of people waiting in front of the legation asking for the Swedish passport. But the policeman didn't let them in. So somehow I worked my way to the policeman, and I asked him, "Would you please send a message to Per Anger that Thomas Veres is here and would like to speak to him." In about a half an hour, somebody came out, two other policemen, and said – made on the loud speaker announcement that everybody should immediately leave the territory of the Swedish legation, immediately, except Thomas Veres. And a cold sweat was coming down. And they let me in. And I met Per Anger, and he said, "What can I do for you?" I said, "Look, I just left the labor camp, and I'm asking you what you could help." "Oh, I introduce you to Raoul." And a young man came in. "Raoul," he said, "this is Thomas Veres, friend of mine, photographer." "Oh, yeah. You will be my photographer." And in ten minutes the official paper was made out that Thomas Veres is the official photographer of the Swedish legation of Hungary. And Wallenberg signed it, and he gave it to me. I never used that paper because it wouldn't mean anything at all. But he said, "From now on, you will be my photographer, and you will do documentary what we are doing here for the outside world to show what's happening. You will report directly to me" – not to the usual people who were working on the passports. And that's how I became his photographer.

Q: Do you know –

A: Did I know what?

Q: What you were getting into?

A: No, I did not. I did not. As a matter of fact, I was a little bit skeptical – not a little bit. I was quite skeptical to – "how am I going to take pictures?" And slowly, I learned my lesson.

01:24:00

First I did, as I told you before, many of the actual passport pictures of people who needed it for him, not for direct, not for the people. What we did when he did save people and they didn't have the Swedish papers, we reversed the action. I did the pictures. In the meantime, the officers did

the passport, and the two were together. It was a post-issued passport, which didn't say it, but that's how it happened. When the actual – Can we stop here? I'd like to drink.

[Technical conversation]

Q: Did Wallenberg tell you why he wanted a photographer with him?

A: Yes. Remember, I told you that he said for documentary to show to the outside world what's happening, in his words, as a documentary. Now, I started saying if I remember that one morning, which is November – end of November, I think it was either 27th, 28th or 28th, 29, in the morning, because at that time my parents were still in the Gerbeaud house in our old home. And I went home to sleep. During the day I was with the Swedish legation, what I told you doing passport pictures until then. And then one morning, early morning – he used to start early morning, so did I. Even up to today. I was there before seven o'clock or 6:30. And a small, handwritten note wait for me. And his secretary said, "Tom, Wallenberg sent this note to you." And the note said that "Wait" – "Come out to the – meet" – no, I'm sorry, "Meet me at the Józsefvárosi Pályaudvar," which is the train station at the outskirts of Budapest, and it's a freight station, not for the public. I have never been there. And I went out by train, and I get there and the whole train station was surrounded by Hungarian gendarmes, and there I was with a camera in my pocket with Wallenberg's note.

01:27:00

He was quite, I call it naive, of those dangers. Even if he realize it, he tried to somehow minimize it. So I went to the first gendarme and I started to say half German, half English, half Hungarian, trying to imitate I'm from the Swedish legation and I want to go in. And the guy looked at me like, "Who wants to go in this place?" So I talk my – I had to talk my way in there. I didn't show them any paper. That would be the worst. My mouth took me in there. And the train station had about 10,000, 15,000 men, Jews, ready for deportation. They were the ones who were surrounded from Budapest, the labor camps, who were still at that time, end of November, sent to Germany by train. Later on, it was on foot. This time it was by train, for deportation. And Wallenberg was there and set up a little table. And I went to him and he whispered in my ear, "Tom, take as many pictures as you can." I didn't want to ask him "Will you pose for me" or, you know, "How?" So I had my coat on me and I had a shawl, and I always have a pocketknife with me, and I made a slit in the shawl and prearranged the camera setting on my Leica, and I just – through the shawl I did bring just the lens out and started, through the shawl, shooting. Sometimes I was sitting in his car and shooting from the car, and sometimes I just went around looking left or right like nothing happened and take the pictures. Up till – first of all, somebody was yelling to me, "Tommy, Tommy." It was not my best, but one of my best friends with whom I was in school from first grade until the end of my schooling. We were sitting next to each other. So I didn't want to be recognized, and I whispered to him, you know, "Do something." And I kicked him in the butt, and I said, "Dirty Jew. Go over there," in Hungarian; that the line was standing for information to give that you have Schutzpass⁴ or not, because that's what Wallenberg in a big book had to verify it, "yes, no, yes, no."

⁴ Protective pass (German)

01:30:15

And he was trying, naturally, also for the ones who didn't have it, to say "yes," and go to the left, go to the right, go to left, go to right.

End Tape 1

Tape 2

02:00:53

Q: Tom, as you pick up on your description of that, could you mention something about the kind of danger that you faced and what the danger of taking photographs was.

A: That's self explanatory. What I wanted to follow-up, the next thing I heard, again, "Tommy, Tommy." And this was a first cousin of mine. And the same thing happened. I went to him. The idiot start, "Tommy, Tommy." I said – I kicked him in the butt, too. "Dirty Jew. Go over there." And the third one, which I remember, I can recall, I saw in the line. He was a very well known Hungarian actor, theatrical actor. And usually he played farmers. He was a Jew, but he played farmer, Hungarian farmer. He was very good. He was standing in the line. And he didn't have – I went to him, and I whispered to him. He didn't have the passport. So I went to Wallenberg, and I whispered to him, "That's a famous Hungarian actor, well-known Hungarian actor." He let him go, you know. He looked at the book; "yes." The interesting part of that one was that maybe two or three years later the same actor who was again in the theater came to my photo shop. And naturally he never saw me before. And I said to him, "Have you been in the Józsefvárosi Pályaudvar?" And he said, "Yeah." And I said to him, "Do you know who was the one?" He didn't – He looked like he didn't believe me, that I was actually the one who saved his life. But he was nice, but then, nothing special. You asked me about if there was any danger. So that was the second – I was there two days, and then this kind of deportation start.

02:03:06

From then on they started taking people on foot. And on the second day, there was a friend of mine, too, in the car. And while the procedure was going on, and taking picture, "Let's see what's happening behind the train." And we slid behind the trains, and they were already ready and closed. All you saw in those little cattle wagons, you had clear windows with wrought iron. And hands were sticking out and yelling and crying, "Help, help." You heard people, "Help me out. I give you 100,000 pengó," and this and that, and "I own a coffee house here." So it was a terrible thing, because you only heard it. So with my friend, we slip closer to the wagon and start – it opened amazingly easy. It opened up. Started to open one door, and people slowly – the wood panel which they walked up was still there, and slowly they started to come out. And we were trying to tell them to go to the other side; that's where the procedure is going on. And didn't notice in the big excitement that slowly whispering, "Hungarian police officer." I'm saying "Hungarian police officer," because in the whole thing there was only one German involved, and his name was Dannecker⁵. He was the right-hand of Eichmann⁶ who wasn't there that time. The rest of it was Hungarian gendarmes. The German, Dannecker, he just stood there silently like he's not doing the whole thing. And the couple of Hungarian higher-up, and he was a captain, and he noticed me and started yelling in Hungarian, "Stop immediately." And then pulled his revolver, aiming. Meantime, Wallenberg came over too, somehow, luckily. With the car, they pulled over and pulled up and said, "Jump. Tom, jump!" I would have gotten the Olympic record for this, because I jumped so fast that I jumped in the car. And we closed the door and pulled out.

⁵ Theodor Dannecker

⁶ Adolf Eichmann

They were yelling after us, and that was the last time we went there. Wallenberg said jokingly, "We cannot come back here." So that was the – that showed a little bit of danger.

02:06:00

Next, your question.

Q: How long had you been working with Wallenberg by then? I mean, it's hard for us to understand. This is compressed into a few weeks.

A: My whole affiliation, in lifetime, it's very short. But it was somehow one of my – one of my longest time. It was actually, I can tell you, October 17 when I met him first – I think it was 17. Either 17 – I know. I can tell you another danger that has nothing to do with the legation. Yeah, it was October 17, until I have seen him the last time January the 14th. Yes. And that's the whole period. You asked me that; right?

Q: Yes. And from the time that you met with him in the middle of October to the end of November you were talking about at the railway station –

A: Uh-huh.

Q: – was that the period of his most intense activity of – of going to the places of deportation and pulling people back from –

A: Not only that. Other instance, which just give you one idea – First of all, the Swedish legation had a place under somebody's command which was called Schützlingsprotokoll,⁷ which is in German. I don't know if you speak any German. It's called Schützlingsprotokoll. In that young men were having all kinds of uniforms starting from priest to soldier to Nazi. And when they came in for help, these young men have been going out like – as I said, depending on the situation, in certain uniforms and trying to bring people out. Now, that was not Wallenberg's personal, but it was under his command. It happened that one of the houses – I did many things, you know. When, for instance, the International Ghetto was built, I'm sure you heard about it, it was called the International Ghetto, where not only the Swedish but different other legation who had imitated the Swedish success, Swiss, Vatican and so forth. And was – a certain part in Budapest was called the International Ghetto which was under protection of different legations.

02:09:06

And when there was need for it, I was there for a day to try to get people in, because all the people who lived there, had to go out if they were Christians, and the Jews were coming in under Swedish protection or any other protection. There were – because the plan of the Nazi government was – Hungarian Nazi government was, up till then, from March 19.... Look, if I'm telling something you heard before, then stop me.

Q: Tell us everything.

⁷ Protégé protocol (German)

A: Up till March 19, start – they did not put the Jews in ghettos. They named certain houses yellow-star houses which was mostly occupied by Jews. But that was all over Budapest. Certain house was, the next house wasn't, and they were called yellow-star houses. Now, the plan of the Hungarian Nazi government was, at the end, to empty all those houses and put them in the actual ghetto, which there was a ghetto which was not done and not established, actually, by the Nazis. It was its own ghetto like in every European city. Mostly for the very orthodox Jews. And they lived there for years and years. But as I said, they were concentrated – it was concentration by little. First in houses, and then to put them in the ghetto and then to kill the ghetto. That was the plan. Now, the Swedish or International Ghetto was these people with passports. And not in those, but in one of the houses which was a yellow-star house, I was with Wallenberg, and the phone said that one of the yellow-star houses had been taken away by the Arrow Cross, which is the Hungarian Nazis. So Wallenberg said to me, "Let's go." And I went too, not as photographer, but as interpreter. With him I spoke either German or English. I knew a little English. And we arrived to the house, and the house was empty. And I don't know what floor. There was one Arrow Cross officer who was not only Arrow Cross, but he was – it is hard to translate it from Hungarian. It was a – a certain organization of the Arrow Cross, to put it this way, who was designated strictly for killing.

02:12:03

So this captain was there from the Arrow Cross, and Wallenberg told me – I was the interpreter – "Ask him where are the Jews," because there was nobody in the house. He said, "In the Danube." "Ask him why." He said it as natural as he can, "Because they were dirty Jews." He also said, "They were swimming in the Danube," yeah. So he did not only go out – when he got – there was help here needed, he went out. Now, he said to me that, "There is nothing we can do here," and we left. Next question.

Q: Did he go to the Danube?

A: Pardon?

Q: Did he go to the Danube?

A: No. Why? For what?

Q: I don't know.

A: No, no, no. That was over. No. He said to me, "We cannot help here," so

Q: It strikes me that you were all actually very young, younger than we think looking, say, at Wallenberg's pictures. Could you talk something about your – the youth of the people involved? How old was Wallenberg?

A: He was born in 1912, so thirty – can you count? He was born in 1912. So 32. Yeah. Yeah, he was 32. Now, the people involved, except that organization which I told you that – the

Schützlingsprotokoll, they – all of them were older than I was; yes, quite older. And the technicality, because it was a big organization and a fantastic organization; very well organized, issuing the passports. Now, his idea was to make them, because the Germans – and that was not with the Hungarians; mostly with the Germans – they like legality, and he wanted to make it real legal. And all his speaking with the Hungarian Nazi government or with the Germans, he was proving – in other words, it wasn't just a piece of paper. It was all the documents behind it. Like if it called – it was needed – excuse me – Swedish connection. The Swedish, the letters, proving the Swedish connection have been all documented with each passport.

02:15:00

Against that was the Swiss legations organization who had issued to anybody, without any paperwork background, which that's why it took away a lot from the Swedish organization in legality. And – and also, it was not recognized. Or if it was, it was not recognized like the Swedish. And the reason for that was, that he was a good man, but he did not take as part in it. His name was Lutz,⁸ who was the Swiss legation's – head of the Swiss legation. And he did not take part just – as Wallenberg did, bodily and in mind. So the Swiss legation was called the Baross utca, and anybody – and there would be crowds there. When there was – sooner or later, they just started up without any paperwork. Now, to some people this was right; to some people this was wrong. I don't know if I under– I make myself understand why, but behind the Swiss legations, which was not in the Swiss legation building – it was in the Baross utca, it was called – was mostly the Zionist movement. They were under the cover of Swiss legation doing – they were mostly Zionists.

Q: It strikes me that a lot of what Wallenberg did, because he was acting so quickly and improvising actions all the time –

A: Yes.

Q: – depended a great deal on, as it must have for all of you, speaking different languages, taking each day or each hour as it came. And also what you're referring to, it seems to me that he understood the nature of the Nazi respect for bureaucracy–

A: Yes.

Q: ...and he took advantage of it.

A: Yes.

Q: Will you talk about that?

A: Yes. You said it right. Now, you're mentioning with all different languages, as I said, mostly it was either German or English. And most of the people around him – I forgot to tell you when I met him first he asked me, "Do you speak any other language?" And I told him, "Yes, German."

⁸ Carl Lutz

And that's when he said that, "You'll be my photographer." The organization had, as far the office work, they were people mostly—

02:18:00

- and there was a big electrical and light bulb and radio factory in Budapest, and they were the head of that company. Because they were one of the first ones who – because it was partly Swedish owned, if I remember right, the factory. They were the first ones who received Swedish passport. Now, those passports were actually original Swedish passport, like you say an American passport. The Schutzpass idea came only after that. So there was a difference. And then I – one day I took pictures of that group. He asked me, and he told me, "This is for P.R. purpose. I want to send it." And I – it was very legitimate because he wanted to show his co-workers. And I think you have that picture. That was people I still remember the names, and they were from that factory. And they were head of this – it was a big organization. And as I said before, I don't want to be repetitious, it was well organized.

Q: What was it like to work with Wallenberg? What was he like?

A: I'm saying it now, and I'm saying that for years, and somehow I – just the other day I found out, and I was amazed, because my idea of him was, and is, that he was like the Scarlet Pimpernel. Even his manners was Leslie Howard; were very low key, not ostentatious. Sometimes [gesturing]. He was a very low key, very good looking – not great, but good looking young man. But to me he was always the Scarlet Pimpernel. And just the other day – I don't want to go into the source, but his sister is saying that, and I didn't know that. I'm still puzzled because it happened a few days ago. His sister, I don't know if you heard about her, they were in the movies in the early '40s in London, and he had a problem always, he wasn't doing what he liked to do. And they saw the Scarlet – it wasn't the Scarlet. The second, *Mr. Smith*?

02:21:00

You know, the second, which Leslie Howard played when he was going to Germany with a crew. You never heard of that movie? And he is a British professor, and he's helping Jews out from Germany. *Pimpernel Smith*, that was the movie's title. And supposedly he came out from the movie with his sister and said, "You know, this is what I would like to do." And in just a few days later, I experience that. So, that says how he was; right? That's how he was.

Q: Did he give –

A: But he was, at the same time, very firm in his – in his saying what he is believing, but not bossy. Firm. And I still didn't make up my mind what to call it. Was he brave or naive? Because it looked like that he did not know fear. To give you an example – That was not the last time. It was beginning of January. I think it was the eighth. Almost at the end, because finally Russian troops came in Budapest on 15th, whatever. He told me one afternoon that, "Tom, let's go up to the Buda side to the mountain and let's see where the Russians are," just for fun. All right. He sat in the car, and we had three paid gendarmes who were paid by the legation. You know, they were our people, with machine guns on the side sticking out of the car. And the siege was going

on. I mean, all over, bloody soldiers and shooting. And we go over – it had to be the eighth because after the third the bridges were blown up a day later. And we can go over to the Buda side up to the mountain, and we step out from the car, and the Russians were on the next mountain shooting over here, and we were at the guns shooting over there. And we stepped out and we took pictures. I took pictures of him, which I never had because it was gone. And like – you know, like a tale, a fairy tale standing there. He said, "Let's take pictures," and we took pictures. And in the meantime the war was going on around us. Now, if that was braveness, I don't know; or naivete, I don't know. The fact is that while I was there, I didn't think of the danger.

02:24:00

He took you with his kind of thinking. Took you with him. And we're just trying to give a little picture.

Q: Did he ever talk about his reasons for his actions?

A: No. That was obvious. But, for instance, he liked small jokes. And he had a friend with me there, and we're sitting in the car. He said, "I feel like I was kidnapped in the States." And I thought he was joking. Right after the war, in his life history, I learned that he was here in – going – in the States going to university; I don't know which one, Chicago, or whatever. And he was not actually kidnapped but he was robbed on the way of the – and he said, "I feel like." And I thought he was kidding, and he wasn't. Now, about his work, why no, there was no question about it. It would have been just lost time to speak about it. Not to me, at least.

Q: He seems to have given a lot of courage to other people.

A: Yes, he did, for instance, to me. Can we stop a little?

Q: Sure.

A: Or you said six minutes.

Q: No, that's okay. That was before.

A: That was before.

Q: Do you need a drink?

A: Just a little relaxation.

02:25:31

End of Tape 2.

Tape 3

03:01:00

Q: You were asked whether you were sleeping in your own home during part of this time.

A: I have been sleeping in my home all – all right. I have to think back. First of all, it happened just the day when, after – hold on a second – after the Nazis took over and I was still in that labor camp. And I wanted to know, because I had the right from my captain, as I told you, to go home and sleep. And that weekend, when the Nazis took over, I was home. And then I had to go back to the camp, and I was there for two days, or a day. But I was quite concerned what's happening to my parents because the Nazi government took away the exemptions which Horthy gave. They nullified it. So I – another officer with whom I was well, friendship, I told him and he said, "I'll come with you. I do have, anyway, some pictures to develop and that will be a good excuse." So we went to the – my parents' home, and I started to develop. He came with me in the darkroom, looking at this and that. And suddenly, the bell started non-stop ringing, the doorbell. Now, that was a big place, you must understand. It wasn't only the studio. It was the darkroom. It was the living quarters are all in a big place, like top penthouse or something.

03:03:00

And I was in the dark in the darkroom and I heard voices, "We are looking for the Jew who came in." That was me. Now, nobody would call me a Jew because I didn't have my armband, so somebody in the house who knew me reported it. So in the dark I was still developing. I took off my ring, I took off my [gesturing]. I knew they came for me, particularly. And it wasn't a Jewish house. So when I finished up the development, I didn't want to ruin, but my heart was pounding. So I go out and there is my friend, the officer, Hungarian army officer he was, and three Hungarian Nazis from the Arrow Cross dressed in Arrow Cross uniform with machine guns, with hand grenade, with revolver; name it. They were armed to the [gesturing]. And they started to question me. So my friend the officer, army officer, pulled his revolver and said, "He's with me and nobody is harming him. He's doing work for the Army." And then I recognize. One of them was working downstairs in that confectionery store. And he came to me quite – he recognized me. Said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know him. He's a good Hungarian boy." And he left because my friend pulled his revolver. They were playing with the hand grenades like this. After the war, a year later I was just shooting in my studio, and a detective came with somebody. He said that this guy was arrested; that he killed I don't know how many Jews, and "He is calling that he saved your life, and he wants your help." I went down. It was the Hungarian Arrow Cross guy. And I said, "How many people?" He said, "Hundreds of people. He was taking them down to the Danube." What would you do now? I'm asking you the question. What would you do in my place? Because he was calling me as a witness that I save his life. Answer me. What would you do? That's one occasion I'm asking you a question.

03:06:00

And I saw – Whether I was right or wrong, I said, "I never saw him before." I figured he may have saved me – he was not the guy. It was my friend, the captain, who saved my life because he

pulled his – how do I know how many hundreds of other people he killed? Okay. That's – I wanted to tell this because ever since, if it comes up in me: Did I do right or wrong? I could have saved the life maybe, but my testimony, I cannot go against the other people who he killed – that's number one. Number two, he was not actually the one. He came to me, because many times I went through this, after I was already saved, after he pulled the gun, after he said then "Get out of here," my friend. So the question was – Yeah, I slept home then. Now, after the train story, Wallenberg told me that, "I need this very fast because I want to send it with the next pouch, diplomatic pouch, to Sweden." "When do you need it?" "Tomorrow." So I went home, sleeping. During the nighttime I print it. And this is why I don't know how many – I know I printed 12 prints of each. And there were a lot of pictures. And I took the pictures and the negatives, and it was already getting dark, and I knew he was – Wallenberg was waiting for me at the legation. And I was, at that time, mostly dressed not exactly, but similar to the Nazi uniform. I had boots, I had black riding. So – I didn't wear the armband. So I had the pictures, and I went, naturally, on foot to the legation from my parents' house. It was getting dark, and on one part of the trip was a narrow street, and I have seen people asking for identification over there, and they were Arrow Cross people. So I went to the other side. I was zigzagging until I reached the big square, and by that time it was really dark. And that Arrow Cross guy was also asking for – but I was too late. He was that close, as you to me now. And with a lamp, he was putting the lamp – you know, small lamp with batteries. Flashlight. You see? Flashlight, and asking.

03:09:00

And there was somebody just showing his identification. So I had to make up my mind. If I stop and go this way, he would shoot after me. So I kept going, and when I reached him, the pictures were in my left hand, I said the Hungarian Nazi salute – like "Heil Hitler,"⁹ "Éljen Szálasi."¹⁰ And he greeted me back like this [gesturing], and I kept going. And when I told – I reached the legation and I told Wallenberg what happened. I was still out of breath. And he told me, "Tom, this is getting really dangerous, so from now on you give me all the negatives undeveloped and we'll take care out there." So that was the last time I saw these pictures and the negatives, and all the other negatives that I did later. Now, I still didn't answer the question how long. So one day shortly after this, which had to be the beginning of December, the fighting was – and the air raids were so heavy that I – but the phones were up to the last moment on. So it was so heavy fighting that I called my parents. "I can't get through." It was really very dangerous. "I'm going to sleep here." And from then on I was sleeping at the Üllői út legation. And that's where, later on – I don't know if you know that story, which was January the 10th, two days after the mountains, when we were up in the mountains. One night, it was a snowy night, and one night the Arrow Cross came and the whole legation was taken to the Arrow Cross place, a department of one of the Arrow Cross. So I knew this is the end again. And I had some false identification with me. I told you, I didn't believe in them. That was for the Red Cross, and it had red canvas binding. Very nice papers they were, stating that I worked for the Red Cross. And on the way to the Arrow Cross house, I ate it. It tasted very badly, but I ate it little by little. And I didn't want them to find it on me. And there were too many people.

⁹ Hail Hitler (German)

¹⁰ Long live (Ferenc) Szálasi (Hungarian)

03:12:00

Everybody from the whole legation was taken out. So a lot of people. Don't ask me how many, because – well over a hundred. So when we got to one building where they wanted to put us in the cellar, I heard the Arrow Cross yelling at each other, "Put them on top of each other. They're going to die anyway." And then they didn't put them because there wasn't place for us, so they took it to their house and started to – They liked my boots. Right away I found customer. They said, "This is mine." And we were standing next to the wall, hands up, and there was an old little guy there who was always very – he was a very nice person, but he always asked questions. And as we were standing next to the wall ready to go to the Danube for, you know, he is asking me, "Mr. Veres, do you know which way is the Danube?" So I think I didn't lose my sense of humor. I told him, "Once the shooting starts, you know we'll be there." And the next moment a truckload of Hungarian policemen came with Wallenberg heading. What happened that the Arrow Cross did not note is on the other floor there was a phone connection. The whole room was phones, the woman who was doing the phones, who was the daughter of the head of the department, phoned Wallenberg and reached him. And he collected a truckload of Hungarian policemen, and they came with their truck. And they came in and he said that, "These are my people. You cannot touch them," and took everybody out.

Q: Did Wallenberg sense that a point would come when he couldn't get away with these demands –

A: Yes.

Q: – anymore?

A: Yes, after that. He had to hide himself, and he was hiding in one of the big bank's bank-vault, which was just a block away from where – I knew it from this woman. This building was one block where my parents' home was, and he was hiding in the bank-vault. Only with a password you could go in. And that was the last time I met him,

03:15:00

when I got the phone from the super from the house that the Arrow Cross took away the whole cellar, Christians and Jews, everybody, where they lived, because they discovered a big, huge food supply from the confectionery, and they wanted the food take away. Now, the owner of that whole building and the confectionery, which wasn't just a little confection – now it's called the same name – was Swiss, originally Swiss owned. And one of the families started to yell to the Arrow Cross, "You can't take this away. This is Swiss owned." And the Arrow Cross, as much as they knew, "Swiss? That has to be Jews." And they were not Jews. And they took everybody from the cellar, Jew and not Jew alike, and emptied out the whole building. It was full of chocolate and sugar and you name it, sardines, and they took it. And they took everybody to that department of the Arrow Cross. And the people who they let out who were friends from the building told me that they were – last time they saw them, they were also hands up next to the wall, and they took them down to the Danube the next night to kill them. And the interesting part, besides that is, is that – I don't know if you know that statue – the original statue of

Wallenberg which is standing – was standing in the little square where the International Ghetto was, and I don't know if you know the story. The Russians stole the statue. In any case, interesting part, if you want, I'll tell you, that little park where that statue – and I have that picture – which used to stand about maybe a hundred yards from them, that was the Danube and that's where they killed my parents, 200 yards from his statue which was raised later. Now, the story of the statue, shall I tell you?

Q: I'd like to ask you something else about the photographs.

A: Ask me a question.

Q: The photographs that you have which we're using –

A: They're just minor.

Q: – those people pulled out – pulled out from deportation –

A: Yes.

Q: – could you describe something about that scene and what those people – what the effect on them was of the sudden change of fate.

A: It was not to believe it, almost, you know, this could happen. And then those pictures, Wallenberg was in another car, and I took pictures while the car was following them, went to the left and to the right, you know.

03:18:08

I took some pictures there, some of, and they thought of me that Wallenberg is here. But they never called him Raoul, and anybody would tell you that they knew him that well. Now, if that was out of respect or – but he was not called Raoul. Nobody that I knew called him Raoul. So they said, "Wallenberg is here. Wallenberg is here." And that gave them some courage. And I took pictures. I wasn't Wallenberg, but I was sticking out from the car, and while the car was going slow, I took some pictures. Yes, that feeling was a relief. But it is hard to explain. That friend of mine who called me, "Tom, Tom," you know – excuse me – I took him to one of the buildings, safe buildings, and he didn't, naturally, have papers because I told you that I took him out without papers. And I told him, "Look, this is where I have the little place – studio where I took the passport pictures." I said, "I'm going to take your pictures now, and stay here. You have food, you can sleep here, and I'll be back when I arrange for you with the ready papers." Two days later his mother, who I know from schooling, comes to the legation that, "Tommy, please help now. They took him away." "What do you mean? I told him he was safe there." "Yes, but he went down because his fiancée was living two blocks from there and they caught him on the street." I said, "I'm sorry, I – I – this way I cannot –" And he never returned. He was taken care. So he was saved there, and then died there. You never know.

Q: And that group of people who were pulled out of the actual scene of deportation, they were taken to the Swedish houses for protection? Is that – They were housed, then –

A: First, I'm trying to explain it to you that issue. I told you the legality was important. So first they had to supply them with papers, the ones who didn't have paper. The ones who had the paper were taken to the international houses, Swedish houses. The ones who didn't have the papers, they were not put in there. Not to endanger the others, they were in other houses owned by the legation waiting to have their passports ready. In order to have the passports, first I had to take passport pictures of them.

03:21:00

And then it went on a procedure; three, four days.

[Technical conversation]

Q: Okay. Tom, could you tell me something about what use Wallenberg made of these pictures even while you were all still working?

A: No, except that he sent them out. There was no use there to use them.

Q: I thought I'd read somewhere that they – a few pictures were taken and put in front of the Hungarian Nazi –

A: Yes. You read in a book. I don't know; I wasn't there. So I can tell you only, in all honesty, what I have seen. The use – well, I also did – actually, they were not the pictures. I had, for instance, Xeroxed – now I'm using Xerox, my God – photocopied, all the Schutzpässe and he had them in a book. You had to read them too. So that was an immediate use besides my passport pictures. And then it was – my parents had been taken away January 12th. It had to be January the 10th – no. It was – in any case, I think it was the 10th when I was with him, and he was speaking – I wasn't in the room, but I was waiting outside with the head of the SS¹¹ troops who had been surrounding – the defense of the surrounding of Budapest who were, I don't know Ober- Obersturmbannführer¹² [inaudible], whatever. His name I don't remember, but they exist. And he gave a paper to Wallenberg after a long conversation approving with Wallenberg's conviction that what he should do. He gave a paper that the head of the surrounding SS troops, "Obersturmbannführer," whatever, "is guaranteeing the ghetto" because it was ready to blowup, and in the personal life of every Jew in Budapest. And when he came out, he told me that, "Tom, I need copies on these, as many as you can do." I said, "There is no –" at that time everybody is living already in the cellar. He said, "Do the best you can." And he drove me to my parents' home. And everybody was in the cellar, but I told you two days later, they – and in one little closed – enclosed place, I took developer down and the necessary chemicals, and all night – I don't know how much you know about photography with the old-fashioned way that you put it in between two glasses, but there was no electricity. I used candlelight, and doing it under the candle I made about a hundred prints of that paper, which – And he came for me the next day,

¹¹ Schutzstaffeln [Protection Squads] (German)

¹² Lieutenant Colonel (German)

and that was the last time I saw my parents, and I gave them one of these papers, but didn't help any. And that was a very – that was the last time. But that was one of a kind, you know, that under – no electricity. But he didn't say to me, "How did you do that?" He didn't even ask. For everything, this gives – his mind was set at the end to say it. But "how" and "when" and "why" and "how did you," that doesn't interest him.

Q: Had you ever seen him scared?

A: No. Again, I don't know if that was braveness or naivete. No, I haven't. I told you stories of him which – no, definitely no. And even if he was, I didn't see him showing it. Next question.

Q: I take it he kept very calm and cool through most circumstances.

A: Always, always. Not one time have I seen him excited or – you know, that – showed – showing any kind of emotion like this. Joking, yes, which I told you when we have been going up to the mountain, but not – He was a calm, cool man.

Q: Just for the record, would you tell me what became of your parents.

A: Pardon?

Q: Would you just tell us for the record what became of your parents.

A: I told you. I told you that they were killed at the Danube. I told you before; remember?

03:27:00

Q: Right at that time; right.

A: Hmm?

Q: Very close to the time that they were taken from your house.

A: Yeah. That night. I didn't know at that time. It took me about a half a year to know it and to sink in. They were shot in the Danube. It's –

Q: And your brother.

A: My brother was here in the States. He was here since 1939. He's not alive, he died of cancer but – in 1974. And even he, when I told him stories, he did not realize the full weight of the history of it. And when I came here, I, I wanted to come here for a long time, and I sent papers, my uncle who lived here in Los Angeles since the mid-thirties, and I gave him the original book on Wallenberg which I have to write, and I gave him papers; among them, one which stated that I am the official photographer of the Swedish legation. And nobody knew about Wallenberg in 1956. And when I started to try to tell stories, you know, either they didn't understand or they didn't believe it. They thought I'm making it up. If they believed it, it sounded too strong, until I

mentioned it much earlier that – in 1980 or '81, I have met one Sunday morning in the Sunday Times magazine my pictures and his story. And it was an up and down. For a while it was interesting, and then it again became a non-person, and then again something happened. I believe that in 19– I think it was '56 that I read about him, that Gromyko,¹³ the Russian foreign minister, admitted that he died in Russian prison, which nobody believed, but it was in '47. That was the first time that they have spoken about him. I told you the last time I saw him in that vault.

End of Tape 3

¹³ Andrei Gromyko

Tape 4

4:01:00

Q: Okay. When you're ready, would you describe the last time you saw Wallenberg and what happened after that.

03:29:52

04:01:23

[Technical conversation]

A: What happened afterward? Okay. When I got the phone call from the super in the building where my parents were, I was trying to get through. Knowing Wallenberg's hiding place, I wanted to speak to him. But the fighting was so strong, I couldn't get through. I mean, really. You can imagine that I was trying. It was impossible. Took me two days to get through. And I know the password. And as I have mentioned it, the bank-vault was a block away from the Gerbeaud house. They had been taken away. So I went to the bank-vault, said the password, and then he was coming out. And I told him what happened. He said, "Tom, you know it's too late now. I can't do anything." So a few other people came out. There were just a few people in the bank-vault. And we went to the big – it was like a – it's a bank, you know, with all the windows there. And we were standing there in a round circle with the people who came out who were with him. They were important people for the legation. And his chauffeur, Vili¹⁴. And we were standing in a circle, and the fighting outside is going on, and he started saying that, "I'm going to Debrecen to pick up the, the new Hungarian – with new Hungarian government to plan for the future."

04:03:15

I don't know if you know it. There was a big plan of his. He wanted to – the plan was almost ready. After the war, relief, and help to people. And it wasn't only for Jews. It was for the whole country. It was called the "Nansen Plan." And as we were standing there – And he also asked me if I want to come with him, and I said, "I can't, you know. I'm looking –" I didn't know what happened to my parents, because I told you it took me a half a year. And so I said, "No, I can't. I'm looking for my parents, to help." And as we were standing in that circle, one of them was about that size [gesturing], he went flat on his stomach and down on the floor. As it turned out, from a stray bullet, he was shot in the heart, just as we were standing there. And that was the last time I have seen him, which was – it had to be either 14 or 15 of January. Now, about the statue, which you didn't ask me, and you said you don't know. Do you know about the statue?

[Technical conversation]

Many years after, they raised money to raise a statue for him. And I know the artist and the people who were involved, and they asked me to take the little – it's called maquette of the statue

¹⁴ Vilmos Langfelder

and I was working. On the pedestal of the statue was his profile, and the last eight or ten pictures, I was working with the artist, was done after – in the photography, what I did on him. That remind me; I never saw those pictures again. So I worked for a while with the artist; you know, in telling, showing pictures, this and that. And that was – the statue itself was a big snake with a man killing the snake.

04:06:12

And on the side on the pedestal was his name and saying thanks for him from the Hungarian people. And they called me that – I don't know what day. Maybe it was a Friday, that the statue is up; "We just finished it," in that park I have told you, "and take some pictures before the official unveiling on Sunday." And that never came because the statue disappeared in the thin air. Now you have to live those times; that was already the Russians, the Communists, the everybody. Why? Everybody knew that they didn't like him. So obviously it was stolen by the Russians. Now, you don't – that was a big statue from here to there [gesturing]. A year later, I go to one of the exhibitions, art exhibitions, in Budapest, and the statue is there without his profile and without the inscription, and the statue's name was "Fight Against Fascism." Years later, I was already here, and I was reading – somebody sent me a Hungarian magazine, and I see the statue there. Said that – what was his name? The Indonesian head – Sukarno¹⁵. Sukarno was in Budapest and fell in love with a picture which – which title is "The Snake Killer," and he bought it for his garden many moons later. And obviously, supposedly, right now it's standing – they must have different versions. Cannot be the same. But the same statue is one of the – in front of the pharmaceutical company – you're shaking your – you heard it? No. Okay...pharmaceutical companies in Hungary; standing there. I don't know if it has a title or not, but I had the – I read it also, and I know it's true. So that's the story of one of his – And then they raised statues today, which has nothing to do with that one, and doesn't remember Wallenberg to me at all, so....

Q: I wanted to go back to in the times that you were with Wallenberg and you were photographing him when he was–

04:09:05

A: Yes.

Q: ...confronting the deportation attempts, what's the most surprising thing that he did? What surprised you or astonished you the most in his actions?

A: Nothing astonished me; nothing. Because I don't know how to explain it to you, but the whole thing was like a smooth operation. It, it, it was natural. You didn't question why it happened; what is it. No. I don't know if it gives you an explanation or not, but there were no surprises. Your whole concentration was to help to people. But that was not surprising. Surprising was the day by day happenings that they called you from here or for there. They taking people here and come out from the big factory or – that was surprising. It wasn't surprising. It was a thing that you worked on it, but not surprised. I cannot tell you one incident which I would call that surprising. Sorry.

¹⁵ Achmed Sukarno

Q: And yet what he did was so unique.

A: Yes. That's surprising. That's the surprising. Unique and still taking it as nothing happened.

Q: Do you think anyone else could have done similar things?

A: Well, you're asking me that. I don't know. It took a special man to do it. But how many special men are coming up when the time comes and stand up. Well, maybe there are lots of them, but they are not there when it's needed. Is it surprising that it's not surprising? It is the most natural, I cannot give you any other description than it was just so natural, so smooth. And it was a great deal – deed, I mean.

Q: Can you give us the picture of any other interactions he had, you know, before that end of November railway station? Any other scenes of that kind you could describe for us?

A: Well, I gave you the – that house when everybody was taken. I can – For instance, when I told you the head of the SS group, they were going on the street. Nobody was on the street.

04:12:05

Nobody asked, "How come we are all alone on the street." I'm trying to visualize it. And it was he – you wouldn't know because you have to go deeper. Somebody who had the connection between the Budapest and – that we had people built in, who were working for us but they were outside, either Nazis or – and, and his chauffeur, that's when we were.... No, I'm sorry. That happened when we were stepping out from the car and going to make the copy, copy negatives. You know, when I told you.... Something wrong?

Q: We're getting a high-pitched tone somewhere. Sorry.

A: Okay? Where were we? We were on the street, stepping out. And I'm just trying to give you that nobody dared to go out on the street, and there we were, walking on the street. Now, this is nothing because you walk on the street every day, but that was some kind of special event, you know. And came three; two of them Arrow Cross uniform, and then other one, a streetcar conductor with his streetcar uniform, and – but with the Nazi armband. So they came ahead, and we just went by. And after that, we were just talking. "They could have stopped us. They could have stopped us." Now, this is true. That happened quite late, before the Russians came in. Maybe two weeks later, I was passing by – as a matter of fact, Genya¹⁶ showed me a picture. The Communist party's headquarter, I passed by, and they had armed guards in the doorway, guns, and the Russians were already in two weeks later. What do you think? Who was the guy standing in the – with the Communist, red armband?

04:15:00

¹⁶ Genya Markon

The streetcar conductor I saw two weeks before with the Arrow Cross band. That's – I know it's not easy to believe, but I remembered his face. I'm very good with faces; very bad with names. I didn't ask his name.

Q: Did you understand the power your photographs could have?

A: You know what? I think I did. As a matter of fact, not only photographs. I did movies. I mean, today, home movie. I had a little Kodak. At that time it was a big thing, but eight millimeter movie. Now, many of the films never reached anywhere because, as I mentioned to you, in the last days he was hiding, so I had movies, and I was all the time with a – I don't know why, but – and he was going, too, all the time. In German it's rucksack, when you go to – back knap– backpack. I had all my things in there. Backpack; cameras, undeveloped films. And when the biggest fight was going on where the legation was, we were in the cellar, certain part, a few of us, and suddenly a Russian comes in. Here we are. The Russians occupied us. He was standing at the top of the stairway. He said – don't tell me how we understood it, but he said, "I'm going to stand here to stand guard." Let's say this is over there. Half an hour later, on the other side the wall opens and the German head comes in and says, "Anybody here?" you know. And we told him, "Hey, get out of here. The Russian's are over there." No, he is going to collect the Germans, and he did. So we knew there will be a big fight going on there. And we broke through the wall which has a certain spot in it just for this purpose, and went, which was connected with other big cellar where at least a hundred people, women and children were. Good enough. Fifteen minutes later, the German comes in with machine gun, and that was deliberate up high, you know. We had to go – And on the other side, the Russian. And they started to shoot each other above our head. And in the short period it was so full of gunpowder, smoke; children cried, and women. So we said, "Let's try, and try to get out from here."

04:18:05

And slowly we broke out the next wall, and trying the children and women. And my knapsack was in my way, and I gave it to somebody, friend, and I said, "Look. I'm helping the women and children. You come after us anyway." And we – took us a day to go about ten houses from cellar to cellar. Two hours later, this friend of mine showed up. I said, "Where's my knapsack?" He said, "The Russians took it." There went my films, my cameras, everything. What was not developed, what was not given to him yet; everything. Ask question.

Q: Was it known really directly there in Budapest what was happening in Auschwitz with the Hungarian Jews?

A: You mean at that time?

Q: The intense rate of killing that was taking place.

A: Wait. Are you speaking after the war or during the –

Q: In '44, during that time.

A: Not really. You heard the stories, but it wasn't accepted or – or – or proven as a known fact. They was speaking about.

Q: Did Wallenberg know, clearly?

A: I don't know. I really don't know. I never spoke about things – what happened after. But for instance, when I was in Miskolc, that was before Wallenberg, which I told you, in labor camp. As you know, the countryside was almost clean from Jews by the time he came, which was in July. And half of the outfit was from Miskolc, and the parents – parents were in the ghetto, and we help them to pack and – you know, because they were deported. And the trains were going next where we had our outfit. And one morning next to the train there were handwritten signs to the boys, some of the boys, "Goodbye.

04:21:08

I don't know if I'll see you." And we were picking up and giving whoever it belonged to. And a few weeks later, postcards were coming for the boys, and it said – I don't know if you ever heard the name Waldsee. That was the code name of Auschwitz, and saying it was – as the location. Do you speak any German? It sounds like a resort area, you know? Waldsee. And they stereotype. They said, "We are feeling good, we are working; we are feeling good, we are working; we are working, we are feeling good. Everything is fine." And that was Auschwitz. But we didn't know it. And they were boys who thought, "Oh, that's all right," you know. They are working. And the name was – you never heard? Waldsee, but there was no talk about Auschwitz. Waldsee was Auschwitz. If he knew it, I don't know. I don't – maybe. I don't know. I'm trying to give you only what I know without any question.

Q: Are there any other people who worked directly with you with Wallenberg that stand out in your mind?

A: Well, there were the – who was with him in the vault. Hugo Wohl who was the head of the electrical factory, and Forgács¹⁷ who was his – they were all connected with that factory, and their sons. I was in good. And then there are people whose name I don't mention because I know they have nothing to do with it in their life. It turned out that they don't want to be heard. I wanted to say something. I interrupted myself, but I don't know what it was. Yeah; that – Remember when I told you when I was introduced to him, he said that "You will report direct to me." And for good reasons I kept my distance, and with his thoughts also, that I did not mingle too much. First of all, you didn't know – what I was doing was undercover even there, because you didn't know who is squealing on who and what – you know, to be caught. So I had to be very careful telling people this I'm taking pictures.

04:24:09

So I had a special place there. I was in connection with many people, but many of them didn't even know that I exist. And as I told you, I just – I know not many, maybe two or three names, which I can't mention because I know that they wouldn't want. Why, don't ask me.

¹⁷ Vilmos Forgács

Q: Did Wallenberg change your life?

A: First of all, he was life. Not intentionally or unintentionally, but I wouldn't be here. Maybe I would with some other – I don't know – In my whole life, it's not a daily routine, but he left a big mark on my way of thinking even if I don't think about him directly. So when I had a chance, I was trying to help. Not in those circumstances, but I had my other later on with the Communist government and so forth, which I was against. So he left – he left a deep mark on my mind and in my heart, in a good way. Sometimes I was just suppressing, you know, because for a while, when – when nobody was listening, I was trying to tell a story and was trying to tell people about him and they didn't listen, so I buried it. And it's – I call it lately, maybe in the last few years. And then I saw many that I – I'm still not active because even today, I don't see too many things right about what people are doing. Many are just there; not just there, but making money.

Q: What would you like younger people who are not familiar with his actions, what would you want them to know about what he did, what he was, what he is for you?

04:27:06

A: For me or for them?

Q: In the sense of what he did, what that represents, how that changed you for the good. How would you communicate that to younger people?

A: It's easy to live when there is no trouble in your life, and you will find only few people who will stand up, and you never know where the trouble comes; from the right or to the left. And try to be a mensch, which he was. That's it, a mensch, which he was. Because you don't find this type every day, and you may not recognize it when there is no trouble. But you do know who it is by the action when it's there. And very few people stand up when it's needed. And you think they are good friends, and they don't stand up for you. And do not wait for the time when the trouble is coming. Try to prevent the trouble. Because no matter where it happens in the world, should it be Hungary, Germany, the United States, the gutter people are there, no matter what and where they were born. And the same bad idea could be anywhere. Should it be called "Communist," should it be called "Nazi," they come out from the gutter. They float out when the people are not there to prevent it. That's it. I hope it says it.

4:29:00

Conclusion of Interview.