

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Steven Fennes
March 25, 2005
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PREFACE

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STEVEN FENVES
March 25, 2005

Beginning Tape One

Question: Good morning, Steven.

Answer: Good morning.

Q: Welcome.

A: Thank you.

Q: Tell me what your name was at birth.

A: St -- Steven Joseph Fenves -- Fenyves.

Q: Fenyves --

A: Right.

Q: -- you say actually.

A: Right.

Q: And wha -- how do you pronounce it now? Just Fenves?

A: Yes, when I got my citizenship I -- I dropped it, th-the J, because the -- the Croatian spelling is with a J rather than the Y.

Q: Right.

A: And nobody could pronounce it so I -- I just dropped it.

Q: Right. And what was it -- what was your date of birth?

A: June sixth, 1931.

Q: And where?

A: In Subotica, then part -- then Yugoslavia, now it's part of Serbia.

Q: And then in the middle it became part of something else, right, yeah.

A: Well, before World War I, it was Hungary; 12 years before my birth it became Yugoslavia and during the war it was re-occupied by Hungary.

Q: Let's get a sense of your family a little bit. You have a mother, father and a sister, yes?

A: Right.

Q: Let's talk about your dad first.

A: Okay.

Q: What was his name?

A: He was born Louis Friedman. He and his brother changed their name. That was the great vogue in Hungary that everybody was taking on Hungarian names, so they changed their name to Fenyves.

Q: Huh. And he was born in?

A: He was born in Mako.

Q: Right.

A: In southern Hungary.

Q: And what was he doing for a living?

A: Well, let me say a little bit on my family history?

Q: Sure.

A: His older brother Ferenc, even in high school, became very much in-involved with literature and journalism. Went to the University of Budapest to get a degree in law, although there is some claims that he never got his law degree, which doesn't surprise me because he -- his interest was in -- in journalism. He came back to Subotica and at some very early age, still in his 20's, became editor of a newspaper. My father, as soon as he finished high school went to work for a lumber mill in what is now Croatia, to support his brother. My uncle married very well. He

married a woman from Temesvar, now Timisoara. The daughter of a very well-to-do porcelain manufacturer. And I suspect with hi -- with her dowry, my uncle bought the newspaper -- the printing plant. And he was the editor, my father was the manager. My uncle died in 1935, and then my father became the editor and my aunt became the manager.

Q: And did your father actually have an interest in journalism too? He must have.

A: He had an interest in journalism; he was not a journalist. I'm sure th--there is a -- a booklet that came out in 90 -- 1994, there was a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of -- of the deportation, and there was a booklet about Jews in Subotica, and it talks at length about my uncle and then a short paragraph that after his brother's death, Louis Fenyves became nominally the editor, but most of the editing was done by x and y.

Q: I see.

A: So yeah, he was not a journalist, my dad.

Q: So you think he was more of an administrator than --

A: He was a -- yeah, right.

Q: -- than he was.

A: Right.

Q: And -- whereas your uncle was really a journalist?

A: Right, right.

Q: I see. What kind of a person was your father in your memory of him as a kid? Were you close?

A: Yes, we were close. The printing plant was in the same building where y -- where th --

Q: Where you lived?

A: -- where we lived. We had a two story building. My uncle's apartment on -- on the first floor, ours on the second floor editorial offices, business office and then a big plant. So we were always very deeply involved with the plant, and I -- as a child I couldn't go to sleep unless I heard the presses rolling.

Q: And why was that, it wa-was it --

A: I mean, that -- that -- that was the --

Q: -- it -- you don't -- that was just --

A: -- that was -- uh-huh, the normal way of things. So I -- I would visit my father's office and yeah, we -- we spent time together, but -- we -- I -- my friends and I would -- did a lot of roaming around the plant -- plant, we liked to do that.

Q: Was your father a serious guy, was he a -- a sort of a lighter person? Do you -- do you recollect as a kid?

A: Ah -- yeah, he was a serious guy, he -- he would -- enjoyed helping his workers. Several people started small businesses. One of them started a small machine shop where during the occupation I actually worked. So he was very helpful to -- to -- who -- very involved in the lives of the -- his employees.

Q: Uh-huh. And his brother Ferenc, was he older?

A: He was, yes, three or four years older.

Q: Three or four years older, and did he -- wh-what did he die of, do you know?

A: Heart attack.

Q: He had a heart attack. Do you have any recollection? You would have been four years --

A: Oh yes, I --

Q: Really?

A: -- yeah, my -- my cousin says it's impossible, but I -- but it -- coming home from nursery school, had to get -- go up the stairs and in the landing was the door to their apartment and my uncle was there, waiting to be admitted. He never carried a key, he rapped on the frosted glass window to be let in by the maid. And I always timed that -- that I would get in there the same time, and we all -- he always had jokes for me [indecipherable]

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: So you liked him a lot, you can tell.

A: Oh yes, yes, yes.

Q: Was your father like him, or were they very -- quite different?

A: I think my father was like him, he -- yeah, he -- yeah, enjoyed, yeah. He certainly enjoyed life, I -- I remember after school -- after the paper was put -- put to bed, he would go to the coffee house and -- and have coffee with his friends and I would go and -- and sit on his lap, and --

Q: Really, yes.

A: Yeah.

Q: And tell me about your mother. Wa-was there -- they were similar in age, or was he consi -- older, or --

A: My father was born in 1889, my mother was born in 1897. So there was eight years age difference.

Q: You me -- 1897.

A: 1897.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And she was born in -- in 18 -- in --

Q: Cause you said 1997.

A: Oh. 18 -- I'm sorry.

Q: Yes.

A: 1897.

Q: Right.

A: And she was born in -- I'm sorry. He was born in 1887, she was born in 19 -- in 1899.

Q: 1899, uh-huh.

A: She was a -- I think she was sort of a withdrawn person in a way. She -- she came from a -- a much more prominent family than my father. My fathers -- was -- my -- my grandfather started out as a tanner in -- in this small shtetl in Mako, then moved to Subotica and -- and a lumber dealership. And s -- I think both my uncle and my father married up.

Q: Up.

A: My -- my mother's family father was a lawyer. The first Jewish professor at the high school was a relative, couple univers -- professors at the University of Budapest were relatives. My grandmother's family was Taussig. He was one of the more -- her father was one of the more prominent merchants. And the -- so my mother was raised in a much more upper class family. She finished high school in Subard -- in what was then Subard, to coin the Hungarian name. Went to Budapest, got her degree in -- in graphic -- graphic arts, and came back to Subotica. My understanding is that she did some artwork for my father's newspaper and that's how they met. My understanding is that the family was opposed to the marriage and they sent her off on a grand tour, and the few pieces of -- of her work that we have is mostly '25 - '26 - '27, Vienna, Italy, France. But then they got married. She did not continue her art as -- work as seriously as my

sister and I think she should have. Her studio was shared wi-wit-with -- our playroom was her studio. She -- she, especially when my aunt became the manager of the printing plant, for all practical purposes, my mother was her social secretary.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Her coffee -- my aunt's coffee was at our house, hosted by my mother.

Q: I see --

A: So --

Q: So it changed --

A: Yeah, so it -- it -- it was a -- strange relation -- I mean, all the important gifts, my first watch, my first bicycle, etcetera, came from my aunt, not from my parents.

Q: That's interesting.

A: But my mother was a very, very warm person.

Q: But you said she was withdrawn in some [indecipherable]

A: She -- yeah, she -- she had a close set of friends, but -- but she wa -- I wouldn't call her outgoing at all.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And what was her name?

A: Claire Gered.

Q: That's Gered -- g -- g-e-r --

A: G-e-r-e-d.

Q: -- e-d. Uh-huh. You know, I forgot to ask you, what was the name of the newspaper?

A: The name of the newspaper is Naplo, which means daily.

Q: Right.

A: The name of the -- of the plant was Minerva.

Q: Uh-huh. Now, what -- was it unusual for a woman -- and I know you wouldn't know this as a kid, but as you grew up an adult, to go and get as much edu -- education as your mother did?

A: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. Several of the -- my aunts, several of the woman I knew --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- had -- had university degrees.

Q: Do you think your mother felt bad because she was not continuing her art? Do you think -- you don't -- you have no idea.

A: I don't know, I don't know.

Q: Yeah.

A: She certainly encouraged the two of us to -- to do art.

Q: To do it.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did she teach you?

A: She coached, she -- yeah sh-she supervised and she didn't explicitly teach us.

Q: Right.

A: But she certainly encouraged us.

Q: That's interesting because you were in the same room with her, so I imagine imitation --

A: Oh yes, definitely --

Q: -- was something that you wanted to do.

A: -- definitely, right, yeah.

Q: Right?

A: Yeah.

Q: And tell me about your sister.

A: My sister is two years older than I.

Q: And her name.

A: Ear -- her name is Esther, and she still uses the Hungarian wording of Eszti rather than Esther, with the Hungarian spelling of s-z. She was always a very outgoing, very precocious, very headstrong girl. The few pictures that we have, always are red hair, and very long plaits. She -- a -- during the Hungarian occupation she didn't get into high school, so her education was sort of stopped at sixth grade, although in Paris she attended the Sorbonne. She's very knowledgeable, very, very bright person. We -- we [indecipherable] reconnected after the war, we left Yugoslavia together, were in France together, came to the States together. And for the last 20 - some years she has been living in Washington.

Q: She's been living in Washington?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh. So that must be very nice for you, living nearby.

A: Oh yes, yeah, yes.

Q: Yes. And as children, she was a couple of years older --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- were you close, or was this be --

A: Oh yeah, we were quite close, we -- we had -- I mean our life was governed by our governess.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so we were always together. We were both -- you can tell from our age, depression children. Most of -- most of our friends were single children, or one or two children, particularly

many of her -- her classmates were -- were s -- only children. And one of the things I didn't care for is that I was dragged through all the birthday parties of her -- of her girlfriends. Which --

Q: You didn't like that?

A: I didn't like that at all.

Q: Was she dragged through the birthday parties of your --

A: No, no, no.

Q: -- your friends? No?

A: No.

Q: Only you?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So tell me, you had a governess and -- throughout your childhood, until --

A: Til the -- the -- the day of the occupation.

Q: The day of the occupation. Was -- w-would you have considered your family middle class, or more than that?

A: Well, cook, maid, governess, chauffeur.

Q: That seems like a lot.

A: But you have to recognize that Yugoslavia was a det -- dirt poor country, and if you could afford to buy a car, you could certainly afford to build a second story on top of the garage and support one more fa -- one additional family.

Q: I see.

A: That's how it worked. Our -- the governess was an important thing. My parents generation was totally saturated with German culture. And the town had a large number of -- of ethnic Germans, Swabians. So -- so as not to learn that ugly street dialect, you had to have a governess

to teach you Volksdeutsche. And yeah, governess was a large part of -- of the life of most of my -- most of my friends.

Q: It was?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was just typical in your [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, terrible woman.

Q: Yeah, I was going to ask you what's she like? She was terrible?

A: Aha, aha, cold, cold woman. Incredibly cold woman. Fanatically religious, Catholic. Dragged us to churches and services all the time. The day -- the day they occu -- a-army came in, she left in a big show, and I thought that was the greatest thing.

Q: That was the best thing.

A: Yeah, right.

Q: Did you complain to your mother and father about this woman?

A: Oh yeah, but that, I mean --

Q: Didn't matter.

A: No, no.

Q: But it seems like an odd choice, given your description of your parents, that they would choose someone who was quite like this.

A: I don't know.

Q: [indecipherable] you know.

A: I mean -- I mean it's -- it's di -- I'm just trying to make a mental image.

Q: So what did she --

A: I can't think of any governess of any of my friends that was a pleasant person.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. Now, I mean, that thought was going on while you were asking a question. No, I can't.

Q: You can't think of any one?

A: No.

Q: So what -- what did she do for you? I mean, what di -- what was the -- what -- what did a governess do? Cause I've never had one, I don't know.

A: Well, first of all, in her presence we only spoke German. You know, the fact that I spoke Hungarian at home, Serbian in school, and German with my governess, that -- that never seemed to me strange un-until my children were all speaking one language. Well, after school -- I think she would wait for us at sc-school, and we had to go on long wa -- take long walks. The -- one of the daily excitements of the city is that the Orient Express changed engines. Hungarian engine was uncoupled, and the Yugoslav engine was --

Q: Really? Uh-huh.

A: -- coupled in. So that was a big event to go to, to the railroad station to see the Orient Express. First time I saw a black person was -- was on that train. Then -- then we had another circuit for a longer trip, longer walk.

Q: Was that -- let me go back for a second, was that a big deal, that you saw a black person?

A: Well no, no.

Q: You just didn't -- you just wouldn't -- clearly you --

A: I -- it -- it --

Q: -- it's a long time memory for you.

A: -- right, right, oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Long walks. So, you know, we were just in her presence much more so than in our par -- parents presence.

Q: Did she smile? I mean, did she have any -- she had no ni -- she apparently had no nice qualities as far as you're concerned?

A: No, she was not a nice person, no.

Q: And Esther felt exactly the same way?

A: Oh yes, yes, yeah. And we were much closer to the -- to the cook and the maids. Maids never lasted very long, I don't know why, but the cook wa-was the same one for -- for years, for all that I remember.

Q: Really?

A: And we were close to her.

Q: And did the maid and the cook live in their own apartments and the governess lived with you?

A: The governess lived with us. The apartment building had sort of an extension and past the kitchen was -- was a two room apartment that the -- the maid and the cook shared.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: The cook was married and would take off some nights. I think she had Wednesday afternoon off. But they had a -- a two bedroom apartment.

Q: Right. And who cooked when she had time off? Did your mother?

A: My mother prepared -- da -- did a lot of planning, I don't -- meal planning, I don't know --

Q: Whether she cooked.

A: -- whether she cooked. One of --

Q: Go ahead.

A: -- one of the -- one of the few things that our cooked saved for us was, in addition to -- to the small portion of my mother's artwork was my mother's very thick recipe book.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Huh. Did you ever go in the kitchen?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: So you were allowed to roam around the --

A: Oh yeah, yes.

Q: And did you like -- you liked the cook and you liked the maid?

A: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Right.

Q: Did you have an animal? Any pets?

A: My cousins downstairs had a -- had a cocker spaniel, I -- I didn't have one.

Q: You didn't have any? Did you like --

A: No.

Q: -- did you like the cocker spaniel?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes. And then in the late 30's, my oldest cousin, who was yu -- slated to take over the -- the company, decided that he didn't want that, that he wanted to be a gentleman farmer. And my aunt, in her usual fashion, went out and bought a large farm, and converted it to sort of a model farm. Brought -- mi -- sent her son to -- to Zurich, to [indecipherable] Federal Technical Institute

to get a degree in agronomy. And she brought back Swiss cows and a -- prize cows, and -- and I spent a good part of my summers on the farm. So tha -- surrounded by animals.

Q: Did the governess go with you?

A: No.

Q: No. She stayed home? She stayed in the house?

A: Yeah. I don't think my sister was there. I -- I liked to be on the farm, I enjoyed it.

Q: You liked that?

A: Yeah, right.

Q: You liked the cows?

A: Yes, we were herding the cows.

Q: And they were do -- they were milking the cows, or --

A: Yes.

Q: -- it wasn't for slaughter?

A: No, no. And there was a prize bull --

Q: Right.

A: -- and I -- I exhibited him at -- at fairs.

Q: Yes?

A: Yeah.

Q: Huh. It didn't -- it -- it was easy for you talking these three languages because you just --

A: Oh yes, yeah.

Q: And were you s -- were you speaking Serbian very well when you were in school?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: So you were fluent?

A: Yeah. I remember after the war, after we returned from Auschwitz, a new -- a crop of teachers came, and I presumed school in -- in Serbian. And there was this literature teacher who came storming in the -- in the room and handed out papers with terrible grades on that. He said, "None of you think Serbian, you just all think Hungarian and then translate it into Serbian." And we took that as a terrible affront, a terrible insult. I -- I felt that I was in good in Serbian as anything else.

Q: As in -- right.

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, why were you speaking Hungarian to your parents rather than Serbian or even German? Do you -- do you know why?

A: They were part of the Hungarian Jewish culture.

Q: I see. But still, German was very important to them.

A: German was very important to them.

Q: And th -- what -- they were fluent in German, I gather, as well.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes. Tell me about school, did you like school?

A: At first I had -- I remember I had terrible sep -- separation anxieties in -- in kindergarten.

They delegated me to recite a poem about motherhood and I couldn't get through it, I broke into tears.

Q: Oh.

A: But after that, it was -- it was great, yeah. Again, Yugoslavia was a dirt poor country. It had compulsory education except it couldn't afford it. So any organization, religious community, etcetera, that could put up a building and hire three teachers, the government supplied the fourth

teacher and it became a government school. So they -- directly across the street from our house, in the -- in the courtyard of the -- of the synagogue was the Jewish grade school. I mean, it was a state school, but it was run by the Jewish community. Probably 80 percent of the students Jewish.

Q: Jewish, mm-hm.

A: And that's where I went for first four grades. I -- I liked it a lot.

Q: You did.

A: Yeah.

Q: At -- so the neighborhood you lived in was primarily Jewish, or all Jewish?

A: Jews -- well, again, Subotica had about 6000 Jews.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Divided, from what I understand, sort of equally between one large Reform congregation, and multiple -- multiple, multiple small shuls. The -- the Jewish community was very divided. They -- those that immigrated -- that came from -- came in the middle of the -- of the 19th century, mostly from Arabia and Bohemia, n-now Czechoslovakia, where German speaking touched by the Mendelssohn [indecipherable] enlightenment and belong to a Reform congregation in Hungary -- Hungary had a three way split -- Reform, which it was called neolog, and the Orthodox, and a third group that didn't last very long called sинагуа al -- as before, that didn't accept the separation. So there was this large Reform congregation, a huge temple designed by my great uncle. I don't like the word assimilated, I -- I think acculturated is a better term. The other half came almost exclusively from across the mountains, from Galicia, touched by -- you know, influenced by Baal Shem Tov and Hassidism and there was very little contact between the two communities.

Q: So even though the community is very small, it's very divided.

A: It's very divided. The -- now, to ans -- long answer to question, the Orthodox community was highly concentrated. The Reform Jews lived all -- all over town, all over the better parts of the town, so it wasn't a Jewish neighborhood at all.

Q: I see. W -- so, you had a mixed bunch of friends, as did your sister?

A: My school friends were largely Jewish. Yeah, I had so -- some neighborhood friends who were not Jewish, but most -- most of my friends were -- were Jewish.

Q: And -- and Jews make up a tiny, tiny portion of the Yugoslav population, let alone it the area where you lived --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- right through --

A: Or the six percent in the town.

Q: Right. So how were Jews treated within this context. Is -- di -- di -- were you raised feeling as if there were some anti-Semitism or not?

A: Absolutely not, I didn't --

Q: Absolutely not.

A: -- that -- that existed.

Q: Right.

A: I mean, that all started with the war in 1941.

Q: Right. Now a-as you're growing up, I mean you're very young when the Nazis take over, you're only two years old in 1933. But before the war, before '39 and before '41 when it really affects you strongly, do you hear about the Nazis? Do you hear your parents talking about it?

A: Oh yes, I -- I -- ye -- well, my mother's brother emigrated to the States in the 1920's. She -- she had a -- the ticket for the maiden voyage of the Normandy in '39 to visit her brother, to go to the World's Fair. And she decided not to go because the war made -- might break out and she might not be able to get back.

Q: I see. Huh.

A: So, yeah, lot of things I remember. I me -- one -- one thing I clearly remember, the radio making the announcement that the -- the [indecipherable] the cardinal, whose name just escapes me was elected Pope Pius, and my father said, "That's bad for the Jews." I remember that.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. So we knew s --

Q: You knew s -- you knew something.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: We're going to have to stop the tape.

A: Okay.

End of Tape One

Beginning Tape Two

Q: Okay, Steven, I have a few sort of disparate questions to ask you. [tape break] Okay, Steven, I have a few different questions to ask you --

A: Yes.

Q: -- that don't necessarily all go together. But when you were talking about your governess, it was interesting to me that she was a very Orthodox Catholic woman --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and here you are in a Jewish family. Did it bother you that you were going to the church?

A: Mm, I -- I don't recall at that time that it did, but -- no, I -- I don't recall it.

Q: No. And she wasn't trying to impose her belief on you --

A: No, no, no.

Q: -- she was just clearly Catholic?

A: Yeah.

Q: Huh. Did you like going to the church?

A: No, not particularly. Particularly not kneeling. Kneeling in the church with -- with bare knees.

Q: Ah, cause you were wearing shorts.

A: Right, right.

Q: Yes?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh, okay. And what about then, religion in your home? Were your parents religious, was

--

A: My parents weren't particular religious. We observed all the holidays, we didn't keep kosher. We didn't observe the Sabbath, except that my paternal grandmother always furnished a bowl of -- of cholent for the midday meal on Saturday.

Q: And can you describe what cholent is?

A: It's a bean dish. The -- the traditional thing because it can be -- be baked the day before and it doesn't have -- require work to -- to make it. The synagogue was across the -- the street from us. My maternal -- my mother's uncle was -- was one of the two architects, so my father inherited his father-in-law's seat directly behind the cantors in the fr -- in the front row and all I needed to was look up and my mother and grandmother and sister were sitting in the front row of the women's balcony.

Q: So this was an Orthodox?

A: Well --

Q: Sort of.

A: I was ultra-Reform, but still, men wore hats, women were on the second floor, service was entirely in Hebrew, except for one prayer for the king once a year.

Q: And that was in Hungarian, or Serbian?

A: Serbian.

Q: Serbian.

A: But -- but in comparison to -- to -- to the Orthodox, it was considered ultra-Reform. A main factor is that the synagogue had a -- had an organ.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Which is what -- what really set apart the two communities.

Q: Right, right.

A: But on Yom Kippur -- I'm -- I mean Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, we went to the services then for Yithzcore, the children were chased out and we were running around the courtyard. But we participated in all the services. And af -- after regular school, three afternoons a week, we had Jewish education. A -- a teacher who was a very strong Zionist, and we were taught not just Hebrew for the services, but we were taught the language spoken in Eretz Israel. And since school went on til noon on Saturday, after lunch on Saturday was a children's service in the small subsidiary chapel, which -- which was sort of a interesting event because a -- you know, there was no Kaddish itha -- and -- and the [indecipherable] at which all hell broke loose, because at two o'clock the matinee started in the three cinemas and everybody was running at full speeds to get out of the service to get -- to get to the --

Q: To the matinee.

A: To the matinee. So --

Q: And you were one of those kids --

A: Oh yes.

Q: -- who went.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: I didn't have to run as fast -- fast as the others because I had passes to the -- to the paper's press box, so I didn't have to line up to get tickets.

Q: Really --

A: Yes.

Q: -- there was a press box?

A: Yes.

Q: Wow. So did you go every Saturday?

A: Every Saturday.

Q: No kidding?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And were these mainly movies that were made in Yugoslavia --

A: No, no, no --

Q: -- or you show a lot of American movies?

A: -- I'm -- lots of American movies.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And who did you like?

A: I don't remember, I -- we liked the cowboy movies.

Q: I was going to say, that's what I was --

A: Yeah, yeah, right, right, oh yeah, that's right.

Q: So did you see Hopalong Cassidy?

A: I don't remember --

Q: You don't remember who it was.

A: -- individuals, no, no. But I do remember, you know, yeah -- subtitles, it wasn't dubbed -- I don't remember if it was dubbed or not. But certainly the publicity material was in Serbian. And there was a movie apparently when Technicolor was use, cowboys in color. And that was translated in Serbian as Kovboji i koloru, in someplace called color.

Q: Right.

A: So yeah, that was --

Q: And were these double features, cause at that time wi -- did see two movies or what --

A: I don't remember, I don't remember.

Q: Were adults with you, or you all went alone?

A: No, no, no, no, no.

Q: You just went alone?

A: We went alone, yeah.

Q: And who sat with you? Did Esther go with you and sit in the press box?

A: Ah -- well, well. Ah, yeah, and my older cousins, I mean, and e-each of us brought a friend or two.

Q: Right.

A: Or we took turns, I remember.

Q: Now, the fact that you were not kosher, although you celebrated the holidays, you went to synagogue a lot, you got a lot of training, in a certain way.

A: Oh yes, yes. Yes, definitely.

Q: So you would have considered your childhood a -- you were in some sense religious, clearly.

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: Definitely.

Q: Another question. Did your mother's family every approve of this marriage?

A: My father never set foot in my grandmother's house.

Q: You're kidding me.

A: Yup. We went -- my mother visited her mother, I don't know if it was once a week or twice a week, we met her there. I liked to go there because her brother was sending his mother old issues of "Life" magazine. And I --

Q: You liked to read them?

A: -- I could leaf through them. Th-The Dionne quintuplets and other news items --

Q: Right.

A: -- from "Life" magazine I remember. But very cold relationship.

Q: Very cold.

A: Very cold relationship.

Q: Even -- even to you, as a child?

A: No, no, no, not to me --

Q: Not to you.

A: -- just to my father.

Q: Just to your father.

A: Just my father.

Q: So that must have been very tough on your mother in some ways.

A: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Very much.

Q: And do you think they refused to meet him? I mean, they -- I mean, to do that for such a --

A: It -- it just -- two worlds. And whenever we went to Budapest, it was the same thing. We -- my time was shared between the opulent homes of my mother's family on the hills above Buda, and the rather modest apartments where two of my father's sisters lived with --

Q: In Pest?

A: -- with their family in Pest.

Q: In Pest on the other side.

A: Yup.

Q: Uh-huh. Did that affect you and your sister? Did you feel that tension, or you don't know?

A: Oh, I felt that tension.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It came to a -- a head when my aunt took me -- took us to see "Wizard of Oz," and I suddenly started screaming when they -- the bats appear, I wanted to ar -- I wanted to see my mother.

Q: It's scary, yes.

A: I wanted see my mother, I -- I bolted out of the --

Q: Really?

A: -- the cinema screaming, and they had to take me back there to -- to Buda to -- so I could see my mother.

Q: And how old were you then, five, six [indecipherable]

A: Seven?

Q: Seven.

A: Well -- wa -- might have been '38 - '39, so I was --

Q: Yes.

A: --seven or eight.

Q: So everybody had to leave the theater who was with you --

A: Yes.

Q: I guess, to take you there. And vacations, you took at various times during the year, or mainly during the summer?

A: Some at various times, most of them in the summer. My parents liked to go up in the Alps in what is now Slovenia and nearby was a camp that provided facilities for -- for children with their governesses. Are we -- I didn't get to the shore -- to the Adriatic shore til after the war. We went to Belgrade a couple times. On the way to Belgrade we -- Nowy Sad, we always stopped at the home of the gentleman who was the newspaper's representative, whose son is Joseph Lapid, former justice minister of -- of Israel, who we visit every time we -- we go to Israel. And then trips to Budapest, but exciting, it was a exciting place.

Q: Now, you know what I was thinking, given the relationship of your mother's family to your father, does this mean that when they got married there was no dowry, which would have been traditional, because they didn't go to the wedding, I gather.

A: Oh I presume they d -- I mu -- they must have, yeah, yeah --

Q: You think they must have?

A: -- I -- they must have, yeah. I'm -- I -- I have no -- I mean it wasn't really a break up of it all.

Q: Right.

A: It just a very, very cold relationship.

Q: Cold relationship. Huh. Okay.

A: I don't kno -- I ne -- I don't remember either of grandfathers, they all died in their early 30's.

Q: I see.

A: I don't know if it was different when my grandfather was living, but my grandmother was -- was a --

Q: And did you see your paternal grandmother --

A: Oh yes.

Q: -- your father's mother a lot, as well?

A: More often than -- yeah, yeah.

Q: More often.

A: We -- w-we were seven cousins and Wednesday afternoons was the traditional day when maids and governesses had half day off. And wi -- my grandmother had a -- had a rather modest house, we were all parked there on Wednesday afternoons and we did terrible pranks, and --

Q: Yes?

A: Yeah, my cousins were really pranksters and -- and I as the youngest was always goaded into doing the worst of the things.

Q: So like what did they do? What'd you do?

A: Like taking all of the years worth of preserves and soaking the labels off, and exchanging the label. Like -- like that.

Q: And what did your grandmother do, did she think this was funny?

A: Oh yes.

Q: She did?

A: Yeah.

Q: So she was a very good humored woman.

A: Oh very good, yeah.

Q: Yes. So you liked being there, I guess?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you sp -- learn to speak Hebrew, as well as these other three languages?

A: No, ne -- I -- I -- I never did, no.

Q: No.

A: I still read in the most halting way.

Q: But you obviously can read some.

A: Yes.

Q: Because of that training that you had as a kid.

A: Yes.

Q: Well, life changes fairly radically in 1941, or --

A: Right.

Q: -- doesn't it --

A: Yes.

Q: -- when the Germans attack Yugoslavia? What is that like? What do you remember

[indecipherable]

A: I don't know whether school closed early or what -- but I was upstairs in the apartment and father came up. And we had this big radio console with lots of dials and he was fiddling with the dials, and a German attack was announced, and Hungary was -- was joining, and on the way to re-occupy the former Hungarian provinces. And to a lot of people it was sort of a holiday at first.

Q: A holiday?

A: Yes, my uncle owned a bank and he took down the -- the Serbian sign and behind it was the original Hungarian name of the bank. And lot of people did that. And so the Hungarian army marched in. A small amount of resistance, a few pockets of -- of -- of gunfire. And on that day or the following day, a officer appeared in my father's office and ordered him out at gunpoint, and that --

Q: Hungarian officer did this?

A: Yeah, and that was that, they -- the plant was confiscated, newspaper taken over. A Aryan administrator was appointed, who kept all the charges -- directed all the charges to my father and my -- my aunt's personal accounts.

Q: So --

A: And in weeks he -- he bled everything that the two families had in cash. A third of the apartment was requisitioned for housing Hungarian officers. Cook, maid, governess left the same day, even before the ordinance came that Jews were not allowed to have --

Q: So they -- they left on their own, as far as you know?

A: Yup.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So, a very intense shock. We lucked out with the -- with -- with the quartering, because the three officers who were -- who were quartered in the house were -- one was a -- one was a Count Esterhazy, one was a Count Karolyi, the son of the prime minister just before World War I. The third one I don't remember, but also a count. Great gentlemen. Oh, we understand that Madame's cook has left, our servant man would -- whatever the -- the -- the orderly, is at Madame's disposal for whatever Madame wishes. So it was -- was very tense. I used to have a large stamp collection, that was one of the many things that went with the -- the china and silver and crystals and every --

Q: They just took stuff?

A: No, no, th -- that we had to sell.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Ever -- everything we owned had to sell. My mother did handicrafts, knitting, weaving, to sell -- to produce things that could be sold. My father became quite ill. The big event that summer, as

tha -- I had finished fourth grade so I was a-about to enter the fi -- first year of academic high school.

Q: Which is gymnasium?

A: Gymnasium. And the Hungarian numerus clausus law was put into effect, the number of Jews admitted equaled the number of -- the proportion of the Jews of the population. So eight -- it was decreed that eight Jews would be admitted. And that summer, my father had nothing else to do, so he coached me all summer in Hungarian literature and history, which I knew nothing about, which I had no exposure to. And so I took the exam. Were rough, very hostile questioning. I remember one, wh -- where did the Hungarian renaissance king defeat the Turks, the only successful battle against the Turks. And I knew the answer was Belgrade, but I knew that if I gave the Serbian pronunciation, that would be curtains. I didn't know the Hungarian pron -- pronunciation. Then I remembered that Belgrade means white castle and Feher Var is white castle in Hungarian, that was the -- the Hungarian name. And then I knew -- I remember enough of my grammar that the declension o-of Var is irregular. And to say at Belgrade, you had to say Feher Var otage and not Feher Var ohn. And I said that, and the guy said fine. And --

Q: And you passed.

A: And eventually I was one of the eight that were -- were admitted. My sister was not -- I don't know if she didn't take the exam or -- or wasn't admitted, I don't remember, but she went to a parochial school. The -- the -- this particular order of nuns and a order of -- of teaching priests called the en -- the Piarists, rel -- related to the Jesuits but not Jesuits. They refused to honor the numerus clausus and they accepted Jewish students. So I went three years to the gymnasium. Hostile teachers sitting in the back row.

Q: Jew -- the Jewish students had to sit in the back row?

A: Sit in the back row. If you raised your -- raised your hand they ignored you, most of the time. A fren -- a father of a friend was -- a few years ago was doing a history of -- of that gymnasium, and I asked him to -- to look up the names. And he gave me the names and he said, "There's this strange notation. The tuition is -- tuition charge is listed." So in -- you know, in addition to everything else they -- they charged tuition to the Jews in -- in nominally free public school. So - - so it was --

Q: It was really tough for you, wasn't it?

A: So it was a very tough life.

Q: Yeah.

A: Tough on m -- very tough on my parents and to see that, it was very tough. I st -- in the afternoons after school and in summers, I started working in this machine shop of a former employee that my father bankrolled into getting this shop. He was the only mechanic who could repair the -- the printing presses, but he was a Serb, and so the Hungarians threw him out. And the presses never ran after that. And so I worked in his machine shop, and that -- and had some income, but -- but it was a very, very tenuous and tough life. And -- and my mo -- my father was getting -- was -- was physically ill, he -- he was in -- in the hospital in Szeged, uh-huh. I remember going to a temple, must have been Passover of -- of '43 or '44, I don't know, but my sister and I went to the temple and there was no place to go after that because my mother was in Szeged with my father and a -- visiting him in the hospital. That was -- it was -- it was very harsh.

Q: Do you know what sort of sickness he had?

A: He -- he -- he had angina.

Q: He had angina. And do you think he had this before, or that we --

A: I don't know, I don't know --

Q: -- the shock of what happened?

A: -- but the -- I don't know, but he is -- the stress on him was very --

Q: Was ha -- was very high.

A: Was very high.

Q: Now was there an early trial of your father over the business?

A: Yes, yeah, the hung --

Q: What was that about?

A: -- the hu -- the Hungarians had to legitimize all of these takeovers.

Q: Right.

A: And there was a trial of my aunt and my father.

Q: Of your aunt as well?

A: Oh yeah, well, she was the owner. My father was the manager.

Q: Right.

A: And a horrible -- the -- the people who had worked for my father -- you know, there's horrible, horrible anti-Semitic statements and accusations and -- I -- I n -- I know that was ver -- very hard on his -- father. And the end of the trial was that the -- the takeover was justified.

Q: I see, so --

A: It was legally sanctioned.

Q: -- so there was no additional punishment other than the taking --

A: No, there was no addition --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: But that still must have been horrible for your father.

A: Oh yeah, well. Yeah, wa --

Q: It certainly affects you now when you think back on it, doesn't it? Yeah. What was it like every day in your family now that this -- was it very depressing, or scary, or -- or --

A: Depressed, I don't know if it was depressing, but all scrunched together. I think at the end we only had the two rooms.

Q: The what? You --

A: Two rooms.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Sa -- two rooms in the -- yeah, on the back side were taken, the large dining room was taken and I think we were scrunched into two rooms. Yeah, it was v -- very tou -- very tense, is what I remember.

Q: And what about friends? Your non-Jewish friends stopped playing with you when you were --

A: Yeah, largely, although in -- in the high school, in -- in the gymnasium, there were a couple -- a couple of kids who were -- who were very decent. I remember one -- one thing I remember clearly is that we had to go on a -- on a -- a nature hunt and collect mushrooms of a -- or plants or whatever. And these two guys came and asked if -- if I would join them and -- but at that -- that was sort of isolated in a -- oth-otherwise we were totally isolated.

Q: And do you think that these people were -- because you describe your life before as no anti-Semitism, I mean Jews and Catholics and people are intermingling in Yugoslavia.

A: Yeah.

Q: But the Germans come, and even in the [indecipherable]

A: Well, remember, from '41 to forty f -- f -- forty phone -- four, there were no Germans.

Q: Right, there's Hungarians.

A: Hungarians.

Q: Right.

A: With there -- yeah. I think they -- they sanctioned anti-Semitism of the -- of the occupying forces let things -- encouraged things to boil on the surface.

Q: But then it's -- becomes -- it's interesting as to what people really believe. Do they really believe this, or are they just doing it because it's sanctioned, and you know, there are [indecipherable]

A: I don't know, I don't know, a -- a -- a lot of people became pardoned, members of the Arrow Cross party, but by the time I got back in '45, they were wearing the insignia that they had been partisans since 1941, the same people.

Q: Right, sure, sure. Do you remember anti-Semitic laws that the Hungarians put into place in '41?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: You do?

A: Oh yes.

Q: And what -- what were -- what do you remember?

A: Oh, t-turning in everything. Turning in radios, turning in alarm clocks, I don't know what else, but there was always a new law about --

Q: Right.

A: -- things you couldn't do, which we laughed off, because we couldn't afford to do them anyhow.

Q: Right.

A: And -- and these interminable laws about this had to be turned in and that had to be turned in.

And trooping to the -- to the police headquarters to turn these things in.

Q: And did you have to wear a Jewish star?

A: Not until the --

Q: Or did that come later?

A: -- Germans came.

Q: Not until the Germans came. What about movies, could you go to the movies still?

A: Movies were prohibited, the beach was prohibited. The beach, which was a big part of our summer events --

Q: Right.

A: -- that was prohibited. There was a -- a steam bath with a sort of a small makeshift beach, that -- owned by a Jewish businessman, that sort of became the hanging out place in the summer. La -
- and movies were out. Beach was out. The promenade up and down the main drag was out.

Q: Was out. Were you able go to synagogue still, or not?

A: Yes.

Q: You could?

A: Yes.

Q: Were there raids in the synagogue, or were you -- you -- you were f --

A: No, not that I know.

Q: Were -- were you fearing physically during this period?

A: Not that I recall.

Q: No.

A: I just felt -- things --

Q: Confining.

A: Confining yes, but not -- not fearing, no, I didn't.

Q: We have to change the tape. You didn't s --

End of Tape Two

Beginning Tape Three

Q: Steve, did you notice that the treatment of Jews and Serbs were sort of equally as bad during this period before the Germans come?

A: Yes, definitely. Yeah, very definitely.

Q: So e -- so everybody is suffering under this, except --

A: Well, I'm -- at that time the Serbs were definitely the minority in Subotica.

Q: Yes.

A: Majority was certainly -- was Hungarian. But definitely two of the senior editors of the newspaper were Croats, they were let go at the same time as -- as my father and -- and the other Jewish employees. There were only three or four Jews I -- that I recall.

Q: Right.

A: But they were let go and yeah, there was a lot of discrimination against the Serbs. Probably more than the Croats, but --

Q: Now, is the paper running?

A: The paper is running as some --

Q: Still running.

A: -- as some -- I forget now the title, they changed the title it was --

Q: It wasn't Naplo any more, it was something else.

A: No, yup, right.

Q: Now when you go to bed do you still hear the whirring of the --

A: Yeah, n-not that mu --

Q: -- but it doesn't mean the same thing, does it?

A: -- no, no, no, no.

Q: Now ho -- how are y -- is your mother the person who's earning the money, cause all the money is --

A: Largely yes, yes.

Q: And she's doing craft things?

A: Craft, right, right.

Q: Is she drawing at all and selling it or not?

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: One of my close friend's father had a -- a rug factory. So he -- and -- and actually his oldest son was a -- was a textile engineer, and they could -- they had the equipment to weave and dye wool. And the textile engineer made -- built some hand looms and my mother and her friends were weaving scarves, Scotch plaid s-scarves. That was one of the things. Yeah, I mean, that was sort of eking out a living.

Q: So this was a unbelievable change for your mother, to be working in this way, right?

A: Oh yes, yes, yes.

Q: So she's actually going to work every day?

A: It was a cottage industry, I mean.

Q: I see. So it was small.

A: She was doing at home.

Q: And she was doing it home.

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Yup.

Q: And your father's not working at all?

A: Not that I recall, no.

Q: Not for those three years.

A: No.

Q: And what's happening with your grandmother, how does she survive? Your two grandmothers?

A: They stayed in their apartments. I don't recall either of them having had quartered -- no, I don't think they had.

Q: Now, you were -- 1941, you're 10 years old.

A: Yes.

Q: You're still a kid, but nevertheless --

A: Yes.

Q: -- you're not living the life of a kid any more. Wa -- are you hearing things about the war, the start --

A: Oh yes, there were -- there were clandestine radios, BBC news came through. Opening bars of the fifth symphony still ring a bell. That was the announcement of BBC Europe.

Q: Really?

A: So we pretty much knew what was going on. I think my friends and I had a map and we were doing -- make -- putting pins. Hungary -- Hungary put an enormous number of s -- of soldiers on the -- on the Soviet front. Hungary lost more -- more men on the -- in the Battle of Stalingrad than the Germans did.

Q: Really?

A: So that -- that was known everywhere. Draft age Jewish boys were put into these notorious labor brigades, doing horrible work, including mine cleaning wa -- with their bodies.

A: Right.

Q: My middle cousin died -- two of my cousins died in Hungarian labor camps. Hungarian la -- labor a -- brigades. So there were the news about those events. But -- yeah, we knew. We knew, but we couldn't accept it.

Q: Right.

A: My oldest son -- cousin was c -- was stuck in Switzerland. Our middle cousin -- the other two were in labor brigades. At sa -- for some reason they were both home at the same time. They went to see their mother and they said they were going to swim across the Danube at night and join the partisans. The partisans were already at the Danube. And my -- my aunt put her foot down and said, "No self respecting Jewish kid will swim across the Danube at night and join those people in the woods." And that was it.

Q: That was the end of that.

A: That was the end of that, yeah.

Q: You knew this at the time?

A: Yes.

Q: What did you think? Why di -- did you think they should go?

A: Oh, I thought they should go, yes.

Q: They should go.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. But that was -- you know, that was the attitude. I mean, yeah, it was unfathomable, unthinkable that this was going to happen, what's go -- going on and that anything would happen to them.

Q: And did you begin to hear things that were happening to Jews?

A: Yes, we were beginning to hear about people who were --

Q: Killings?

A: -- who were at -- snuck across the -- the border from the north, from Poland, or occupied S-Slovakia, and yes, even at my age I began to hear, yes.

Q: So did you start getting scared?

A: No, I think --

Q: No.

A: -- I mean, my parents and -- assured me that that -- that's never going to happen to us.

Q: I see. So life was hard, but it was not going to become impossible to live.

A: Yeah, I mean --

Q: It was not [indecipherable]

A: -- that generation was so totally under the influence of -- of -- of German culture that they just couldn't accept that. If there was a division between them and us, they -- they were part of -- of us, Germans rather than them -- I mean, I menti -- I mentioned to you this -- this story at the -- this magazine that was published in 90 s -- '94 for a 50th anniversary. The big section where my uncle and -- and -- and my father are described, the heading of that section is Jews as the guardians of Hungarian culture during -- during the Yugoslav years. That's how they --

Q: That's how they put it.

A: -- they viewed themselves, and that's how the world viewed them. And so they -- I mean, we heard about the -- the slaughter at Nowy Sad, but yeah, you do -- it couldn't happen to us. That was my parents attitude.

Q: Tell me something. When you describe listening to the BBC radio --

A: Yes.

Q: -- you get extremely emotional. What -- what is it? What -- what do you think it is?

A: Well, first of all it was illegal.

Q: Illegal.

A: And punishable by I don't know what punishment.

Q: Right.

A: But it was such a break from everything else.

Q: Yeah.

A: I mean, we listened to the German radio too, you know.

Q: Right.

A: And it -- the jokes going around was that before our children's tales start -- started with once upon time, and now our [speaks foreign language here] high command of the German army announces that. And then the children say okay to follow. That was, yeah, one of the ongoing jokes. So they -- the BBC was a -- was a breath of fresh air.

Q: Do -- do you think that your parents ever thought of leaving?

A: Not that I know of.

Q: Or was it possible by then?

A: By then it was impossible.

Q: Yeah.

A: When -- when you think about being in the apartment when you could only be in two rooms, is -- is there a kind of normalcy that gets created during that time in spite of what's going on?

A: Oh yeah, yes, definitely.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Definitely.

Q: So you just -- one, as a human being, just keeps adjusting and adjusting?

A: Oh, I -- right, oh yes, de -- very definitely.

Q: Did you --

A: I think my sister rebelled a lot more than -- I mean, my sister rebelled, I never rebelled.

Q: And -- and how did she rebel?

A: Oh, she wasn't going to do this, she wasn't going to do that, she wasn't going to wear -- obey this law, she wasn't -- yeah.

Q: So in 1941 she's 13.

A: Right.

Q: So she's enough older than you that she --

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Does she actually disobey?

A: Oh yeah, I think she did.

Q: Or does she -- she did?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did she ever get in trouble?

A: Not that I know of.

Q: No.

A: No, no.

Q: So she was good at it.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And once you noticed that she was doing it, did you think, well I think I'll do that too, or did you decide no, you're not going to do that.

A: No, I --

Q: No, you didn't.

A: -- I -- no, no.

Q: And how does your relationship with each of your parents? Your father is ill.

A: Yeah.

Q: And when he comes back from the hospital, is --

A: I mean -- I was trying to be as helpful and supportive as I could --

Q: Right.

A: -- helping him when he was ill, helping my mother with all kinds of chores, whatever I could.

Yeah, I mean, I really tried to -- recall that I tried to be as -- as helpful and as unobtrusive as I could.

Q: So what kind of a kid were you? Do you -- how would you describe yourself?

A: I was serious. I was always interested in arts, even before the war, but af -- certainly after that. I was not physical at all, but I g -- had a lot of very good friends, and we did lot of things, and --

Q: So you didn't do sports much?

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: Right. D-Do you remember hearing about something called the great raid in 1942 in Backa?

There was a lot of killing in Nowy Sad.

A: In Nowy Sad, right.

Q: In 1942.

A: Right.

Q: And did -- did you hear about that then?

A: Yes, certainly.

Q: You did?

A: Yes.

Q: And did you still think -- I mean, did you think to your he -- you know, why are they telling me this is not going to happen, it is happening. Or was this a --

A: Well that was so egregious that even the Hungarian army was forced to hold a court martial for the general who ordered it.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And it just didn't seem to be something that was going to repeat, or was repeatable.

Q: Right, so it seemed uncommon, as oppo --

A: Right.

Q: Exceptional for you.

A: Yes.

Q: I see. Okay. So you have three years where ne -- nothing terribly memorable happens except life is --

A: Was -- was -- was getting squeezed together.

Q: -- getting closer and squeezed.

A: Yup.

Q: Do you have relatives in other parts of Europe that you're not hearing from, or you are hearing from, do you remember?

A: I'm -- tell you my aunt came from -- from this well-to-do --

Q: This is Ferenc's wives -- Ferenc's wife, right?

A: Ferenc's wife.

Q: Yeah.

A: The firm ha -- her brother, younger brother was the firm's representative in Berlin. In the 30's he moved to Holland and was the firm's representative in Holland. When Holland was occupied he was deported to Subotica. And why not to [indecipherable], Subotica, with his -- with his wife from Berlin and his two children. And we became very close to -- to the -- her cousins.

Otherwise I don't know of much contact. We had some relatives in Switzerland we had very little contact with. My cousin in Switzerland we had practically no -- I don't recall we had co -- much contact with him. No, we didn't have any contact that I think of.

Q: Now what's the food situation, since you don't have much money. You still eating okay, as far as you remember?

A: Yeah, yes, lot of potatoes, lot of boiled potatoes, I remember that. Yeah, I mean, I don't --

Q: You don't recall deprivation.

A: I wouldn't call it depravation --

Q: Right.

A: -- it was just a very constricted, and --

Q: And is your mother cooking?

A: Yes.

Q: She is. And she -- is she okay as a cook?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Yes.

A: Very good cook.

Q: She was a good cook?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Now, when we move to 1944, things change in an even more radical --

A: Right, right.

Q: -- way. In 1944, in March, Germany occupies --

A: Hungary.

Q: Hungary.

A: Right.

Q: And since you're been -- this little piece is part of Hungary --

A: Right.

Q: -- what happened?

A: Well, o-order to wear the yellow star came first, that came almost right away. Within days, I don't recall the dates, but within days my father and most of the prominent Jewish men were deported to a small village called Backa Topola.

Q: So he is deported with other Jewish men?

A: Yes. No news at all. And again, I don't remember the date. By that time there was no school, and I was working full time in this machine shop. Then came the summer and end of May, early June, I don't remember the date, came the order to move into the -- this restricted area along the railroad tracks.

Q: In Subotica.

A: In Subotica.

Q: Can I stop you for a moment?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember when your father was taken away?

A: Yes.

Q: Wer -- were you there?

A: Yes.

Q: What was that like?

A: We were all crying, we were all very upset. Very painful.

Q: And who came? Germans came and took him?

A: Hungarian.

Q: Hungarians came.

A: The entire -- even after the German occupation, up to and including of loading into the -- into the railroad cars, I don't remember having seen a German.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. Was all done by Hungarian gendarmerie.

Q: Hm. And there's no warning that your father and these other men are going to be taken?

A: No.

Q: They just come and they grab them and take them.

A: Right, right.

Q: And he's not a well man as it is.

A: Right.

Q: Okay, so now you're alone with your mother and your sister.

A: Right.

Q: And your mother's still working or she's not allowed to work any more.

A: I -- it went so fast, I don't know. I honestly don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: But anyhow, the order came to move with possessions that you could carry, into this row of dilapidated houses, along the trai -- trai -- railroad yard. One of the nastiest memories I have is getting -- going on that journey, and people were lined up, up the stairs, up to the door of the apartment, waiting to ransack whatever we left behind, cursing at us, yelling at us, spitting at us as we left.

Q: Did you know any of these people?

A: Not that I remember. I don't know. I don't know.

Q: But like vultures they were standing --

A: Like vultures, right. Except among them was our cook. She went in, she grabbed the cookbook and she grabbed this folder of -- this binder, and shoved into it all the artwork that she could shove into it.

Q: And took it. That's quite an act.

A: Yup. And she gave it back to us when -- when we came back. So we went into this one room. My maternal grandmother was bithu -- was moved in with us. My paternal grandmother did something else.

Q: Uh-huh, the maternal, okay.

A: Yup.

Q: The paternal grand --

A: My -- my father's oldest sister Rose married a Christian, converted at such an early age that by Hungarian law she was not Jewish. By German law she would have been. Not only she was not deported, but my grandmother moved in with her. All of us were going one way --

Q: She was going --

A: -- and everybody knew that old Mrs. Friedman was living there for a year with -- with her daughter, and nothing happened to her.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: Huh.

A: She was there when we came back.

Q: How interesting.

A: Yup. So --

Q: Did you see the cook?

A: No, not -- no, I don't -- no.

Q: You didn't see the cook at that mo -- you [indecipherable]

A: No, I-I've thought about that before, no I --

Q: Yeah.

A: No.

Q: It's interesting what she took, isn't it, Steve?

A: Yup.

Q: That she took your mother's things, and no -- nothing else. It's quite extraordinary, actually.

A: It turns out, we discovered this just a few years ago, that within this thick cookbook, somehow stuck into it, were two other things. One was a blueprint of the parlor furniture that my

mother's uncle, the architect designed for her as his wedding gift. That's framed in my -- my sister's apartment. And the other a slim diary that my mother had kept, which is sobering, because it's two and a half years of my sister from her birth, and about four months of me after my birth.

Q: Really?

A: And then they --

Q: And then it stops?

A: And then it stops. So --

Q: And it's about you as a [indecipherable]

A: Oh, yeah, yeah --

Q: -- it's just every detail of what you --

A: -- like every detail, measurements, not just height and weight, but the he -- circumference of the head and --

Q: Really?

A: -- and -- and food, and how much food and how much weight, yup.

Q: That must --

A: And first words and -- and everything.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: That's extraordinary to have, isn't it?

A: Yes, yes, yup. So -- so that's where we wound up.

Q: And what's this ghetto like?

A: Well, it wasn't a connected ghetto. It was several areas dissected by major roads that were open. And, you know, broken down old houses that were requisitioned and we were squeezed into them. Terrible sanitary conditions, terrible. Some communal food, but that was terrible. No medical attention whatsoever. But you're still allowed to go from one to another. And I, working in a plant that was doing some military work, had a pass to get out of the -- the ghetto.

Q: Is this in an -- it's not enclosed, is there a fence, or --

A: There was some kind of a gate, guarded by --

Q: There was?

A: Yeah, it was enclosed at night. I -- but not -- not -- not as --

Q: Not like a wall?

A: -- not like the Warsaw. Yeah, not a wall, no.

Q: Did you have toilet facilities in your apartment? No.

A: A privy in the -- in the back.

Q: In the back?

A: Yeah.

Q: Water?

A: Like everybody else, y-y-yeah. Artesian well in the back.

Q: Was there a kitchen? No kitchen.

A: No.

Q: No, so it's all communal eating --

A: Yeah, right.

Q: -- which is not eating.

A: Right.

Q: So you -- do you start being hungry?

A: No, I work outside. My boss's wife fed me lunch, and had a satchel for me to take back to the family. So I was probably better off than most people. But I was in the shop on my birthday, June six, 1944, and I her -- when we heard about the -- when I heard about the -- about Normandy. And I must have been the first one to come into the ghetto to -- to tell people about it. I -- I don't know, I -- it's -- it's -- when I recall I -- it was sort of a hothouse atmosphere. I mean, we had, at age 13 we had this -- this horribly serious love affairs with 12 year old girls.

Q: Really?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: You too?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes. All -- I mean, everything was -- was very intense and very concentrated and very pres -- precocious for age, shall I say so.

Q: So when you say affair, you mean there were -- there was a lot of sexual relations.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Was this shocking for the adults? Were they all like what's going on here, or did nobody care any more?

A: Nobody cared any more.

Q: Nobody cared. And did -- did it feel as if -- well, we may die, so -- or is --

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely, definitely. And things can get only worse was -- I think that was the [indecipherable] yeah.

Q: Right. So did you have a steady girlfriend?

A: Yes. I was more enamored of her than she was of me, but --

Q: Well, it happens, doesn't it?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And did you bring her some of the food that you've brought back?

A: Oh yes, yes. But that only was -- that was -- a-again, I can go back to the -- this thick book by the gentleman from Columbia University.

Q: Really? [indecipherable]

A: No, no, no, no, they -- the gentleman who did the two volume on the genocide in Hungary.

Q: Oh, Braham.

A: Br -- br -- yeah, Braham.

Q: Braham, yes.

A: I mean, I can get all the dates out of it.

Q: Right.

A: I was one of the main plaintiffs in the -- in the slave labor suit, because I -- because I had better documentation than anybody else, because I just went to Braham's book and copied out all the dates.

Q: Right, right.

A: So mid-June were -- order came, leave the apartments with one piece of luggage. We're lined up facing the railroad yards. We were put into these railroad cars and that was just a very short trip to Bacsalmás which was a -- a village that Hungarians took over and made it as the ghetto for putting in people from Nowy Sad and the whole region.

Q: And that became -- that's the ghetto that ends -- ends up being a weigh station to other places.

A: To -- right, right --

Q: Right. Cause you're not there for hugely long time, right?

A: No, five, six days, I think, you know.

Q: Is that all?

A: I think so.

Q: And who of your family goes? It's your sister and your mother and your maternal grandmother?

A: My -- my a -- maternal grandmother. My Uncle [indecipherable], my aunt and her mother, and her sister-in-law, German speaking Gerda. That's it. Now I'm told, I don't remember that, but I'm told that the church bells were ringing and that te deum masses were held in the churches as the trains pulled out.

Q: Like a celebration.

A: Yup.

Q: Yeah.

A: So Bacsalmas was -- was even more -- I mean -- I mean that -- housed in a chicken coop, I believe, terribly cramped. We kids were running around the camp, all -- that's all I remember is -- is we -- running around, all kinds of rumors about ways of getting out, some of which turned out true. There was one train -- I'm -- I'm -- I'm not sure I can reconstruct the whole story, but it's in Braham's book. Eight --

Q: Can -- I -- I hate to interrupt you --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- we have to take a break --

A: Okay.

Q: -- we have to change the tape.

A: Okay.

End of Tape Three

Beginning Tape Four

Q: Steve, you were talking about people saying there were ways to escape somehow.

A: Well there was rumors flying everywhere. It turns out that two tr -- one train -- I don't know how many cars, but one trainload, mostly of prominent people was diverted and sent to -- and went to Switzerland, maybe 100 - 150 people. A much smaller group which may have been just one car, was diverted and taken to Budapest and opened up there. And one of -- one of my classmates from grade school who now lives in Israel was in that group, and it was a relative of hers who was in the Hungarian equivalent of the ghetto leadership, whatever it was called, arranged for that carload to be brought to Budapest, which at that time was still quite free. See ha -- the Hungarians -- yo -- as -- as eager as the individual gendarmes were to do the job, the horti - - Admiral Horthy and -- and his government was not that e-eager. So they started on the periphery of the -- re-occupied provinces from slova -- Slovakia, Transylvania and -- and Backa in the south. And delayed deportation from Budapest as we -- as long as they could. And so my friend Lilly survived in Budapest.

Q: This was your girlfriend?

A: No, this is a fre --

Q: Oh, this is ano -- other friend.

A: -- a classmate.

Q: Uh-huh. And she survived in Budapest?

A: Yeah, she and her mother survived in Budapest and walked back -- walked back and got back to Subotica. Subotica was liberated in October, '44. We w -- we were deported in -- in June, and by f -- by October, the partisans were there.

Q: Huh. So these trains were diverted by the Jewish Council? I mean, they were sa -- some --

A: I tha -- that one -- one carload --

Q: That one car?

A: -- was -- was -- my understanding is that it was diverted by the Jewish Council.

Q: Huh. So did -- when you heard this did you believe it and did you try to get on these trains, or what?

A: Well, we tried, but I mean -- one of my classmates, whom my wife met once, whom all the other, the few survivors left bitterly hate -- bitterly dislike. He was a [indecipherable] from day one. He was on that group. He went -- a-after the war he came back, he went to Israel, he -- he was appointment secretary for s -- for some minister, but he assured everybody that he was running the country. You know, I -- total -- impossible character, but he was telling us about all of these things, so -- so it was -- it wasn't easy to believe him. I mean, none of us believed him. But anyhow, it was just a few days before the real train ride took place.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: 60 some people per car. No food, no water, no sanitation. People dying. And then the doors opened and we were in Auschwitz.

Q: Now, go back for a moment.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you get a notice, or they just say, out, the -- just -- th-the same way they did with the other?

A: Yeah, right, yes, just out, yeah. Line up, and --

Q: Now, you also said that you kids, when you were in this second ba -- barc --

A: Bachal -- Bacsalmas.

Q: Bacsalmas. Is that right, Bacsalmas?

A: Yes.

Q: That you were just running around like crazy.

A: Right.

Q: What was that? I mean, why were you running around? What -- and --

A: Well, chasing rumors, trying to find food, trying -- seeing if possible we could get out. Just -- just busy-ness, but I -- that's what I remember is -- is this relentless restlessness of trying to do something.

Q: Right. Were the adults as restless as you were?

A: No, no, the a-adults were very passive.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: My grandmother had had mental problems before. She's not a Freda Kahlo, but like Kahlo she -- she lost a leg in a streetcar accident, I don't know when. And she had -- she had mental trauma. She was going crazy, there's just no question about that. And it -- my mother was -- was very, very upset. And so getting out of there was just -- you know, just -- we just had to get out of there, and that's why I was never in that place.

Q: So you didn't stay with them, if you --

A: I crawled in at night, I guess, but I don't remember that.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: At dawn I was out of there.

Q: But it clearly is very chaotic for you there.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And did you have an idea where they were sending people?

A: No.

Q: No idea?

A: No.

Q: And you had never heard of Auschwitz?

A: No.

Q: And what had you been hearing about the killing of Jews? Cause here you have two years between '42 and '44, and so many Jews are killed in '41 and '42. Do you hear anything?

A: Yeah, we heard some. There were -- there were a couple people who had escaped from -- I don't know whether it's from the camp, but certainly from the -- from Galicia, from the -- occupied Poland. And we were warning, but nobody listened to that.

Q: [indecipherable] didn't believe it.

A: No. No.

Q: Do you remember this train ride?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you see it?

A: Yes.

Q: You can s -- you can see the train?

A: Yes.

Q: Are you sitting, standing?

A: Mostly standing, sometimes pushing thr -- my way to the crack at the door. Certainly I wasn't tall enough to push myself to the -- to the barred window.

Q: How tall are you? Cause you're now 14 -- or 13, you're 13.

A: I -- I don't know how tall I was, I was -- I was sort of reasonable ral -- height for my age. Not -- not necessarily very tall. Tall enough to survive the -- the -- the selection. Yeah, I remember

that -- that train ride quite well. And I remember that chaos that greeted us. Yells, shouts, dogs barking, people shoved out of the cars. My grandmother sitting on a pile of -- of suitcases and stuff in her gown, with her prosthesis lacking, waving to us and saying -- saying, "I'm healthy, I'm healthy." [indecipherable] I forget now what she said, but she cheerfully waved to us. And we were lined up. First I was with my mother and sister and then they -- women to one side, men to the other side. And that's the last time I saw my mother. And eventually five of us, we were marched past this SS officer in white gloves, whether it's Mengele or not I don't know, I -- I couldn't tell, couldn't remember. But I guess I was tall enough and healthy looking enough that I was waved this way and not that way. So I --

Q: Was he wearing a white coat as well as white gloves?

A: White gloves, no, no, mi --

Q: Just white gloves? White gl --

A: -- wi -- military uniform and white gloves, medical gloves.

Q: Was he actually touching people?

A: No.

Q: No. Okay.

A: So this endless processing, being stripped naked, being shorn, disinfected, sitting, waiting, sitting naked on the floor. Eventually rushed, always rushed from barrack to barrack, tha -- at -- at -- at double time with guards barking and hitting. Thrown some mis -- ill -- ill-fitting prison uniforms and broken down shoes, and marched into the compound in a barrack across from the Gypsy barracks, where there were about 10,000 -- abi -- about a thousand kids my age.

Q: You were with kids your age?

A: That was a barrack only for kids.

Q: Now, are you tattooed at this time?

A: No. You were not tattooed til you left the place. I was tattooed when I -- in October when I left. Until then you weren't even a number.

Q: Now that's a little unusual, so I'm just wondering whether it was because you were a group of kids.

A: No. When they -- the huge onslaught in summer of '44, of -- of the Hungarian --

Q: You were not tattooed.

A: They were not and when they -- when -- later when the Łódź ghetto was emptied and they were brought in, they were not tattooed until they left.

Q: Right. So w --

A: You -- you can check my --

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, no, I --

A: -- you can -- you can check the -- the Auschwitz, the big Auschwitz diary doesn't have it on a weekly basis, but occasionally it has a list of --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- of serial numbers.

Q: Right.

A: Mine is from October --

Q: Yes.

A: -- not from --

Q: No, no, it [indecipherable] right.

A: -- not from June.

Q: But it's a -- it's an unusual circumstance --

A: Well, I mean that --

Q: -- so it's interesting. Maybe it's only for the Hungarians.

A: That n -- I mean, that -- that load on the system --

Q: Right.

A: -- the -- the gas chambers, crematoria and the processing area was -- was -- I don't think there had been that much of it, that volume, before that summer.

Q: Do you come in with the large Hungarian transports, or do --

A: Yes, all of Bacsalmás. I mean, I don't know how many trains from Bacsalmás.

Q: You don't know how many.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you're in a barrack, you're in B2D, I guess.

A: Something tha -- yeah, yeah, right.

Q: Something like that. And B2E has some Gypsies?

A: The whole row, [indecipherable] on the fem -- if I can visualize the map, the norther -- the northeastern quadrant of the compound was all Gypsies, all Gypsy families.

Q: Cause there's a big killing of Gypsies in May before you come.

A: Yeah.

Q: But there are some Gypsies left.

A: But there's one in August.

Q: Right, that's right.

A: Right. That one I remember.

Q: That's what -- that's what the one that you remember.

A: Right, yup.

Q: Do you get a number on your uniform?

A: Nope.

Q: You have nothing.

A: Nothing. I -- I have my ID card, I mean my index card from Buchenwald. I don't know how it worked in Auschwitz, but everything was recorded and everything was in the books. I got these terrible broken down shoes.

Q: Were they wooden?

A: Wooden. The wooden sole broken. Terrible sores on my foot. I took myself to the revier -- to the hospital wing, and I sat there waiting, nobody would service me. Appel started, and the entire compound was on block -- on lockdown because one number was out of order. And I remember very clearly this very large SS officer, and this small, owlsh, Polish kapo came to get me and marched me in front of all of the assembled people back to my barracks and I remember clearly the Polish kapo whispering to me in Polish, "If you were not this young, you would be long dead." Yup, I -- for a day I upset the entire accounting system. How they knew that, I don't know.

Q: Wait a minute.

A: How they knew that --

Q: How -- how are you upsetting the counting system? You don't --

A: The barrack was short one and the revier was -- was one more than was supposed to be.

Q: Supposed to have. And were -- were they identifying you by name?

A: I don't know. I have no --

Q: You don't know. You have no idea.

A: -- th -- the -- no, they found me and --

Q: Now you said this guy, the Polish kapo spoke to you in Polish.

A: Yes.

Q: How did you understand Polish?

A: Serbian and Polish are --

Q: Are so close?

A: -- si -- six weeks later I -- I was fluent in Polish because I was working for the Polish kapos.

Q: Really? Huh.

A: So okay. So you know enough about Auschwitz, you know that camps C and D were largely warehouses of labor personnel. German civilians came in, selection was set up, usually in the -- naked, not always. They selected the workers and those people were marched out ta -- a -- first into compound A and then registered, tattooed and sent out. Digression. A number of years ago at Pittsburgh, we hosted a small exhibit from the Auschwitz museum. There was an opening night for the survivors. Was a big map of Auschwitz. And seven or eight people there asked me to take them over to the map and show them where they had been, because most of them were there three, four days.

Q: Right.

A: And I was there four months. And I have a reasonably good graphic memory and so I showed them anyway. So that was camp life. At that time wa --

Q: Wa -- when -- when you're showing them the map, they're looking at the outside commandoes that they were on, they didn't know that they were all --

A: No, they were not on there, they were all in one of the --

Q: So they were -- but they didn't know where they were?

A: The people who were there only three days were there in one --

Q: I see.

A: -- in either C or D.

Q: Right, and they didn't know that.

A: They didn't know that.

Q: Of course, right.

A: So the boys barrack was treated like every other, you know, once a day allowed to run to the ra -- latrine. You know, you learn things on the way, like a elder -- older inmate telling you to -- to pick up a pebble on the way to the latrine, so you have something to wipe yourself with.

Q: A pebble?

A: Yes. Food, ladled out from these big cauldrons. Somehow you had -- an -- and the slice of bread, somehow you had to save enough to have enough on -- on the black market to get yourself a broken down tin cup, otherwise the soup was ladled in your hand.

Q: So you were not given a cup at all?

A: No.

Q: Nothing.

A: No. And we could see people coming and going in the barracks, in the barrack that we were in, nobody was coming, and the only going was -- was to the selection and to the -- to the crematoria. My -- all my classmates, one by one, becoming walking corpses, musselmanner, and dying. I rem -- I mean, I still remember the sequence of the last three or four, until I was alone.

Q: Until you were alone?

A: Out of the group from Subotica.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah.

Q: And how do you account for your being able to [indecipherable]

A: Well, one thing my gra -- my governess did me a great service. The kapos were all red fr -- were all green triangles, German political prisoner -- German criminals, and they needed an interpreter and one of them came around asking for an interpreter and I volunteered. I spoke much better German than he did, much purer Volksdeutsche than he did. And so I became an interpreter, and one of the privileges that came with it at -- after the soup was ladled out, you were allowed to scrape out the bottom of the -- of the pot. And that was the --

Q: That was the [indecipherable]

A: -- increment that kept me alive.

Q: Were you losing weight?

A: Oh yes.

Q: You was -- you lost a lot of weight?

A: Yes. So, as I say, one by one, there were about seven or eight of us that were together, that knew each other, were together, and then --

Q: And they died from starvation, or they were killed?

A: Yup. They was -- died from starvation.

Q: They died of starvation. When you say the word musselmanner now --

A: Yes.

Q: Is that a word that you knew then?

A: Yes.

Q: This is what the terminology was?

A: Yes, this shuffling corpses, glazed eyes, yeah. That was the definitely the -- the term. So then came August, this night in August we were locked down. I remember very clearly yelling,

shouting, firing of weapons. And we didn't know what was going on. We started singing, just to give ourselves strength or something. And the following morning, as an interpreter, I could be out in front when the soup arrived. And I looked around, the row of barracks was empty. There were inmates clearing and later whitewashing the barracks. And what was most startling is that the kapos that supervised them had red triangles. So one o -- one of them, man by name Tadek, came over and said that he needed an interpreter who spoke Polish, German and Hungarian. And I said Serbian and Polish are close enough, I volunteered. And so that day I moved across to the barrack that he supervised.

Q: Which was E, into E. Or is that not --

A: I -- if you give -- show me a ma -- if you give me a map, I'll -- I'll --

Q: Okay [indecipherable]

A: -- I'll locate the number.

Q: But le-let me ask you something. Why was it so shocking to you that those who were supervising that barrack, where they had ex -- grabbed the Gypsies --

A: No, supervising the new -- new inmates, so it [indecipherable] the barracks.

Q: Wa -- why -- oh, and why was it surprising that they were political prisoners?

A: Because -- because up til then we were surrounded by the --

Q: By the greens?

A: By the greens.

Q: By the criminals.

A: Yes, except a coup -- one or two in the higher administration of the camp.

Q: Right, right. And having the political prisoners meant it would be better in some way, was that true?

A: Well, it meant it would be different. The political prisoners at -- in Auschwitz as well as in -- later in Niederorschel, in front of the Germans were as loud and cussing. They were as adroit with their batons in hitting you as the criminals. But when the Germans were gone, then -- then things were different.

Q: Mm-hm. Which wasn't true with the criminals.

A: Which was not true with the criminals.

Q: Right.

A: And so I --

Q: So you joined them.

A: So I joined them, and --

Q: What was Tadek like?

A: He was a university student, communist. Caught up in the -- the big catching up ca -- round up of Polish intellectuals. Not a terribly bright guy, but eventu -- I mean, he promised he would take care of me. There were others. There was a somewhat older guy, a kapo of one of the other barracks, who had been a c-communist organizer in Yugoslavia, so he -- he helped me occasionally with things I couldn't translate. And there was a third one by name of Piotr, who was a Russian studying in Poland, who was caught up and was deported with the Poles. And he was by far the most entrepreneurial and enterprising of all of them.

Q: Can you explain what you mean, why -- ho --

A: Well, black market was -- was the staff of life in Auschwitz. Everything could be had. We [indecipherable] work with Tadek and Piotr. They -- the compound backed onto the railroad side [indecipherable]. We would -- when a train arrived, we would be there sweeping the gravel between the last barrack and the -- and the electrified fence. Guard towers at either end.

Occasionally whis -- whistle would sound, you would look up and tins of sardines, other thing liberatable. You know, liberating was the -- the codeword to stealing, or flying over the fence, from the inmates who were cleaning the trains. So that's how you started accumulating black market goods. Piotr -- well, I had my -- my duties, I was an interpreter. Very often German people were lined up, German foreman will -- would come. I would walk behind them and do whatever translating, if -- if they had questions for the inmates. And most inmates always pretended that they didn't know German, whether they knew it or not. So I would translate.

Occasionally I actually esc -- was ordered to go up to the front, to the SS barracks at the top of the compound and escort the German to the -- to the site, to whatever barrack they were selecting from, and then escort them back.

Q: What was that like?

A: Past the -- passing the gallows every day twice, it was not -- not pleasant. But in addition to that, eventually Piotr organized a roof repair detail. And we went from compound to compound pretending to patch roofs.

Q: Pretending?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I have a -- a -- I don't have a full sense of equilibrium, I have a fear of heights. I would have remembered if I had been on a roof, I've never been to -- on a roof.

Q: Did he go up on a roof?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: He went up?

A: Yeah, we -- we had this -- this cart with rolls of felt paper, barrel of pitch, both of them very good for hiding things as you go from -- as you're frisked from compound to compound. And they -- you know, they pretended to be patching roofs and -- and most of -- I mean it was spent trading black market goods, trading lists of prisoners to be smuggled out to the outside. Typical day to day work of resistance.

Q: So you were the ground crew --

A: Right.

Q: -- for the roofer.

A: Right.

Q: I guess, huh?

A: Yes.

Q: And unfortunately we have to stop the tape again.

A: Okay.

End of Tape Four

Beginning Tape Five

Q: Steve.

A: Yeah?

Q: When we last were taping, you were talking about not being a roofer, but walking around with -- was it Tadek who was --

A: No, that's -- that was Piotr.

Q: Piotr, who was going on the roof.

A: A-Actually, I -- I will correct myself. I was on the roof of our old barracks, number 12, with couple others, there was an opening in the roof. And we tried to pull out my last classmate.

Lowered a rope and tried to pull him up, and he didn't have the strength in his arms to -- to hold on. That's -- that time I remember being in the roof, and I remember this incident because a number of years ago, when I was at the tekneon, this -- the guy's sister came to see me because she understood that I had -- had seen him in Auschwitz, and she wanted the story of her brother. But that's the only thing -- only time I remember being on the roof.

Q: And why were you trying to pull him out?

A: Trying to save him.

Q: Uh-huh --

A: Trying to get --

Q: -- so you were -- you were going to put him someplace else.

A: Right, right.

Q: And you were able to be on the roof in spite of your problems with --

A: Yeah.

Q: But that must have been a horrible day then, not being able to pull him out.

A: Yeah, right, yeah.

Q: And wa -- going around fixing roofs, did he -- did Piotr actually fix roofs or was it mainly --

A: Oh, I think, yeah. I mean this -- the barracks were shoddily built and shod -- and totally u -- not maintained and so there were roof leaks and we had pitch and felt paper and we did -- the crew did some repairs, but -- but that was really a cover for -- for black market operations. He had a girlfriend, a female kapo in -- in one of the compounds in -- in Mexico, the -- the new -- the new women's compounds in the other side of the main road. And we were -- often went there. I met my sister there. I found out that she wa -- she was there and we met. Sh -- this was late in the fall, and she was in a short sleeve dress, reddish hair, maybe centimeter long, no -- no longer than that. Face and arms red raw from the wind. She remembers that I was this fat, that's how she described me. Well, probably in -- in Auschwitz comparisons, I was fatter than -- than what her image was. So I -- I found out that she was being shipped out on a transport and whatever black market goods I had, I cashed in and managed to get her a -- a sweater and scarf and gloves before she was shipped out. Managed to get somebody to get it to her, after the -- the -- o-on exit. But we went everywhere.

Q: So he had the right to go everywhere, whether it was [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, we -- well [indecipherable] right -- yeah. Frisking at ev -- every entrance and every exit from a compound. In Auschwitz the -- the common black market currency was a gold watch. Everything was counted in -- in terms of gold watches. And I was thin enough, I usually had dozen or more gold watches strapped to my thigh, so we went through frisking and I was never caught.

Q: How could that be?

A: Well --

Q: But you had them on your thigh and they didn't --

A: Yeah, under my pants, and they didn't frisk that far down. I don't know, I don't know. So Kanada was a great place to go because lots of -- lots of good could be interchanged. They were ke -- contact with the under -- with the Polish underground, they were -- you could pass information to the outside commandoes and they -- they were working outside the fence, and they -- the Polish underground was never more than a couple kilometers from the perimeter. So we knew about the -- the Sonderkommando uprising.

Q: Did you hear it?

A: We her -- I don't remember hearing, but I do remember the -- the extreme anxiety and the extreme unusual severity of the -- the controls in the watchtowers and that's -- that's all I remember about it.

Q: We -- were you anywhere near when the women were hung because of the stealing of powder from [indecipherable]

A: No, no, n-n-no, no.

Q: You weren't?

A: No. I don't remember. I mean I'm just not [indecipherable]

Q: You just don't remember.

A: Right.

Q: When you went to see your sister, wasn't she on the same transport with you when she came into Auschwitz?

A: Yes, but then we were separated, and she was separated from our mother right -- almost right away. She had the information that our mother was -- my mother had asthma and she thought that -- that she had an asthma attack and -- and that she was not yet dead she wa -- when she was

carted away with the -- the day's corpses to the crematorium. It's the best she could determine.

So -- so you know, th -- I last saw her in June, and this must have been September, thereabouts.

Q: Right.

A: I remember it was beginning to get cold.

Q: So you didn't know until then that she was alive.

A: I knew -- right, right, right,

Q: You thought she might have been --

A: Right. Well, either shipped out or s --

Q: Right.

A: -- killed, I don't -- didn't know.

Q: And her condition, was she okay?

A: She was emaciated, and as I said there, you know, totally unprotected from the weather.

Q: Yeah. So what did it mean for you to be in this group? Were they really doing resistance, were they doing it --

A: Well, it was something to do. It was a will to live. I mean, seemed to be some purpose to life rather than just waiting to be carted away to the crematorium. And you know, I think back, I -- I -- the chance of surviving, the expectation to survive was very low, and you just did whatever you could to keep yourself busy. And -- and quite frankly, on occasions they -- they certainly -- the kapos certainly used me for being much smaller to get into places where they couldn't get into, to do hand-offs that -- that they felt they were too exposed, so yeah, I -- I made myself useful any -- any way I could.

Q: So what -- what would it be for you to hand off? Is this a bartering system?

A: No, ma -- it was mostly issues of -- of handing off lists of prisoners to the -- to the outside commandoes, to be sent out to the -- to the -- to the out -- Polish underground on the outside.

Q: So people would have names, so they would know --

A: Right, right.

Q: -- what was going on.

A: Right.

Q: And where do the lists come from? They weren't -- w-were they paying for [indecipherable]

A: Well, all the orderlies in the -- in the -- in the offices were also political prisoners.

Q: So there's a very extensive underground system --

A: Right.

Q: -- that's going on.

A: Right.

Q: And are you involved with people who are mainly doing informational resistance, or are they also connected with the people who are going to do an uprising?

A: There was no -- I -- I -- I -- not in Auschwitz, there was no -- I don't recall any talk of any physical resistance because it was just -- just not possible. [indecipherable] was different.

Q: But there was an uprising, so that there was physical resistance because the crematoria was blown up, right?

A: Yeah, well -- well, yeah, but the Sonderkommando had privileges that even the --

Q: Right.

A: -- the kapos in the regular compounds didn't have. They [indecipherable] access to food, to -- to alcohol, to bribe the -- the guard and all kinds of other things that -- I mean, they were privileged prisoners [indecipherable]

Q: But when you -- when one says privileged, they're still in a horrible situation.

A: Oh yes, yes, of course, yeah.

Q: Right, so it's privileged in a very --

A: Right, right, and very relevant, very relevant --

Q: -- specific [indecipherable]

A: -- yes.

Q: Right.

A: Yes.

Q: Would you have considered yourself a privileged prisoner?

A: Oh definitely, definitely.

Q: But were you actually protected from selections?

A: Yes.

Q: You were?

A: Especially in the fall when things got severe, th-they hid me. One time I was hiding in a latrine, up to my mouth in excrement. Then I had to find a -- the lavatory barracks and sneak in and get a -- take a sh -- cold shower with clothes on to get some of the smell off. Yeah, they protected me, yes.

Q: So they protected you, it's not like as if you were in a protected kommando so that the SS wouldn't get you. It's that the -- that these men themselves were protecting you.

A: Yes, right, right, yes.

Q: But going into latrine doesn't sound --

A: Well, that --

Q: -- to a normal perso --

A: Right.

Q: -- regular person, like it's terribly much protection.

A: Well, if that was the place to hide, then that was the place to hide.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Yup.

Q: When you think about this now, thinking about yourself as you're close to 14, or thirt -- you were really 13 actually --

A: Yup, right.

Q: -- right?

A: Right.

Q: Doing this, can you conceive of yourself in this, or just this seems like, well it's my history, it's just the way it was.

A: Oh, I th -- yeah, I can conceive myself doing it, I -- I did what I could, I -- I -- I -- I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to -- to do something, not to just sit.

Q: Now these -- these -- when you say that these are Polish kapos, or --

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: -- you -- you mean that they're Polish Gentiles --

A: Yes.

Q: -- these are not Jews.

A: Right.

Q: Right. But they know you're Jewish.

A: Yes.

Q: And there's not a problem in terms of [indecipherable]

A: No, they were violent anti-Semite, all of them, without exception.

Q: They were?

A: Oh yes. Without exception.

Q: So what was that like for you? On the one hand they're protecting you, on the other hand --

A: Well -- well, now, for the duration of the hostilities, they suspended their -- their animosity, or hatred, or whatever you want to call it. But you -- you know, the ordinary talk, ex -- especially after a few vodka, the cuss terms for Jews was -- was as sharp as -- as the terms that the SS guards used. No -- no distinction.

Q: Did it make you feel f -- strange, as a Jewish person, or not want to be Jewish, or that didn't occur to you?

A: That didn't occur to me, no. Just was part of the surroundings.

Q: So those years of living under the Hungarian occupation, while there's not violence so much -
-

A: Yeah.

Q: -- there's still a lot of anti-Semitism. So do you think you start getting used to it, you just expect this to be the case for a lot of people?

A: Yeah, yes, definitely.

Q: Cause certainly it doesn't seem to be easy to accept it.

A: It definitely was something to accept, yeah.

Q: Now, do you know -- are -- are you still involved at -- where are you living? Are you living in B2 bi -- D, or are you living in the same place that you began?

A: In the same compound -- in -- in -- in compound D, but in one of the barracks on the opposite side and further down.

Q: Than when you started.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yes. And are you with any Jews?

A: Everybody's Jew --

Q: Everybody's Jewish, except these guys --

A: Except the -- except the -- the kapos, yeah. All the orderlies wi --

Q: Now do they mistrust you because you're with these other guys, and being an interpreter?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I mean, the front office in the barracks is -- is -- you know, maybe eight or 10 orderlies, and by that time they were all Łódź Jews. And then in the back, or -- eight - 900, thousand inmates who rotate out on -- on very short time basis. That was the life.

Q: And what do you understand what the Nazis are doing? I -- you -- you know that they're killing Jews in Auschwitz.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you know at this point that there's widespread killing?

A: Yes.

Q: And that they're trying to kill all Jews?

A: Yes.

Q: You know this?

A: Yes. Def -- yeah.

Q: So you -- you don't have much of an expectation of surviving this?

A: Like zero.

Q: Zero?

A: Yup.

Q: But you --

A: But I never gave up, I mean --

Q: But you never gave up.

A: Every opportunity I could to -- to do something like that. I never allowed myself to -- to give up.

Q: Was your sister a similar way --

A: Oh yeah.

Q: -- when you spoke to her afterwards?

A: Yes, yup.

Q: And are you hearing things about the progress of the war also? Are the rumors going around -
-

A: Ah yes, some of the smuggling was the other way, from the underground on the outside, so yes, we knew something about the -- well, in -- in that location we knew a lot more about the -- the eastern front than the -- than the western front.

Q: So is some of your -- not desire to live, but ability to keep going, also a function of thinking well maybe the war will end, maybe they'll be ri --

A: Oh yes, de -- yes, by that time it was beginning to -- to look like that, yeah.

Q: It wa -- it was beginning to look up?

A: Yeah, right.

Q: Are there many kids around your age, or are they mostly gone?

A: I don't remember if the kid's barrack continued. Now, among the later transport -- among the Budapest Jews that came later, July or -- or August, there were quite a few father son groups -- pairs. And I think among the Łódź Jews also. So you'd did doos -- did see some kids teen -- in their teens.

Q: But they don't necessarily stay very long in Auschwitz?

A: They not necessarily stay in Auschwitz, and I don't remember many of them being alone, they were usually with their fathers. I remember that very clearly.

Q: Do you feel protected, do you feel close -- a-and close to these guys?

A: Oh yes.

Q: You do?

A: Yes.

Q: So, are they nice to you in some ways?

A: Yes. Yup.

Q: Are they warm as well, when --

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: Because this must be difficult, you are still a child, in a way.

A: Right, right.

Q: And not receiving affection and --

A: Oh, I me -- in those circumstances, ya -- normal emotions don't -- don't --

Q: Don't count.

A: -- don't do much. But you're better off without them.

Q: You're better off without them.

A: Yeah.

Q: Why?

A: Oh, it's ha -- it's -- it's -- it's just baggage, it -- it -- very ha-hard to carry around. Lot of ri -- writers have -- have said that. Kids had an easier time surviving than adults, that you were not conditioned by civilization, and I -- that's definitely the case that I remembered. That I dare to do things that adults would -- would not do.

Q: Do you think that you became more primitive in some way?

A: Oh yeah, by all means, yes --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- yes. Yes.

Q: Does -- when you look back, does it surprise you how easy it is to become so different than what you were before?

A: Yeah, in a -- tha -- yes, definitely. But you know, it -- it was -- entrance to Auschwitz was this deep, deep, deep immersion into hell that you couldn't con -- possibly conceive. And you either got out of it, or you didn't get out of it. And I don't know what in my make-up helped me to -- to get out of it, other than the -- my governess's effort to teach me German.

Q: [indecipherable] terrible governess. You saw a lot of hangings.

A: Yes.

Q: Was that the first time you saw a dead person?

A: No, in -- no, in 1941, at -- when the Hungarians came in, 13 young people were hung in the public square, including the -- the rabbi's son, and I remember seeing that hanging. So I -- I -- yes, I'd seen a hanging before.

Q: You had seen it before.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you see beatings in Auschwitz?

A: All the time.

Q: All the time. Was there sort of a gen -- you know, people just walk around and all of a sudden they would be hit, or did you --

A: Yes, oh yeah, ra -- yeah, random violence all the time.

Q: And did you see people who were being punished and beaten?

A: Yes.

Q: What did it make you think about human beings? Did you --

A: Hoping that it wasn't me. I mean --

Q: Oh, you hoped it wasn't you.

A: Yeah --

Q: Yes.

A: -- I mean, you get -- you become very selfish.

Q: Yes.

A: Self-centered and selfish.

Q: Did you see the people who were helping you, being brutal to other people?

A: Yes.

Q: And did you ever say to them, how can you --

A: No.

Q: No. Were you ever afraid that they would ask you to do that kind of thing?

A: No.

Q: You weren't?

A: No. They would --

Q: They wouldn't have done it?

A: No, they wouldn't have asked me, no. But, I mean, I have some recollections which I'm not very proud of. I remember one day very clearly having a snack before di-di-distribution of dinner -- in -- in -- a slice of bread, and three slices of cheese on it, and going outside for a [indecipherable] standing for the appel, and one of them said, "What is the ration tonight?" And I said, "One of these slices of cheese." And I was eating three or four as a snack. And another time -- shoes were always an issue, and mine were -- were again, very beaten up and Tadek saw a pair on a man, a pair of ski boots that he thought would be good for me and made him take them off and take my broken down shoes, and he gave him a loaf of bread. And I didn't feel good about that.

Q: But you now have ski boots?

A: Yes. Yeah. So that was -- that was life in Auschwitz. I became very callous.

Q: Yeah, makes perfect sense though.

A: Clawing t -- clawing through life.

Q: Was there a canteen in Auschwitz that you knew about where you could go and get, I don't know, juice or cigarettes or something. Was there a place that people could exchange?

A: Yeah, there was a canteen in th -- I-I mean, I understand Auschwitz itself there were several canteen --

Q: You mean Auschwitz one?

A: -- in -- in -- in Birkenau, Auschwitz two, I think there was a canteen. I don't know who had access to it, but we -- we got things with black market things.

Q: So you didn't go to the canteen?

A: Oh, I'd -- I'd been to the canteen many times.

Q: You were?

A: Yeah,

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But bartering.

Q: As opposed to --

A: Right.

Q: -- purch -- I don't know what they purchased.

A: There -- yeah, there was some -- there was some scrip. Yeah, everything was bartered [indecipherable], passes to the women's b -- to the -- to the prisoner's brothel was so many gold watches. And then you got --

Q: So many gold watches.

A: -- and then you got a pass.

Q: And did you know people who went?

A: Yup.

Q: Did you go?

A: No.

Q: No. Could you have gone?

A: I guess not, I don't know.

Q: A-As a Jewish boy?

A: I don't know.

Q: You don't know.

A: The kapos around me all had girlfriends in a -- in -- kapos in the -- in the women's barracks, they didn't have to go to the brothel.

Q: And were they ab -- they were able to go in and out of the women's barracks?

A: Well, one time I -- I remember -- I remember one times very clearly Piotr was in bed with this woman and an SS came in and I was in the out -- outer room, and all I -- and all of these women orderlies had these beautifully elaborate ta -- beds -- beds with silk bedcovers and silk pillows, everything pilfered or bar -- bartered from Kanada. And all I could think of is slide under bed [indecipherable] bed with the bedcover to the floor, and then it was over and they started asking each other whether they had seen me or whether the SS woman had taken me, and then I climbed out from under the bed. I remember that.

Q: You just went under because you wanted the feel of the --

A: Ah no, I just slid --

Q: Oh, slid on top?

A: -- I slid on the floor, I slid on the floor.

Q: I see, I see.

A: Under the -- and the bedcover came all the way down to the floor.

Q: Oh, oh, I see.

A: Yeah. So --

Q: Did you know -- di -- did people talk about who were the women in the brothels?

A: No, I don't remember ever -- but when I got to Niederorschel which will sooner -- come sooner or later, one of the questions I was asked, is it true that women were selected on their looks to go to work in brothels? And I said no, I don't know if anything that -- that -- I've seen many women's selections, I've never seen women being selected on the basis of looks. I lied, but I --

Q: You lied?

A: Yeah.

Q: Why?

A: Because I'd seen that.

Q: That they were selected and you knew they were going to be prostitutes?

A: Right. But to these men --

Q: You didn't want them to know.

A: No.

Q: Steve, how did you know that they were selecting women to go to the brothels?

A: Because kapos were talking about it.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And comparing the -- particularly the women kapos were comparing the -- the condition -- the relative conditions of the various brothels, that's why, you know.

Q: Comparing --

A: Some -- some were better than others. You know, don't ask me why, but that's --

Q: Really?

A: -- that's what they were talking about, so I knew what this meant.

Q: Uh-huh. So you were in Auschwitz for how long? Six months?

A: From mid -- end of June til mid-October, July, August, September, four months.

Q: Four months. So you leave after the uprising?

A: Yes.

Q: Now what are the conditions? How -- how come you get out of Auschwitz and go to Niederorschel?

A: Well, the conditions were getting harsher and harsher, and the kapos decided to smuggle me out. And they were looking for a safe transport because the word was that sometimes people were turned around at the railroad siding and taken to the gas chambers. So this one transport appeared safe, they pushed me in the line. I -- I got tattooed -- no, everything gets counted. One of the kapos, I don't know if it was Tadek, I don't remember any more, went up, who -- who will trade places with this boy, we'll give you food and we'll make sure that you get out on another transport. And this man volunteered and I was pushed in. Piotr slipped me a gold watch in my hand, he -- for the doctor. So we were stripped, examined. Had a Jewish inmate doctor examining. I passed him the watch, he said, "Thank you, I would have passed you anyhow."

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. Next station is tattooing and this inmate working, these huge, crude numbers and he looks up at me and he gives the tiniest number that I've ever seen.

Q: Do you still have it?

A: Yup. But you know, that is -- it's almost illegible now because it's so small.

Q: Right. And your number is?

A: B13174. Shower, cold shower in October. At the next station Piotr appears and shoves a bundle of clothes in my hand, including the -- the ski boots, which I left with him and he -- and so I was quite well dressed. I have -- I'm sure it was a woman -- woman's tight fitting ski jacket, because it buttoned like a woman's jacket, and my boots and an overcoat, which just had a stripe painted in the back, not the cut in.

Q: Not the what?

A: Not the piece of striped clothe cut in, which is what all the other clothes were.

Q: Right, this is one stripe?

A: Just a piece of, maybe two inches wide and few inches long.

Q: And what was the color?

A: Blue and -- and gray stripes.

Q: I thought you said there was a paint stripe.

A: This one was just a red paint stripe.

Q: Right.

A: The patch on my pants and on my jacket were not cut in, were just sewed on.

Q: I think -- can you hold that?

A: Yeah.

Q: I think we have to stop the tape before we --

End of Tape Five

Beginning Tape Six

Q: Steven, we were talking about your leaving. Do you have a sense of who this group of people were? Were these Hungarians that were going to Niederorschel, or this --

A: I can show you the -- the bill of lading that I got in Buchenwald. I'm listed as a Slovakian Jew, because this was a group from -- from Slovakia, and I was pushed in between them.

Q: And you were pushed in between those.

A: Yup. Yeah.

Q: When -- why was there a Jewish doctor standing there? It's a little hard t --

A: Well, th-the -- the -- the processing line involves a absolutely cursory medical examination, and that was a inmate doctor who was doing it.

Q: Were these people -- had they come from outside of Auschwitz, and they were passing through after a --

A: No.

Q: -- day or two? Do you have any idea who --

A: No, no, no, these were --

Q: These were Slovakian Jews who were in the camp?

A: Oh, oh, oh, the ones who were going out?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Yes, they -- they had just been there days.

Q: Now, were they all tattooed?

A: Yes.

Q: On the way out?

A: On the way out. But the doctor, you asked, I'm sure he was a -- a standard inmate wa -- of some standing, I -- I don't know.

Q: And Tadek gave you the gold watch?

A: Yes.

Q: And did he assume that there wou -- there could be a problem --

A: Yes.

Q: -- that the doctor would not pass you --

A: Right.

Q: -- and you would be sent to the gas?

A: I -- I wou -- I wou -- what happens if they s -- I -- I mean it was unclear what would have happened if the doctor found reason for me not to be put on the outgoing transport, I don't know.

Q: And do you have any idea why they allowed you to be showered, because you were leaving? I mean, what was --

A: Well amid this -- this incredible barbarity and filth, there was also the German fascination with cleanliness. And all these slogans in the barracks, where you had to use pebbles to wipe yourself, there were big slogans on the wall about healthy body keeps you alive and God knows what else. So ever -- every process involved a shower in cold water and -- and disinfection of some -- walking through some disinfectant like [indecipherable] and I mean, that's was just part of the routine.

Q: Was there soap?

A: Aaarrgh.

Q: No soap, okay.

A: No soap.

Q: No towel, I'm sure --

A: No towel --

Q: -- to wipe yourself. So -- this is cold weather, cause it's --

A: It's cold weather.

Q: -- Poland in October.

A: Right, right.

Q: Right?

A: Right. And there were -- I was naked and shivering, running from one barrack to the next with my bundle of clothes, and a guard stops me and he said, "Where are you going? How old are you? What is your birth date?" And I said, "April 16, 1929," because the -- the kapos drilled me to use my sister's birthday so I -- that I would appear older. And he say -- said okay, and he passed me. So -- so we got dressed, marched to the trains, and I remember very long wait on the siding. Eventually the train started. Three days on the train.

Q: Three?

A: Three days. Wa -- once a day we were let out.

Q: And this is a cattle car similar to what you --

A: Right, right, yes.

Q: -- had in coming to Auschwitz.

A: Right. I remember looking in the window. I remember seeing kids my age romping in the snow and building snowmen and thinking about that.

Q: But now you're tall enough so you can see out.

A: I guess so.

Q: You guess so, huh?

A: I guess so. And so eventually we arrive, railroad siding. We get out, station sign says Niederorschel, and barking orders from an SS. A few words from German foreman, translation by Hungarian interpreter. And then to my horror, the German foreman comes up to me and says, "Why are you here, I did not select you." I was the one who escorted him in Auschwitz through the sel -- through the selection.

Q: So he knew who you were.

A: Yeah. So this was one thing that the kapos didn't train me for, and so I thought very fast and I said, "Well sir, with this many new m -- inmates, they decided that you need another interpreter and I was sent as an interpreter." And he shrugged his shoulders and said okay. And we were left -- let into this --

Q: Now is th -- is this a German pri -- this is not a German prison. This is --

A: No, German civilian --

Q: -- civilian.

A: -- foreman.

Q: I see, okay.

A: So Niederorschel was these two [indecipherable] but now I know is a textile factory right next to a railroad siding and a plywood factory further up, were enclosed as a camp, with a narrow walkway between them with barb wire fence. And we were marched into this dining room and sat at tables and there was warm meal, which was quite a shock. And we were all eating and the Hungarian interpreter and another guy who I was very close to later, came in, sat down, really crowding me on both sides. Who are you, where are you from, how come your clothes are different, how come the foreman knew you?

Q: You must have been scared out of your mind.

A: Oh yeah, yes. I was very s -- I was very scared. So I tried to explain myself. That evening I was taken into this little side room of where the two kapos lived, both German -- German political prisoners, both of them communists and in prison since 1933.

Q: Oh my God, wow.

A: Oh -- it -- in -- next month, in April, the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Niederorschel, there's a ceremony, including the Israeli ambassador to Germany. The kapo is -- kapo's family is receiving a posthumous award as a Righteous Gentile, because only -- only 19 people died there.

Q: Really?

A: Yup. And that was due entirely -- entirely to him. So the quest --

Q: What -- what was his name?

A: Otto -- I'll think of it in a minute. I have the invitation from the ambassador on -- on my desk.

Otto -- no.

Q: It's okay.

A: So, the questioning. The two kapos in German, a Gypsy who -- who was the camp orderly, I-I forget what language we -- we usually sp -- spoke. Polish, a couple of the -- the labor orderly who was Czech, all crowding around me and questioning me. And, so at -- at the end of that night, I convinced them. And I was only 13 years old, but I was accepted as -- as a full member of their resistance organization.

Q: What -- what were they trying to fi -- what -- why were they so suspicious of you?

A: Once a plant, a plant, a -- a -- a --

Q: A German plant?

A: A German plant, a -- a [indecipherable] I mean, I did stick out like a sore thumb.

Q: Because your uniform was so different.

A: Yeah. Yeah, so --

Q: But Tadek got this uniform in Auschwitz for you, I mean he just gave it to you.

A: I mean, a collection of clothes, yeah.

Q: So there's a collection of clothes.

A: Right, right.

Q: So it can't have been so unique.

A: No, but it was bet -- better fitting, warmer.

Q: I see. So you were better prepared [indecipherable]

A: I was better -- yup, right, right.

Q: It's also funny that they would suspect a 13 year old as being a plant.

A: I don't know, I don't know.

Q: I don't know, it seems like an odd plant to me.

A: I don't know, I mean, yeah right.

Q: So how did -- I mean wi -- wa -- how did you convince them? Just by being honest with them?

A: Yeah. I told the Gypsy -- orderly wanted to know about the Gypsies, I said -- that was one of the very difficult things I remember. I told him a -- what I had witnessed. This young Slovak Jew wanted to know about the women. I lied to him, but I -- I thought I had to, and I answered all of their questions and I convinced them.

Q: Okay, so now you're one of them.

A: Yes.

Q: What does that mean?

A: Well, all right, let me tell you a little bit about Niederorschel. There is the story -- okay, Niederorschel was a factory producing wings for Messerschmitt fighter planes.

Q: And Niederorschel is really a sub-camp of Buchenwald, right?

A: It's sub -- yeah, in Buchenwald, right, right.

Q: So it's in that area.

A: Yup. About 700 inmates, about 50 or 60 German civilian workers. 12 hour work shifts, six and a half days a week. Every 30 minutes the bell rings and the wing moves up on the assembly line from one station to the next station. That was the life. Food somewhat better than Auschwitz -- it's better than Auschwitz. Fortunately there was this absolutely first rate Czech cook. He was fat, he was really fat, who, I don't know how he did it. Kitchen scraps from the guard's food, I'm sure table scraps from the guard's food. Vegetables that the si -- the town crew managed to steal or whatever. He provided some taste and some variety to the -- to the daily soup. So it was -- life was on the edge of being bearable, not quite. I still, after all of these years I think back with amazement at what people in this circumstance still managed to do. Obviously there were shoemakers who could prepare your shoes with sole from discarded tires that the grounds crew found and shoe nails that were cut from scrap lumber. Obviously there were tailors who -- who with needle and thread gotten on the black market from the -- from the civilians could fix your clothes. Those kinds of things you expect. You don't expect to see these two brothers, Hungarian Jews deported from Holland, diamond grinders by trade, who ground prescription glasses out of bottoms of discarded milk bottles. Jewelers who took scraps of aluminum from the plant and created these carved boxes that could be traded. Beautifully carved, elaborately carved boxes. Some others made these very elaborate boxes out of pleated s-straw that could be bartered with the -- with the German civilians for ne -- needle, thread, soap, tobacco, few things. There were

about five or six -- maybe five to eight kids my age, mostly, as I said, Budapest with their fathers. One -- one kid I remember from Transylvania with his father. These gentlemen decided that our education could not be interrupted, so after 12 hours workday, they sat us down, classes in algebra and French. Oh, everything, of course, was punishable by death, particularly smuggling o-out of the plant. Everybody who had a opportunity smuggled out scrap aluminum, scrap tools, sharpening them into weapons at night. The lights went out about half an hour after meals were served. You could hear for hours stone bowl -- pebbles being scraped against metal to create wa -- knives. I was very proud of a knife I made for myself out of a -- a -- a hacksaw blade. There were -- of the 700, probably a hundred were Soviet POWs. The Germans did not honor the Geneva convention, and the Soviet POWs were in the same boat as we were. And some of them were the strongest, in terms of trying to make weapons. Training for a uprising. Throwing knives. Many of them had fashioned these heavy knives with very heavy handles and practiced.

Q: So there was real intention to have an uprising?

A: Yes. You asked about my role. First few weeks I was on -- on the detail with the -- under the Gypsy orderly that went to town to -- for collect -- for getting goods that -- bread and vegetables and that was brought in from the local market. I was well enough dressed, if the other inmates detracted the guards attention, I could sn-sneak in the apothecary and with Reichsmarks from the black market, get aspirin and medication that the medic wanted; to get ethyl alcohol for Molotov bombs.

Q: Ethyl alcohol for --

A: For Molotov cocktails.

Q: I see.

A: Then the SS lieutenant decided I was not strong enough to carry these loaves of bread, and so they put me from that detail to the factory, and next to the Hungarian interpreter, the next to the last line on the assembly line, the inspection line. I was given a dentist mirror, and it was my job to look at every single rivet to see that it was properly driven. Badly -- o-occasionally -- I mean, sabotage was going all the time. Occasionally I would see a rivet that -- that wasn't right. I could pass it, occasionally I could stop. Our station was the only one that could stop the assembly line to drill out a rivet and insert the explosive driven rivet, that you apply heat on the top and the bottom explodes and that tightens the -- the connection. Whatever sabotage we could do, we -- we did. It didn't really matter because it turns out -- well, eventually, by January, the railroad line was bombed. We were getting fewer and fewer parts, and the wing -- the partial wings that we produced were piled in the snow outside, was no place to put them. The story I heard -- it's th -- it's known that no single wing produced here ever flew.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, the Germans made this a known -- the camp was only started in the spring of '44. The Germans made this enormous effort to disperse war production because of the bombings. And none o -- not all of it worked. In fact, I've heard a rumor that this was a ruse by a small group of people to -- to found this factory and escape from being drafted to the eastern front. How true it is, I don't know. So -- so life was little bit more bearable, much more to do. Looking forward to that half day on Sunday afternoon where we had a little rest. Then as spring -- as weather became -- came to war -- warm up in -- in March, we would -- especially the Russians would set along the fence, which was the promenade to the townspeople, and -- and sing Soviet songs loudly, which upset the promenade -- naders. That was the life. As I said, only 19 people died. Two were Soviet POWs that escaped, were brought back -- were captured by German civilians, brought

back and they were ha -- hanged. I have the list of the others, got it last November. But mortality was -- was quite low -- were -- I mean, remarkably low.

Q: These classes that you talked about that they said they were --

A: Yup.

Q: When did -- when did they give you these classes, after work?

A: After work.

Q: After you eat?

A: After you eat, yeah.

Q: So how long would they last? I mean, you must have --

A: Half an hour.

Q: Half an hour.

A: I mean, we were all asleep, but --

Q: I was --

A: -- we were all asleep by halfway through, but I guess [indecipherable]

Q: And you did the classes in the barracks?

A: Yes.

Q: And obviously these are all verbal things you --

A: Right, oh yes, sure, yeah.

Q: Did you learn anything?

A: I don't know. I -- I -- I was -- again, there was a fairly -- especially if you have red -- yellow star, there was a fairly sharp dividing line between the religious Jews and the secular Jews. I was a -- in the -- the room -- there was some self selection, who went to what room. I was certainly in one of the rooms that was very secular, but they -- the -- the religious ferwer was -- was equally

impressive. I mean, to know the entire daily and Sabbath prayer book by heart, I mean that's for -- taken for granted. To know the parsha, the -- the week's Torah portion and Aftorah portion by heart, well, there was always room for debate, th-the great Talmudic debates on -- on what was the correct memory. All of the festivals are observed, every -- I mean, yeah they -- they -- the Orthodox inmates were totally immersed in -- in their religion. So we knew there -- most of the workers just sort of came and went as if we were invisible. You know, very little contact. One of them ev -- every day, would eat his lunch and read his paper and then make sure that he got my eye and he made -- and signal on where he was hiding the paper, so that later, just before we were herded back to the -- the barracks, I could retrieve the paper and bring it in the barracks. So whatever the German newspaper said, we knew that. So, April first, we had just finished -- I -- I finished work is no longer ap-appropriate. We just finished our 12 hours and went back in the barracks, the whistle sounded and they were moving -- moving us out. There was a big debate in the kapos rooms. Lot of people would -- lot of people wanted to stage an uprising. We had counterfeit keys to all of the guards' rooms. That's not eas -- not hard to do. The inmates were -- were taking the -- the food across several locked doors. With the key you just chew some -- some bread dough in your mouth, make an impression in the key and there were locksmith who could duplicate that. The SS, the officers were living upstairs, we didn't think we could get to them. So there was a big debate and the kapo decided that -- that we didn't know where the American front was. It seemed to have slowed down after the -- after the Battle of the Bulge, that we would march out. The kapo gave orders to the leaders of the brigades that everybody was free to escape if they could. The cook had some emergency rations. Chicory grounds, molasses, something that you could carry, and we were marched out.

Q: Were you disappointed that there was no uprising?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: You were?

A: Yeah.

Q: You wanted to do it?

A: Oh, I was -- well, yes, but when it came to the vote in the room, the Czech work orderly and I voting no swung the -- sw-swung the balance. I could have voted for --

Q: And so why didn't you?

A: I didn't think we had the -- the troops to do it.

Q: Ah, so you're distinguishing between wanting to do it --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- but realizing that you were --

A: Yeah. I didn't think we could do it.

Q: How many people do you think could have been involved? How wa -- wa -- or were creating these weapons, of some kind?

A: 150 out of 700, something like that.

Q: And do you know about how many guards you had?

A: 40 - 50.

Q: That's a lot.

A: Yeah. They were -- the officers were SS. The guards were Wehrmacht, regular army reservists in their 40's and 50's and 60's. I mean, tottering old men, but still, they had automatic rifles.

Q: So that was the problem, of course.

A: Yes, yeah. So that's when -- that's -- that's how we got --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: -- going on the march.

Q: Right. Well let's -- we have to change the tape.

End of Tape Six

Beginning Tape Seven

Q: Okay, Steven, did you bring your knife that you had fashioned, with you?

A: No.

Q: You didn't?

A: I -- I -- I traded it with -- with the -- the Gypsy orderly during the march, and he gave me another knife, and I -- I lo -- I -- I -- no, I haven't -- I haven't got any -- anything from -- I don't have any artifact from --

Q: No, but when you left --

A: Yes.

Q: You did take it.

A: Oh yeah, yes, yes.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Stuck in my --

Q: Yes.

A: -- stuck in my boot, yes.

Q: And did all the guys that you know, who had -- who had made weapons, did they prob --

A: Oh, of course.

Q: -- they -- th -- everybody took them?

A: Of course.

Q: And the intent was in case something happens they'll use it.

A: Yeah, we almost ca -- we almost came to that on the -- on the ninth day. I'll tell you -- I --

Q: Okay.

A: Do you wa -- do you want sa --

Q: So -- well --

A: -- okay, so it's --

Q: -- all right, so you all leave --

A: -- 10 day -- 10 days --

Q: 10 days of marching?

A: -- of march -- let's see, la -- in October we covered the same route by car, probably two hours at 50 kilomet -- say it's about 120 - 150 kilometers, less than a hundred miles.

Q: And you're marching towards --

A: Towards Buchenwald, yes, towards Weimar --

Q: -- towards Buchenwald.

A: -- right, right. Escapes almost every night, shootings I'm -- I'm -- most every night. People falling behind shot and left to die in the -- left dead in the -- in the gutter. Farmers watching us, standing in their fields, clutching their pitchforks. Walking through these -- marching through these villages. People peering out behind lace curs -- curtains. We went through Sonderheim, which was an only large city on the way, broken up cobblestone streets, and that city had been bombed. So it was very long march, very arduous. The follo -- we were being marched with the guards on the side, following the train -- following the marchers was a very old army truck, with a platform in the back, on which the relief guards slept, and it also carried couple rows of a barb wire fence which they used to enclose every night. And pulled this, which was obviously World War I vintage field kitchen, which sometimes worked and most of the time didn't work, so sometimes we had ersatz coffee or some -- something resembling soup. Most of the time we didn't.

Q: So then, but there was an attempt?

A: Yeah.

Q: They didn't just --

A: Right, right.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: So after eight days we arrived at another satellite ca-camp called Berlsteed, which some of the old time prisoners recognized. That had been a brick factory which produced the -- the bricks for Buchenwald and for the other camps. So we had a little bit more freedom cause we're inside the fence, inside the barb wire fence, and not the enclosure of rolls. And we had some food. We also found some -- some frozen potatoes on the ground and everybody started making fires and -- and grilling these potatoes and usually get -- taking them out barehanded before they were cooked. And suddenly we were called to a -- a second appel. A contingent of SS guards came in a truck from -- from Buchenwald, replaced our Wehrmacht guards, and these officers took count. In the officer's staff car was an inmate, and even it was dusk I could recognize first the red triangle on his chest, and the red beret on his head. So as dusk was falling and the officers were chatting, I inched up to him. The guar -- the -- the -- the kapo was sitting on the running board of the SS staff car and I inched up to him and sort of crouched without looking at him, as -- as if there was no contact. And he said, "Do you speak Polish?" Yes. "You have a resistance group?" Yes. "Send me one of them." All I could say is, "I'm one of them, you can talk." And he said, "Whatever you do, stall. Buchenwald is being emptied, trainloads of Jewish prisoners are -- are being taken -- taken in open cars. We don't know what's happening, we don't have control." The re-resistance organization in Buchenwald was always very strong. "We don't have control, stall." So I shuffled back to the -- actually I ran back because a SS sergeant was kicking at me, ran back and when we were bedded down, I reported that to the kapo and the -- the others. How do we

stall? And this Czech government bureaucrat who was a high level -- I think he was deputy secretary of something in Czech Republic, he realized what we had to do, that the SS took e -- that up to that point the local SS were in charge, they could do whatever they wanted. Now a count had been taken up to Buchenwald, our SS had to deliver that many bodies, dead or alive when they arrive in Buchenwald. There's no -- no question. So if some people would hide, the count would come short. Well the -- the Gypsy orderly had been in -- in bel -- Berlsteed, he knew where the brick ovens were, and it was decided that three of -- he and two others would hide in the brick ovens at night. We woke up, our kapo -- our -- SS took a head count, it was three short. So they were thr -- dispatching people all -- all -- guards all over to search, we just stood at attention for a good part of the day. They he -- the SS lieutenant singled out the organization, he knew everybody. Others were allowed to -- to sit, to lie down, we were standing. He threatened to start killing us. Nothing happened. He s -- that's when he sent all but four to six guards for another search. And that was when I thought that they -- he -- that Vladya, Russian off-officer would yell one word and the breakout would start. I knew that. Facing the guards were all the -- the sharpshooters with their heavy knives. And I expected that those people would -- would kill the guards and get their guns and s -- and face the other guards coming back. And then, for the first time that I recall, we heard the sound of -- of gunfire from the west. I -- I don't recall having it er -- having heard it earlier. I don't know how -- how far the front was, I -- I never checked. I could check by date on where the front was. But anyhow, the SS chickened out, and decided to march us out. Long, torturous, very difficult walk up the steep slope. Buchenwald means beech forest, and the camp is at the tip of this somewhat sizable hill. The SS made the resistance group march in front and SS officer behind us and then rest of them. The inmates -- and it was definitely silence, and everybody was shuffling, and I decided I had

something to -- I had to do something, and I stopped as if to tie my shoe, and turned around and yelled pasnia in Russian, a song. And the Russians heard me and pretty soon the entire column was singing. And that was a tremendous relief. Me -- I mean, we all we -- on Sundays, the Sunday afternoons we were singing Russian songs, Polish partisan songs, Yiddish songs. Never Hungarian songs. Nobo -- nobody Hungarian wanted anything Hungarian. We were singing elements of -- of the choral movement of the Ninth Symphony, because that was a -- one of the musicians from the Budapest orchestra taught it to us. So that singing started and that somehow got people the -- the strength to march the last couple of kilometers up -- uphill, and we arrived at the gate in Buchenwald.

Q: You remember the song that you sang -- that you started to sing, this Russian song?

A: [speaks Russian here] A Russian folk song, the -- the Volga -- the Volga boatman song, some partisan songs.

Q: So that gave everybody a --

A: That -- that was a -- a big lift. So we arrive at the gate of Buchenwald, which was described to me by the people who had been there, and we marched in. First thing I noticed that the crematorium, the chimney was -- was cold, there was no smoke coming out of the chimney, which I thought was a good sign. We were marched through the sanitation delousing area right at the top, and that was a good sign. And we were faced by a group of -- of political prisoners in the red beret coming to meet us. On that day there were no more transports out, there were no more SS inside the camp, and the resistance organization controlled the camp. So -- so we were marched in one of the barracks and told to go to sleep, and I fell asleep. And I don't have a very heroic closing because next thing I remember is in following day at mid-afternoon, somebody shook my shoulder to say that the Americans were there.

Q: Did it feel like the end of this hell?

A: Yeah, in many ways it did. We all raced up to the -- to the barb wire fence, we yelled, and I tried to catch somebody's attention and report on the -- on the crimes of the SS lieutenant that I knew of, and then I collapsed against the fence. Spent six weeks in a field hospital run by the American army.

Q: And the field hospital was on the site? On the --

A: Ah -- buchenw -- you've not been to Buchenwald.

Q: Yeah, on top.

A: On top. The camp is that side, on the other side is the crescent of these large buildings which were SS barracks, which now house the museum, library, etcetera. In 24 hours, Americans converted that to one field hospital, recruiting nurses and doctors from [indecipherable] I don't know how many thousand of people were there. So I was there for --

Q: Six weeks.

A: -- six weeks.

Q: Were you awake a lot of this time, or were you [indecipherable]

A: I was awake [indecipherable] uh-huh, yup.

Q: And what was wrong with you at this point?

A: Dehydration, broken arm --

Q: Broken arm?

A: Yeah.

Q: Where'd that come from?

A: Oh, that came from one of the guards. I spoke back to him and he swung his rifle at me and I -
- I -- the only time I lost my -- my cool, spoke back to the armed guard.

Q: When did this happen?

A: On the march.

Q: Oh, on the march. So you're marching with a broken arm?

A: Yeah, with a -- with a -- yeah. The medic -- the Russian officer cut some -- cut some tree limbs and made a s -- they made a splint, medic made a splint and I was walking with a ar -- marching with a broken arm.

Q: He could have shot you.

A: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: Do you have any idea why he didn't?

A: I don't know.

Q: No, you don't know. He just broke your arm.

A: Yeah.

Q: He smashed you with it -- with a baton?

A: With -- swung his rifle and -- and I just put my arm up.

Q: Oh. Well, I'm glad you told me.

A: Yeah. So I don't know how far beyond you want to go.

Q: I want to go a ways down. So you're in the hospital for six weeks.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you know that your mother is not alive?

A: I didn't know that -- I mean, yes, I knew that from my sister. I knew what -- I didn't know about my sister, I didn't know about my father.

Q: Your father, right.

A: While I was there in the hospital, a rabbi from the Backa area came by. He -- he was taking names of liberated inmates from the Backa area, and came to interview me. I said ah sa -- Subotica. Date of birth -- 16 -- April 1929 and s -- s -- wait a minute. He goes through notebooks and says, you have a twin. So he had met -- seen my sister in Bergen-Belsen, and so that's how I knew that she was there. She was alive. So yeah, the Iron Curtain was down in '45. Not -- didn't wait for Truman -- for Churchill's speech. The French, Norwegians, Danes, Dutch, Belgians were out of there in 48 hours. The people who wanted to go to the Soviet side were there for weeks and weeks and weeks. I was informed when I registered with the American -- that there was a provision for DP orphans to be sent directly to the States. And they notified my uncle who was a doctor in -- in New York, that they found me. And my ga -- my uncle would take me -- and I said no, I can't do that.

Q: This is the brother of your mother?

A: Yes.

Q: Right? Okay.

A: I said, "I have to go back. If anybody is alive, they will do -- will do the same thing, I have to go back." So it wasn't til July or August that we were taken by American trucks to Pilsen in Czechoslovakia and then by train, Pilsen, Prague, Budapest. And I arrived in Subotica.

Q: And had you all said this to each other, as a family, that we'll go back --

A: Never said it, never said it.

Q: You never said where you would go?

A: No. We just knew that.

Q: So did you go back to your house?

A: At the railroad station, my two surviving cousins were waiting for me. They were in the Yugoslav army, and they were coming out daily, whenever a returning train was coming, they did that regularly. So we went to our -- my Gentile aunt's house. Going back to my house made no sense. So I stayed there. Couple weeks later my sister came back omai -- on a train from Bergen-Belsen. And then in late August, maybe early September, my father came back on a Russian hospital train. I still have the admission diagnosis from the Russian mi -- military hospital. Angina, kidney failure, 15 serious maladies, from a coal mine in Silesia. But he came home. He tried to start a new life. He was told that if he asked for the plant they're going to try him for collaboration with the enemy because he didn't put up armed resistance when the plant was taken away. He eked out a miserable living, and he died sixth of February, 1946. Three months after he came back. Totally broken, physically, emotionally.

Q: So he wasn't the same man that you knew?

A: Uh-uh. One picture that I don't have in my album -- most of the pictures I have in my album - - my sister it was bet -- had better connections, got more pictures back, and mo -- large majority of what I have is -- is photocopies from her album. There is this small passport size picture of our father, I don't want a copy of that in my album. It's so horrible that I don't want it. But at least we could bury him in this big, elaborate tomb that was put up for his brother. My wife, Norma is n -- November, this October was the first time that she wa -- she had seen somebody [indecipherable] and of course we went to the cemetery. And she said, "You had sow -- shown me this picture before," it's a big, white marble thing with [indecipherable] and projecting letters. But on a photograph it's -- they're almost invisible. And then underneath, carved in very crudely are the names of my father and all the relatives who died in the Shoah. Then my wife said, "This solves one mystery. I could never bring up myself to ask you, but I could never

understand how, in those circumstances you could afford to have such a fancy grave for your father.” She never realized that that was a -- the tomb f -- for my uncle. So after he died --

Q: Is your mother’s name up there, too?

A: Yes.

Q: So all the family members who died --

A: All the family mem -- yeah --

Q: -- whether they’re there or not.

A: -- a -- a -- through the entire cemetery, everywhere, there are the -- the names of the -- of the -
- you know, one engraved name on the name and 20 chiseled in names of sur -- of people who
didn’t survi -- of people who died. So, went back to school, I’d lost a year.

Q: And where are you living?

A: We got this apartment, which was a terrib --

Q: You and your sister?

A: Well, first my father --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- and I and sister. We had a terrific maid, a Volksdeutscher, a [indecipherable] woman who
was let out of the camps to be our servant until they were booted out to Germany. All -- all they -
- all the Volksdeutscher were -- from mo -- all of these countries were booted out. You know, the
-- the German -- the German foreign minister’s name is the same as my nickname, Joschka.

Q: Really? Oh that’s right, yes it was.

A: Yeah. I mean ob -- obviously his family came from -- fr -- came from -- was expelled in the --
at the end of the war. So we had this miserable apartment, cold, with my father, and until she was
deported, this -- this woman, who was quite, quite nice. And then my -- my younger aunt -- my

three younger so -- aunts -- my father's three younger dau -- sisters survived, two of them in Budapest and one in -- in Subotica and she moved in with us. And that was it, we -- I mean, going to school in communist Yugoslavia was no fun at all. You know, obligatory membership in the communist youth party and I was there -- I -- I'm very grateful. I still correspond with two of my classmates who sort of pick me up and provide a lot of support. So I did two years there. And my sister came back on a train with many Yugoslav army officers coming from POW camps, and she was corresponding with one of them, who wrote back -- wrote her that he had a position in the foreign ministry. I went to Belgrade, we saw him and he issued us passports and exit visas. I'm not quite sure it was legal for him to do so. But of all of us, two of us, my two cousins, and my two cousins fiancés, of the six of us who found ourself together in Paris, we were the only two that had legal ways of getting there.

Q: Let me ask you something. Did anybody, when you came back and you're going to school, you're there for a couple of years --

A: Yes.

Q: -- before you leave for Paris, yes?

A: Yes.

Q: Does anybody ask you what happened? Do you talk to your sister, is there -- or do you just simply go on?

A: No, there was a lot of talk, there -- there was a -- a friend of my aunt's who invited me to talk, who im -- who told me that I have to sit down and write all of this down. Yeah, some people were interested. The majority -- I mean, all of us -- most of us just wanted to get on and let --

Q: Did you -- so you didn't want to talk? This was not something --

A: Oh, I -- I talked to them. I me -- when people asked, I talked.

Q: Right.

A: But I didn't want to dwell too much on it.

Q: Right. And your sister the same?

A: Yeah, me -- much more so than I.

Q: More so than you?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, I mean she -- she had ter -- totally divorced herself, she -- she said she didn't want to have anything to do with it. I mean, she --

Q: Did you talk together so she knew what happened to you and you knew what happened to her?

A: Yeah, yeah. I --

Q: But that was it?

A: That was it. So --

Q: So you went to --

A: -- so -- so we escaped. I mean, in -- with all -- in -- with all respects, we escaped. If --

Q: Were there any questions at the border with these papers?

A: Well, we were very careful. On the basis of Yugoslav passport, French -- Americans were not very helpful. "Oh, you missed your chance as a DP. There is a Yugoslav quota, but it's kept in the west. If you manage to get the west and register, we'll register you." Period. French were very nice, "We'll give you a three day transit visa, if [indecipherable] you get to France, the police will extend it indefinitely if you renounce your citizenship." On the basis of that we go to Italians, 24 hour transit visa. You wait, th -- Trieste was being run by [indecipherable] arrangements. You certainly don't go the month when the Russians control it. You don't go the

month when the British control it, because they read stuff. You wait til the Americans control it, they put a stamp on it --

Q: Then you just go.

A: Then you just go. The train -- in Ljubljana the train was locked. The train was unlocked when we got to Milan. And from there we went to Paris. I usually break down when I talk about that. I came back maybe a dozen time to the Milan train station, going to Florence, going conferences in northern Italy. But that's really the place where I feel my freedom began.

Q: In Milan?

A: Just a railroad station, hour of waiting for the train to Paris. But that was --

Q: That's the place.

A: That's the place.

Q: We have to stop the tape.

A: Okay.

End of Tape Seven

Beginning Tape Eight

Q: I know it's hard to remember feelings. Did you actually feel when you were in Milan that this was the break --

A: Oh yes. Very strongly.

Q: You did feel --

A: Very strongly.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah.

Q: And when you go back there, you feel [indecipherable]

A: Oh yeah, right.

Q: And did es --

A: And my sister's comment is, "You were a good little boy until then, you haven't been one since."

Q: And you're still a little boy to her?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes.

A: Yeah.

Q: So from Milan, you go into Paris.

A: We get to Paris, we registered with the Joint, American Joint Distribution Committee, they provided housing and -- and meal tickets at a cafeteria. Went to the Yugoslav consulate, asked for an interview with the consul, we walked in, handed him the passport -- two passports, and walked out, went to the Yugoslav royal military mission. They gave us a -- a certificate.

Q: That said what, you're no longer citizens?

A: That -- that we are recognized by them, whatever that was.

Q: Okay.

A: Went to the French police prefecture, got our three month visitor -- a three months permit.

Went to the arrondissement headquarters, got our ni -- our rations, it was still rationed. And the fren -- I mean, the stay was extended for two years. Every three months we had to go to police for an extension. Visited England the following year, and then c-coming to the States I had -- we both had [indecipherable] stateless passports issued by the French.

Q: And you went to school in France, did you not? Both of you?

A: Well, at first -- at first al -- Joint had thousands of us, so they contracted out to French social service agencies to take care of groups of people, and we were -- we were at a outfit called Service sociale des jeunes. Youth social services. And that's where we went monthly for money, some clothing, I mean, really subsistence money, clothing, meal tickets, etcetera. There was nothing else to do. There's this great institution called Alliance Française, which gives free French lessons -- free lessons in French three days a week, morning sessions, afternoon session, evening session. Allowed to progress as fast as you're ready. I went through three sessions a day, had nothing else to do. And so I -- the next year, I'm now a proud owner of a certificate that allows me to teach French as a second language al -- any-anywhere outside of France.

Q: So that was your fourth language?

A: Yes.

Q: At least.

A: That's my fourth language. There was this great urge that we all should learn a trade. I ne -- I know social workers who -- handling DP persons in this country, and always that same urge. So they put us into this school, e-electrician school, majorly make-shift sort of thing. The directress

-- the -- Madame le Directeur of the social service agency thought I could do better. She used her personal contacts, and I got accepted in a private high school. Of course [indecipherable] you know, one of the government lycées never take somebody like that. She got me into a private school. She got her octogenarian former teacher to coach me. And in '49 I passed the first part of the French baccalauret and in '50 I passed the second part. How did I do it? My French teacher said -- the -- the nice thing about the French baccalauret is that it's administered by the universities, not by the high schools, so nobody knows you. He said, "You've got to establish right away that French is not your native language. Make a atrocious colloquial error in the first sentence. And after that, do the best that you can." So --

Q: And it was -- was that because they would be sympathetic?

A: Yeah. I mean, they would understand that it's not my native language. So that's what I did in the first year in French, second year math -- I mean, math I was okay. And physics, chemistry, etcetera. Se -- yeah, first year there's a written -- written foreign language and a second oral only. That year I took English because I had a little bit more sc-schooling in English than I had had in French -- in German. Second year it's only an oral exam, so I took German. Exam was running late, I was the last one and I -- I was totally exhausted, I just propped myself in there, in front of the examiner, and in German I said, "Wass soll ich übersetzen?" What is it that you want me to translate? He said, "That's it." He closed the books, and I passed.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. I was beginning t -- m-my s-sister and I were both beginning to think about staying there --

Q: Staying?

A: -- staying in France, yeah. She was start -- she started with the Sorbonne, I was thinking about which preparatory school I would take in the fall to -- to get into one of the architecture schools.

And then the American visa arrived in August of 1950.

Q: And you had applied for a visa?

A: Yeah, yes, we registered with a -- but yugos -- Yugoslav quota and then there was the McCarran Act --

Q: Right.

A: -- which said let's start from scratch, throw away all the accumulated quotas that were not exercised during the war. Yugoslav quota is 400 year or something like that, but it wasn't exercised since '41. I would ha -- you know, if Truman hadn't vetoed that I would never have been here. In between we tried various places where we could go, with our two cousins and that didn't work out, because we had affidavits from my uncle on the maternal side. They eventually wound up in Venezuela and we came to the States. So we went to Chicago because that's where our uncle lived.

Q: Wait, let me -- hold it for a second.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you like being in Paris, in France?

A: Oh, tremendously.

Q: It was --

A: I mean, we lived -- I mean, miserably. You know, I -- when I went -- on weekend you decide whether to use your money to eat or to go to the -- the weekly visit to the se -- to the public baths to -- to take a shower. You know, it's a different level of living than -- than what you normally is

-- are accustomed to. But -- but it was great, I mean, yeah, I mean every other -- in most respects it was great.

Q: Did you feel like orphans?

A: I was the token refugee in this high school which was very upper class French high school. I mean, several of my classmate's fathers were still in prison for -- for their role in the Vichy government. I felt very well accepted.

Q: You did?

A: Yes.

Q: But the two of you are still children, in a way. Your sister is what, 16 - 17?

A: Seven -- yeah.

Q: And you're 15?

A: Right. Well, it didn't matter.

Q: Didn't matter?

A: No, no. We were quite self-sufficient. My -- I no longer keep conta -- I kept contact for a couple decades with my classmates from high school. You know, the -- the number of people who passed the baccalauret is exactly equal to the number of openings in the university at the following fall. So they consider me as a traitor to France for having dropped out of that. And I've often thought what it would have been. I mean, there's no question in my mind if I'd become a professor at the Ecole Superieure des Ponts et Chaussee, in relative terms that would be something higher than being a professor at Carnegie Mellon University. But the -- the odds of a foreigner getting that far in France, it's sort of near zero. So I -- I -- I don't -- never regretted it.

Q: So you came to the United States.

A: Came to the United States.

Q: And was your uncle, your mother's brother in Chicago?

A: He was a -- well, he had a practice in -- in New York, he contacted Multiple Sclerosis, and decided that the best way to heal himself is to heal others, and gave up his practice, moved to a veteran's hospital in Chicago as a -- as a physical therapist.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. But he was not in a position to support us. He died -- yeah, I think I introduced Norma to him once, he met my wife-to-be once. There were some other friends of my parents, who were terrific. Took us over and sort of nurtured us and I got -- I was disin -- by that time I was absolutely disenchanted with architecture but I decided I would study civil engineering. I started na --

Q: So your original intent was architecture?

A: Yeah, there's a expectation of my parents, because of --

Q: Because of your --

A: -- of my uncle's prominence. But at Beaux Arts -- I -- I'm still -- I'm sure that if I'd started at a decent, modern architecture school I would have stayed. But in the Beaux Arts, the first year there's only one subject, free hand sketching, nothing else. And I passed the mathematics option of the baccalaureate. I wanted to do some other things beside free hand sketching. So that was out. So a friend of -- our friend in Chicago suggested that I was not qualified to work as a draftsman. I didn't know the English units, among other things, but at that time engineering drawings still had to be traced in ink on -- on vellum. So I got a ma -- job as a -- as a tracer. Eventually they promoted me to draftsman, that's -- was fine. I started night school at IIT [indecipherable] technology in Chicago. And I had a path laid out and in seven and a half years I would have my bachelor's degree.

Q: Working at night?

A: Working at night. Except that in January '52, 15 months after I came to the States, I got drafted in the United States Army, because I came as a -- with my intention of becoming a citizen, so I was qualified for the draft.

Q: But you weren't a citizen yet.

A: No, but -- but my --

Q: But they can still draft you?

A: The intent -- the green ca -- the -- the cert -- the certificate of intent, or whatever you sign, qualify --

Q: Qualifies you to be drafted.

A: -- makes you subject to the draft, yes. Korea -- not to citizenship because the Korean war was not a declared war, so peace time rules applied. And peace times rules are, after three years in the continental -- three years of service in the continental United States, you qualify for citizenship. Well, people were drafted for two years, not three, and they were sent overseas. That's why they were drafted. And then, in Korea, the Chinese captured a few kids in my situation. At least one of them was -- was taken back to -- to Warsaw and paraded on the streets of Warsaw as a traitor.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. At which point congress passed the wartime regulations, after 180 days without -- without a dishonorable discharge you qualify. And so everybody in Korea in one weekend -- a federal judge was flown to Tokyo, all of these kids were pulled out and sworn in in one weekend.

Q: As citizens.

A: As citizens. In -- in the European sector we were just told that we qualify as soon as we get out. So anyhow, I had basic training, I had orders to Korea, blanket orders to Korea, which made

me wonder what it will be like to have a weapon to shoot back. Last minute I was -- a few of us were pulled out and sent to Europe -- sent to Germany as interpreters. So I arrived in Bremerhaven, arrive in Stuttgart, intel -- intelligence battalion attached to the seventh army headquarters, after four or five weeks of doing nothing, the executive officer calls me in and says, "Soldier, we can't get you clearance." Obviously they couldn't check in Yugoslavia [indecipherable]. Security status -- "without a clearance, you -- we can't use you in this battalion. The normal procedure under these circumstances is to send you back to infantry. You look a little bit more intelligent than that, what else can you do?" And I -- I said, "Well, sir, in attempt to be a civil engineer I also passed the draftsman test, not just the language test." He called across seventh army headquarters, engineer section, oh yeah, they need draftsmen. And so for a year and a half I was a --

Q: A draftsman.

A: A draftsman. In a few weeks I got promoted and I was chief draftsman. So that was a very interesting lesson because the first time I was responsible for other people's work, which was interesting. Being stationed in Stuttgart was interesting. I met two or three -- two other guys that sim -- situation very similar to a -- to mine. One of the very inexpensive entertainments was the opera. One -- four marks, one dollar, running 10 months a year, and so you know, twice a week, three times a week we would go to the opera. There were a lot of young German men and women working in various positions at army headquarters. I s-sort of became part of the group. Mit -- at that time it was still an army of occupation, you couldn't wea -- wear civilian clothes. It didn't matter, I -- I met this girl, I kept my clothes at her -- her house. I would change, we would go out to dinner, and get changed and get back on the last bus at midnight going up to army

headquarters. If I was -- whenever I was challenged by the MPs in restaurants, I spoke better German -- better German than they did, I -- I was ne -- I was never caught. I never -- never --

Q: So they thought you were a German?

A: Yes, I had this -- there was a Hungarian laborer in the kitchen at the -- at the -- at the army headquarters and he would lend me his -- his I.D. [indecipherable] car -- I.D. card and [indecipherable] MPs didn't faze me.

Q: They didn't faze you, no?

A: No, no.

Q: You figured they can't be worse than what you already went through, huh?

A: Right, right. So it was a very interesting experience because several of these kids wanted to talk about what happened and what they -- what their parents role was, and what happened to their parents, and I was very much interested in what their parents role was, and what happened to their parents. So we had very long conversations with -- weekend long conversations.

Q: Were you honest about yourself?

A: Yes.

Q: You were?

A: Absolutely.

Q: And they were very interested to know --

A: Absolutely, yes, yes.

Q: -- how this connection was?

A: Yes, I was -- absolutely. Yup. Certainly that was a very -- intellectually very interesting part. The other part is that with the leave I had -- and -- and money, I had opportunity to travel. One thing I forgot to mention about my childhood is that this room that was my mother's studio and

our play space, on four walls, three rows of black and white reproductions of -- of artwork, most -- mostly renaissance, mostly classical, very few modern ones. I was raised with that. So over the years, but certainly starting with the period, I must have seen all the originals by now. My sister and I couple times have started to make a list and we always stop, because the list gets aha -- longer, and longer, and longer of things we think should -- that should have been there, which weren't there. But, you know, going to Berlin, to the Dali museum to see the [indecipherable] which with the -- the owl [indecipherable], yup, that's -- that's part of my -- my traveling schedule anywh -- anywhere I go. So I got out of the army. I got early discharge so I could start at the University of Illinois. I started February '54, got my Bachelors in February '57. In the meantime I met Norma, we got married. 50th anniversary is coming up in three months.

Q: Where did you meet?

A: In Chicago. My sister and her sister-in-law met through a common friend and they had both had children of the same age. Her sister-in-law was born in Vienna, sent on a kindertransport first to England, and from there to -- family went to Latin America before they came to the States. And so we got married in '55.

Q: And she's American?

A: She's American. First son was born in '57. I was valedictorian of the '57 class.

Q: That's quite an accomplishment. Same year, huh?

A: Yup. Commencement speaker was the junior senator from Massachusetts, John Kennedy. I didn't -- I wanted to design suspension bridges, I didn't --

Q: You wanted to design suspension bridges --

A: Yeah, that's -- I mean --

Q: -- that was the thing.

A: -- that was the thing. I didn't think about s-staying in academia, but I -- I got it -- I had very good record, I got a fellowship for the first year of graduate study, department [indecipherable] offered me a instructorship for the sec -- for the succeeding years. So in seven and a half years, I had my Ph.D.. Never paid a penny for it, because I was on the G.I. bill, and then the Illinois Veterans scholarship [indecipherable] so I never had -- I never had to pay tuition. And so I -- I stayed in academia all my life. One -- one serious consideration for one -- to work in company in New York, but other than that, I stayed in academia.

Q: Now, did Norma work while you were getting your Ph.D.?

A: Norma worked until Gregory was born in '57.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And we were never as well off as when I -- I was a graduate student, and I had a -- the -- the small amount from G.I. bill, and the stipend. I mean, we never lived as well within our means as we did then.

Q: Really?

A: Oh yes, yes, I mean -- campus time -- you could go to concerts for a pittance, and -- and I mean, we had a -- a great life. So I became an instructor. I did be -- then things slowed down because I was working full time, I didn't get my Ph.D. til '61, when I was 30. But I was full professor by '65, in four years.

Q: That's amazing.

A: And so I -- I had a very, very satisfactory career. I got into computing very early. Took my first -- my one and only programming course in '57. Machine language programming. But I affected personally -- had a great affect on how structural engineers earn their living by taking

part of the dull hand tracking computations off their -- off their hands and putting -- and substituting computer programs for that. So I --

Q: Did you ever build a suspension bridge?

A: No, I never -- no --

Q: Does that make you unhappy?

A: -- I -- I -- I worked -- I worked part time before -- a-as a first year graduate student, and I designed a little -- tiny little county bridge, 20 foot span and that -- I was very proud of that and - and a few times when we wer -- went back to Illinois, I actually drove out to look and see how it was faring.

Q: 20 foot.

A: 20 foot span, very --

Q: That's pretty nice.

A: Yeah, tha-that's --

Q: It's sweet.

A: Yeah, but not -- my colleagues were -- two of my good friends were on the -- working on the Messina Strait crossing, you know, I did -- never did anything like that. But -- but I dare to say that very few structures built that have not been designed with the tools that I started.

Q: And prior to what you were doing, people were doing everything by hand --

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: -- trying to figure out everything.

A: I mean, as an undergraduate this was drilled into it, that our chance of -- our livelihood depended on how efficiently we could do this hand cranking procedure.

Q: And you just said [indecipherable]

A: Well, I wa -- I was very fortunate, I -- as a young instructor, I -- no, young assistant professor, I had a chance to work one summer at IBM, and I got introduced to some very useful theory and then I had a year's leave of absence at MIT and I had some good colleagues to work with and I had a chance to -- to do something in very short order. My -- my claim to fame was finished in '63, have been downhill ever since.

Q: I doubt it.

A: But -- but 38 Ph.D. students --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- first in '72 we moved to Carnegie-Mellon. I went there as department head. I thought, you know, no big deal. Year and a half later I had a horrible, totally debilitating nervous breakdown. I couldn't handle promotion cases, tenure cases, lab technician firing cases. A psych -- psych -- a psychic-cologist -- psychiatrist and -- kept me on pills, which made me function okay, but he didn't help, he was a pure Freudian. He said, "How old were you?" I said 13. He said, "It's impossible that something that old -- at that age could have ever affected you." So one day it became so severe that Norma didn't trust me to go by myself and she came with me to -- to the shrink. The way -- the reason I connected with him because I went to th -- asked the rabbi and the rabbi recommended him, the guy's practice was marital conflict, and s -- i -- many times I would say something, what does Norma think? She's -- the same thing that I do, sh -- sh -- call Norma and -- and were always surprised that she said the same thing I did. We walk in, we barely sat down, he turns to her and says, "Norma, what do you think is wrong with Steve?" And Norma, clear out, says, "Steve can't be responsible for the life and death of people." And so by the time he explained to her that these were n -- not really life and death decisions, yeah, I was -- I was done. Next -- next day I went to see the dean and resign my position. And both -- the dean

said, "I'll let you resign if you promise to stay and to see the vice-president." He said, "What do -
- what are you going to do?" "Well, I'll go on back to te -- to what I know how to do, teaching
and research." He said, "That's not good enough. We come to depend on you, and on your
opinions. If you can't provide that, then there's no point your staying here." And so from -- from
'74 til -- til '99, that's how I functioned at Carnegie Mellon.

Q: So you stayed?

A: I stayed in my -- my --

Q: As a --

A: As a professor. I just gave up my administrative function.

Q: Right. Did the psychiatrist ever understand the metaphor?

A: No.

Q: It didn't make any sense to him?

A: Nah. No. I mean, the gu -- one day I walk in his office, he says, I'm just looking at this new
scale of trauma by the [indecipherable] the big dictionary. He says, "It scales trauma on a scale
of one to 10, and 10 is surviving concentration camp. Tell me, was it really that bad?"

Q: Did you walk out?

A: That [indecipherable]

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah.

Q: We have to change the tape.

A: Yeah, okay.

End of Tape Eight

Beginning Tape Nine

Q: So Norma made the correct evaluation of your problem, and we have to stop for a second.

Okay, so Norma made the correct evaluation and this idiot psychiatrist had no idea.

A: Right.

Q: And he didn't have an idea later, either?

A: Right, no.

Q: Right.

A: No.

Q: So you remained as a professor and your symptoms went away, you did not have a --

A: Ah, the de-department has been -- was always very supportive, the symptoms went away. At promotion and tenure proceedings, you were expected to be a spokesperson for your department's candidates. In very important cases the department head asked me to -- would ask me to represent the department, but the rules of the game were understood. If I started feeling queasy, no question asked, I was off and somebody else was in my place. And that has worked. Occasionally -- sometimes I could go through, sometimes I could not. There's no point in speculating which one -- which was which.

Q: Right.

A: But yeah, my symptoms went away.

Q: And how many more children did you two have?

A: Yeah, we have four children. Gregory was born in '57, Carol in '59, Peter in '60 and then [indecipherable] Laura was born in '66. So in their childhood we used to refer to them as the kids and Laura because they're -- they're --

Q: The kids [indecipherable]

A: Right.

Q: Right.

A: But I -- I always felt that -- that she was a civilizing influence on the other three. That they -- they were quite wild, and -- but then when she came around they were vying for the privilege of babysitting her, etcetera. Some -- so the kids, we were proud of them. I must say I was not the best prepared parent during their teenage years. I couldn't quite emphasize with their concerns and their worries. But certainly after they left home and went through college, we've had a marvelous adult interaction with all of them, a relationship with all of them. Gregory went into civil engineering. He's department chair at University of California, Berkeley. Carol went -- got a Master's in public administration from Columbia. And from her student days on she has worked for the city of New York. She now works for the Department of Environmental Resources, and we joke that she's a more serious civil engineer than either Greg or I, because she manages about a billion dollars worth of construction money a year, for the sewers and s -- and water se -- tre -- tre -- water supply and sewerage for New York City. Peter went off to get a degree in -- in physics and math at Wesleyan, came out with a degree in English and classics. Went to Hopkins in their Center for the Humanities. And now has four appointments at Northwestern. German, comparative literature, philosophy and social sciences, I believe.

Q: Four?

A: Four -- is member four departments. He has written extensively on Karnt. He was a early follower of derridar and he specializes in German and Jewish philosophers and -- and writers. Laura has a Master's in -- Master's degree in higher education administration. She works -- she's human re -- HR director for a -- for a software firm in Silver Spring. They're all married. Four -- four marriages under chuppah, which we are very proud of. Greg's wife Carmel converted when

they wer -- got married, and she -- she's marvelous, she's the -- the [indecipherable] of the temple in their -- you know, leading -- leader of all the women's activities at their temple. Carol, between her Bachelor's and Master's spent a year in -- and they -- they have two -- two daughters, Hannah and Emily. Carol, after her Bachelor's went to Israel for [indecipherable] for a year, and met a Israeli guy and he came -- they married -- and he came and they got married, Ithzak. He now works for the same agency as a -- as a instrument tech -- instrument supervisor and they have two daughters, Molly and Ilanna. Peter met Susannah at the University of Chicago, she got her Ph.D. in English, she teaches in -- in the English department at Northwestern, which makes it difficult for them to move because it's a two [indecipherable] which is hard. And they have one so -- one son, whose named Daniel Imbo, but only goes by Imbo. She's -- she was born in Korea, she was adopted and converted when she was year and a half. And Laura is married to Steve Herberman, who grew up in -- in Potomac. He's a jazz musician, teacher at Townsend University, and probably will be teaching some -- some private courses at -- at the new music center in -- at -- at Strathmore.

Q: Strathmore. That's quite a family.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did it take you a long time to talk about your experiences when you were a kid? I mean, your Holocaust experiences?

A: Yes. As I was going through -- yeah, I barely talked about it. The k-kids barely knew it, outlines normally, a little bit more, but barely outlines. In this depression control process in -- in the early -- in early 70's, I was chair of the adult education committee at our local temple. People wanted a course on the Holocaust, and this lady came to give some -- some talks about the Holocaust and then she had to be absent for one of the lectures. And I suspected the connection, I

knew the connection right away, I couldn't verbalize it. I volunteered to substitute for her. I thought that it might be beneficial. Norma sat in the audience, cringing and hiding behind the back of a large man, and that's when she heard the story from beginning to end.

Q: Which she hadn't before?

A: Not as a full story. A week later the rabbi called, he heard about my talk, would I repeat it to the temple youth group? And I said sure, and that's when Gregory, Carol and Peter heard it the first time. Not to them, but to the youth group. And then six, seven years later, Carol was taking a Holocaust course at the University of Michigan and her teacher invited me to come and give a guest lecture, and so Laura came along for the drive, just on a weekend outing with her sister, and she sat in the classroom.

Q: And heard for the first time.

A: And heard it for first time. It's largely that I didn't want to burden them, and it's largely that Norma wanted to shield me and shield the children. More shielding me than shielding the children.

Q: Was that right? Do you think that was the right thing to do, that you -- you needed your own time?

A: I think yes, yeah.

Q: And the kid's response? Were -- were they unhappy that they didn't know before, or they --

A: No, they were very -- ver -- appreciative that they -- no, they were -- never any unhappiness about that.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I think they appreciated that they were adults, that they could understand, internalize the story and they all -- they -- they, ever since then been very protective of me, and you know --

Q: Did it bring you closer together in some ways?

A: Not -- not necessarily. But, there's a closeness. And the kids are always available when -- when I need it. In '94, there was this 60th anniversary commemoration in Subotica, very poorly advertised, because they didn't know whether the government would allow it, this was height of Milosevic. My sister and I decided that we had to go. The women in the family were against it, it was the fighting in -- in Bosnia. What if this is on CNN? What image will it project. So I decided I had to go. It turned out that Peter had a -- had a philosophy conference in Holland the following week, so he came along for that. '95 I was asked to give the keynote address at the International Conference on Computing and Civil Engineering in Berlin. The family again worried about my going, decided to delegate Greg to come with me, which was very useful. I mean, you know, he knew some of the people, they were short of a chair for one the sessions, so he sat -- he was a chair for the session. We went two days early and we drove down to Niederorschel and Buchenwald. And that -- that was very -- very satisfying. The night before Gregory wanted -- treated me to a nice dinner and at the dinner he said, "Dad, what is it that we are going to look for?" And I took a napkin and I drew a map of the pla -- of the camp. And the next noon we were there, and except that somehow I tried to visualize the orientation with respect to the sun, I was off 180 degrees orientation, but other than that, that -- that was -- that -- the plan. So the kids have always been involved that way.

Q: And do you talk a lot? Since -- since you first opened up, do you -- do yo -- have you talked at various schools, or not so much?

A: Oh, I -- yes.

Q: Yes.

A: Ever s -- yup. We started the -- the survivor's organization in Pittsburgh has a very, very active speaker's bureau. They usually were reserving me for college talks. High school talks, other members of the organization would handle, so I had Washington Jefferson College in --in Washington, PA, Allegheny College, north of Pittsburgh. State University northeast of Pittsburgh. I've been repeatedly invited for -- to speak as the speaker for Holocaust week.

Q: Is there anything that surprises you when you talk to these students?

A: Surprises me?

Q: About how -- what they question you about, or what their response is? No?

A: No.

Q: You like doing it, though?

A: I did, but then I -- then I got tired be the -- the last couple years before we left Pittsburgh I was doing less and less, I feel slightly burned out. But a friend who since then has become chair of the Holocaust Commission, runs a course at -- at Carnegie Mellon and she al -- she invited me regularly. There, I get essentially zero reaction from the students.

Q: Zero?

A: Yes. The intimate -- I think they're terribly intimidated by the fact that a professor whose office is -- is three doors down from the classroom is talking about something --

Q: Right, so personal.

A: That's so personal and so far from his academic field.

Q: Right.

A: I ver -- a-at student talks I usually start out by saying I'm in this odd position with academics, jealous of their scholarship, and with very few exceptions, don't want to go outside of their field of -- of --

Q: Right.

A: -- of expertise, and here I am talking about something I have no expertise whatsoever.

Q: Right. Well, is there anything that you would like to talk about that I haven't asked you?

A: No, I think you were very thorough and I appreciate it very much.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much, cause it's been really wonderful to spend the day with you.

A: I appreciate that.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you.

Q: And I'm very grateful for your being willing to tell us your story.

A: Thank you.

Q: Okay. ... And who is this, Steve?

A: This is my mother. I suspect it's a -- either her high school graduation picture or one taken even earlier than that. I don't know anything more about it.

Q: And how did you happen to ca -- to have it?

A: Friends, acquaintances over the years have even gi -- either given us photographs or allowed us to copy from theirs. My sister has a much better collection than I have. I've just -- most of these are copies from -- from her collection.

Q: And this photo?

A: This is my father during World War I. He was in -- a officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, because he had spent several years in Croatia before the war, he speak -- spoke Croatian, so he was assigned to a -- to a Bosnian regiment.

Q: And this group?

A: These are the employees of the printing plant, Minerva in Subotica, with my father and my uncle sitting in front. The -- my uncle was the edit -- was the owner and editor, my father was the manager. And behind it is the -- the plant where the -- the printing presses were.

Q: And this group?

A: This is the editorial staff, again my uncle in the middle in front, and my father next to him. Several of these people became quite prominent journalists. Some of them on -- under Fascist Hungary, a number of them in post-war Hungary. Not shown in this picture are several people who had worked for my father who later came to the States. When I came to the States there was still a Hungarian daily paper in New York, Detroit and Toronto, and a Hungarian literary journal in New York, all four of the editors had worked for my father.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Something like that.

Q: This picture?

A: Well this is my family at the local resort outside Subotica. I'm sitting on my mother's lap and my sister is in front of my father with two of my mother's friends in -- in the group.

Q: What year would this have been?

A: '33.

Q: And what's this group?

A: This is my grade school, I think it must be second grade class picture. I sit next to the teacher and my best friend sits on the other side of the teacher an -- we were sort of the leaders of the boys and the two girls nex -- sitting next to me were the unquestioned leaders of the girls. The second one, in the dark dress, lives in Israel. We visit her every time we go to Israel. We once coun -- counted heads. I -- I believe four people in that -- in that picture survived the Holocaust.

Q: And this picture?

A: This must be s -- well, no question, this is summer of th -- of 1940, one year before the occupation. My parents and my sister and I looking at -- I don't remember any more whether it's a chicken coop or -- or a rabbit hutch. My father bought this fo -- small vineyard, and he tried to -- to grow wine and -- and make schnapps out of the -- the fruit, but it wasn't very successful.

Q: And this shot?

A: My -- th -- my sister and I. She's wearing the uniform of second year of the academic high school, gymnasium, so this must be '40 - '41 academic year.

Q: In Yugoslavia?

A: In Yugoslavia. I obviously didn't know how to tie a tie.

Q: And who's this?

A: That's my sister and I in Paris, '47 - '48 - '49, I can't tell, but that's after we -- we got out of Yugoslavia and -- and lived in Paris. In fact, it must be close to '47, because I remember that's the suit in which I traveled.

Q: And what does this represent?

A: This is the -- a photocopy of the Buchenwald index card. On the left I'm listed as a Slovakian Jewish political prisoner, because I was -- I was pushed into a Slovakian transport. Why political I don't know. And my birth date I obviously intended to give 16th -- April 16, 1929, somehow it -- two of the numbers got mangled, but clearly I -- I was use -- always using my sister's birth date when I -- whenever I needed a birth date in Buchenwald and throughout the concentration camp.

Q: And this?

A: This is my provisional identification card, issued by the American army, after the liberation in Buchenwald. I still use Josef -- Josef for my name, but I think I went back to June six, 1931 as

my birth date. And I never -- I didn't make the comparison. I see the Buchenwald number is on it, which I -- I -- I didn't know I had a Buchenwald number until this -- this past fall.

Q: And this?

A: This is an artist's rendering of the synagogue in Subotica, the Reform synagogues, completed in 1902, designed by my mother's uncle, a very well known architect of the Hungarian art nouveau movement. The temple now is in very bad condition. We are trying to find a way to have it restored. The -- it's -- it's on the -- on the UNESCO register of threatened historical monuments, it's on the list of Jewish threatened historical monuments, but I -- I don't know whether we'll be able to save it.

Q: And this to you?

A: This is a copy of my father's newspaper. I guess the date is -- is 1933, December 22nd. So at that time my uncle was still living, and so my uncle was still the editor. 36 pages, one dinar. And the headlines are, "The King -- King's Visit to Zargrev. A rapprochement Between -- Friendship Treaty Between France and Germany Proposed by the French par -- Perfume King, and A Strike of the Postal Workers in Greece." In case you needed to know what the news were in 1933.

Q: And this, Steve?

A: This is my mother. The date is 1918, so she probably was an art student in Budapest. I'm told that the sketch was done by one of her classmates, whose signature appears below, Fusti Molnar Katalina. But I've tried pouring over Hungarian art -- artistic -- artist's directories and artist' dictionaries and I have never located that name. So I -- I don't know who the artist was. But this -- this has always hung in our house. This -- this is one of the -- the things that were in the folder that our -- our cook saved for us.

Q: And this?

A: My mother traveled extensively, 1924 - '25 - '26 in Austria, France and Italy, and this is one of the etchings she made in Florence. I don't -- for li -- for lithographs I -- I know that she did pencil drawings first and did the etchings at -- at home. I -- I -- and did the lithographs at home. I don't know whether she did the same thing for the etchings, but I presume she did, that she didn't have all of her -- her copper, and -- and acid and everything else that goes into etching with her. So this is n -- nice view of the -- of Florence that I've always liked.

Q: And this?

A: This is one of her lithographs, it's also Florence. Think a little bit more Impressionistic than the etching. The -- my father's printing plant had a large, flat -- flatbed press with a large stone normally used for making maps, and I'm sure that that's what my mother used to -- to pull the lithographs.

Q: And who is this good looking group?

A: This is my family at my granddaughter's Bat Mitzvah, two years a -- three years ago. My wife and I in front and our four children, Gregory, Peter, Carol and Laura and their spouses, and my son-in-law Ithzak's family in the back row. And the grandchildren, six grandchildren, including the one on the side, that -- that's in bo -- that is in Chicago, and the other boy is here in Silver Spring and we have mo -- much more actively than any of the others, we have been involved in his -- in his growth, which has been very satisfying.

End of Tape Nine

Conclusion of Interview