

This is Andrew Sternberg, who is our interviewee for today. And I'm Bea Stadtler, the interviewer. Andrew, the first thing we'd like is for you to tell us something about yourself, your name, how old you are, and your family, where you live, and so forth.

OK. My name is Andrew Sternberg. I presently reside in 2611 Fenwick Road, Cleveland, Ohio, United States. I'm 55. I'm married. I have three children-- I have a son and two daughters. I think that is--

Where do your children live?

My son is living here in Cleveland. And my oldest daughter is in New York and the youngest one presently in Europe. So I don't have so much to complain about, no.

OK. Could you tell us something about what life was like before the war? Let's begin about 1939.

Before 1939 or around 1939?

Where did you live? Where did-- what was the town or the city? What was the Jewish and non-Jewish population and so forth?

I born in a very, very small village. It's about 940 population there. And we are only Jewish family there. And I could permit it to say, I experienced very early year in my life in the differences being-- in a Jew and non-Jew. Hopefully, I'm not insulting anything.

But as the first experience I have, probably, I was four, five years old, the rest of the children is told me, I killed Jesus Christ. And I have no idea who is Jesus Christ at that time.

And naturally, I enrolled the elementary school. I learned about more Jesus Christ. And I felt that, all the way through even up to date, I have nothing to do with his destiny. But we lived peacefully for this little village.

Andrew, excuse me a second. What was the country that you came from?

Hungary.

And could you spell the name of the village for us?

P-O, [HUNGARIAN]-- excuse me, two dots on the O, T-R-E, [HUNGARIAN], T-E.

OK. So you were one Jew among a population of almost 1,000?

That's correct.

And was there an industry? Or what did most of the people do there?

Well, there was no industry there. The country basically is a agricultural country. And my grandfather owns the grocery store in and owned some lands. And we traded grains. And also, we blend in do agricultural work with the rest of the-- I should say, with the peasants.

We live very comfortable life. My grandmother, who is come from a very religious family, that time, I remember my younger childhood, she kept kosher. But we never been religious. On the High Holidays, we went to the nearest temple, what is about seven kilometer. And one of my uncle was a schoolteacher in a Jewish school there.

My mother is more up to date what's going on in the world, around the world. We got the daily newspaper-- apparently, two. One is in the Hungarian language, and the other one is in German, called Pester Leute. The both is-- both

newspaper according to the regime. And that standard is a kind of a liberal or democratic-oriented newspaper, is not left or not right. This is a more in the center line.

So you spoke Hungarian and German in your house?

Yes, but most and primary, Hungarian.

Were there any other languages you spoke?

No. First time I come across for other language is so-called Yiddish in a concentration camp, what is absolutely strange to me. But I heard from my grandmother is some part of the country, some other Jewish people speaking Yiddish language. But that's the only thing I know about for the Yiddish language.

What was the closest large town or city?

The closest large town or city is at 27 kilometers, approximately about 16 mile. Is about 37,000 people there, with 3,200 Jewish.

What was the name of it?

Nagykanizsa-- N-A-G-Y-K-A-N-I-Z-S-A.

I see, OK.

It's the-- well, relatively, I mean, Hungarian standard, is a large railroad centrum, right close to the Austrian border and also close to the Yugoslavian border. The Orient Expresses crossed that town.

I see. And what-- how many brothers and sisters did you--

I have none.

Have none? You were an only child?

That's correct.

You must have been spoiled rotten.

Well, I don't think so.

Did you ever work in the fields or help your family in any way?

No, I don't work. I did it as a-- probably as just experiencing it for how is the other people, the rest of the peasant. I admired them. And I kind of a jealous about it as a young child. They don't let me do it. It's-- is the physical work. And this, least in the Western part of the-- we called-- that time, we belonged to the Western society, the Jews is-- they-- was a derogatory working with the hands.

And the education business, that was the primary interest. But I want to experience it. And I did, but not as necessity. I did it as just experiencing it. And I'm glad I did because I experienced the people who worked in the field. And I know the feeling, the thinking. And I think it's a great experience.

You got along OK with them.

I have no problem. We have very well respected in the community. We are a proud family. We felt that we are among themself. We don't felt that outlawed or something like different. I just young children in my age or a couple of years

older-- and naturally, way is the wind of the-- blown from west, from Germany, where Hitler gets stronger on his position, you heard more antisemitic slurs and remarks.

And even with 940 people, they have a divided opinion about. You have to remember, Hungary was, after the First World War, is a lost war, a lost large territory. And there's a big campaign after the First World War. They blamed the-- they lost the war, blamed by the Jews.

That was German propaganda.

Well, yes. I remember, when I went to the elementary school for that small village, I read it in a history book. It was not propaganda, it was in a history book. The First World War, they lost because of the Jews, is undermined the economy-- and also, the Jewish communist. But I later found it out, is very difficult to be a Jews because if you have money, you called dirty Jewish capitalist. If you are-- you don't have money, you call-- and you are a liberal, you called a Jewish communist. So it doesn't matter which end of it, you're taking a short end.

OK. There-- you know that history is not always objective either, even if it's written in a history book. It doesn't make it objective. Tell us what a typical day was in your family.

Well, a typical day-- I went to school, the elementary school. We lived across the street in the school. My parents is worked. My grandfather is most likely, he are-- watched his lands. And we have help who helped working on the lands. My father is more on a lumber business. We bought live forest and the surrounding area lot of forest, this, and get chopped up, and sold to lumber yards.

Did your mother work at all?

Worked around the house.

The house.

But she also read every day, so is my grandmother. This afternoon was a reading time, like a ritual thing. There really is nothing spectacular for a small place like this. I think, I was very comfortable. I always remember these people. I think, it's very nice to me always and very nice to our family.

And there's nothing is more showing, even if I'm deeply sensitive about the whole subject. About two and a half months ago, I went back to visit this village with my daughter. The things changed. The population probably is more or less the same, basically.

But naturally, who knew my parents, they is slowly dying out. Some of my schoolmates died out. I always remember this places. I think, the people was very, very nice to us. I probably more could emphasize it to you when is the first-- well, when the antisemitism is get more stronger and stronger.

Now, our family is heavily under the influence of my mother, who is more interested to go a bigger city. They felt safer with more Jews and very hardly pressed-- I mean, my father and my grandparents-- we shall sell everything there. And we should move in that city what I mentioned to you called Nagykanizsa.

And after the war, it is broke out in 1939, she more stronger pursued this matter. And finally, we give-- and the family give in 1941. And we sold all lands and the property.

And when we sold the land, there already existing anti-Jewish law in Hungary. The minister of agriculture is send out a deputy to evaluate the property after it has been sold, and told the individuals, and send them in writing, that property is not worth the money what they are in contract, is only allowed to pay him X amount of pengo, what is the currency in Hungary at that time.

Well, all these buyers voluntarily came to our house and told my parents and my grandparents, we will live up to our

bargain. We don't want to-- it doesn't matter what the government says. We will pay what we bargain. And I think is-- they say something about the respect.

Sure. Sure.

And I cannot forget for this. People, they could go buy exactly what the law said at that time, nothing we could do about it. But all one is paid. Our house is bought by the village, is turned-- converted to the cultural center. In the village itself, they paid the same thing what we bargained for. So I'm not trying to put in these people on a pedestal. I'm just trying to be--

Honest.

--honest about it.

That's good. OK. Do you-- let's get back for a minute to your family and the earlier time. Did you celebrate holidays except the High Holidays in your household? And did you belong to a synagogue? You said you went for the holidays.

Yes, we belonged to the synagogue. Was about seven kilometers, about four miles away. But all those-- because the villages is three, four kilometers, five, eight kilometers-- three, four miles, two miles away one village to-- and one village, for instance, our village we only Jewish family. The next village was one and a half mile away from us, only three Jewish family. And the village for four mile away from us got about 14 Jewish family, and the next village, again, for one Jewish family.

So this is a kind of a district for a certain area is-- went to the temple for-- they called the district of-- called Pacsa-- P-A-C-S-A. That's the largest Jewish community, about 50-60 Jewish family lived there. And naturally, they collected for a contribution for that maintaining a temple.

And we-- my grandfather don't work Saturday. He don't go to there. Once in a while, he go to the temple. We really never-- being honest with you, never really deeply religious. But I always know I'm a Jew, always let me know, and always maintain that. He don't work, he don't even smoke pipe. But he took around.

And he-- even High Holiday, when he took me to the temple, and he told me, says, well, we come here to remember our parents, our grandparents. Their memory is-- yes, we celebrated a Seder, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkos. But is nothing exuberant. We do not want to be-- I mean, not want-- that's the way we are.

And what about Zionism, or socialism, or any of those isms? Did they play any part in your life?

Well, my grandfather was a wise man. He has a philosophy, says, a man who's hanging around too long with politics normally don't die in horizontal. This political putsch is very common. And one group is asked the other group. And he really don't get involved too much of the politics.

If I recall, in 1930, it was the last election in Hungary before the war. And was already anti-Jewish laws. So the Jews has to be proved that the ancestors lived or stayed in Hungary, or proved go back to 1885.

So my grandfather went back, trace it back to something like 1832. And he showed them. And he says, and I'm not voting now. Just I want to show, my ancestor was here before. But I don't came here to prove it to vote. I just want to show it.

Somebody then show him a disrespect for the type election what they have. He not told them pointly, but that's the way he expressed himself here. I'm not even-- is not voted to be voting. That's what it really--

In other words, it was probably a fixed election, he thought.

I don't think is a fixed election. I just-- he not respected. He has some-- I should say, a splinter on his eyes about the

regime of the Admiral Horthy. If you don't mind that I go back historically about it what was the reason, I have a uncle who was 19 years old.

After, when he finished the high school, he went to Vienna. And he was a traveling salesman. And I don't know how much you know about historically after the First World War, when is the Bolshevik Revolution is broke out. And that spread in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Hungary.

And he was a very well-dressed young man. He went from our village to went back to Vienna. And we called the White Terror because after the revolution is broke out 1818, they called the October Revolution, in 1919, the communists took over. And the White Terror, the Admiral Horthy who is came up with his troops from southeast, who was-- anyone who's suspected is a Jew, or a socialist, or communist just take off the gate to the house, or take off the train, or any public transportation, and executed.

And I have a uncle who I never known. He was 19 years old. He was well-dressed, and they took him off the train. And they don't even ask a question, just told, are you a Jew? Yes. And they lined them up in they called the river Sio-- S-I-O-- and shoot him. But he jumped in. And he tried to be-- swim across. But he get shot in.

Well, is a standard procedure, just like in this country, if you go to public places and some patriotic stores, you see the president picture. Well, just about every store, at the time, it was an Admiral Horthy's picture-- well, except our store. He don't-- I mean, he never made a peace with the-- because he called him a-- that man is killing innocent people. And according to a family history, we never involve any type of politics.

OK. Let's go to--

So it's not even Zionism. OK, that's, I think, is answer for you.

OK. Let's go to yourself now. Do you-- can you remember what you felt about yourself? How did you look? Were you healthy? Did you have any special interests or hobbies? Did you feel you were-- you did mention that you thought you were sensitive. Did you feel you were brave? And about the time that-- in 1939, were there-- was there much antisemitism? You said it was starting to get more and more.

Even before '39.

And you did mention about the non-Jews who helped when you sold your property. But tell us a little about what you thought about yourself at the time. How did you see yourself?

Well, again, I go back. I always felt that a certain extent, I never let know the outside world. I was kind of a-- I want to show them how strong. I really don't care about it how much making those-- my age of kids for seven, eight years old making the slanderous remarks. I really don't show them. But I really-- inside, I cared about it.

And it's-- I have to admit it, after so many years, it was frightening me. It frightened me when I first saw the Hakenkreuz, or the swastika. I don't see it on our village, but I see it on the village where it was 14 Jewish family. And we-- my grandfather and I went through that village. I saw swastika on walls. This frightened me.

I not exactly aware if there was Nazism. But I know one thing is dislike who is Jew. No, the political reason and economic reason, I'm not completely aware of at that time. But through my mother, who I'm very grateful, I think, I paid more and more attention. I have to be say that much.

Before I went to elementary school, I fully able to read and write. And I read a newspaper. I have one uncle, who was a college professor, who said I should don't read a newspaper because I picking up a lot of damaging stuff. He has a different opinion. I should read different type of material. My mother said, I should be aware of what's happening in the world.

Even my uncle, who was more educated-- he was a Greek/Latin college professor, I think my mother was more right

about it. She made me beware what is this world looks like or going to be looks like. I'm physically always very strong. Mentally, I think, I was more stronger.

I was very active with sports, running, soccer, playing, and sometime is naughty things, like summertime with a bunch of kids, we went in a field, we just take some apples or pears off the trees. And the owners come, we run. So I learned run fast. Some of the local people says, well, he don't even burning if you put him-- throw him in a fire. Well, they don't know that the fire wasn't too far. It's going to be come.

Yes. Your question about the daily life-- in the school, when I enrolled in elementary school, is-- even the-- because the country or the village is basically Roman Catholic. We are only non-Jews and the two Protestants in the village. And every Monday morning was a religious hour for the Catholic children.

So it was a older priest. I think, even if he is not existing anymore, he is died, if I reassess my memory, I putting in it-- myself to call him-- he was a kind of reactionary. He told me, I don't-- well, he actually not told me, he sent me out of the class, not to stay in a-- even a Roman Catholic religious house. But as a year or two, or a priest came into the village, and I told him, I want to hear what they learned.

Well, I think it's some selfish rascal interest a bit. Because I very much my ears and eyes is open. And I able to answer more question about it, the kids who has to be learned about the religious thing. So that also means I went through for a Roman Catholic religious--

I understand.

--teaching. I attended on a Jewish-- once a week, a Jewish religious teaching. I have to go to for a mile. And I'm very glad I'm beware both side of the-- I could make differences. And I saw those are Italian, Roman Catholic hours. Sometime, I brought up controversial questions. So probably the rest of my life is remain for controversial.

OK. What do you remember about the beginning of World War II? When were you first aware there was a war? And what kind of changes happened in your village? Or what kind of changes happened in your family? You did say that they sold the property in '41.

Yes. Well, we-- with whole thing with the idea I told you about many years before, I think, again, I have to refer to my mother-- the Munich Agreement, when Chamberlain and Daladier went back and says, we made peace with Hitler. And I think it's about one week later, he marched into Czechoslovakia.

And my mother never trusted, never believed Hitler. So we have a high hope with the Western culture, the Western society, especially the British, the French, and the United States. But we more depend on that time the French and the British. And it's like a big blow. We took it personally in the family when Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia, and Memel, and the Sudetenland, and on, and on.

And then after he went to France, the official broke out of the Second World War was September 1, 1939. And after Poland is collapsed in six weeks, we felt that big blow. I have another uncle who lived in this city where we moved later in 1941.

I had the first time I come across with the Polish refugees. They lived in-- four family lived in our house-- well, my uncle's house. And they told us the terror. But I think, just like any other human being, and is no difference today, the longest is our house is not burning, someone else's house burning, we don't believe it that our house could be burned.

Right. Right. That's one of the problems.

And we believe them. But we don't believe this could this possibly happen to us. That was the biggest. And I seeing that today. I'm jumping for almost 40-some years between 1939 and now, but I think it's the same situation today. You don't see the parallels quite right?

I do. I want to know why you think so. Just for a minute, let's digress.

Well, the parallel is we think so much about our comfort and our luxury. I mean, when I meant sensitive, I mean, sensitive about any racial or religious slanders-- is not necessarily to be a Jews or any racials-- Black, whites, Indonesian, or Chinese, well, anything is-- I think, the human being is the biggest enemy himself. If there's no Jews, either they have to be invented, if there's a no Black, has to be invented. But we find someone.

Scapegoat.

The scapegoat-- doesn't matter who is it. And this is a part of what I try to tell you. Longest is not happen to me, that's what we thinking. I'm not saying it personally, but I think it-- this the thing I experiencing. As longest is not happening to us, is a tragedy, but is really-- is only a statistic.

OK. Let's go back to this. We'll talk later. What happened to you and your family when the Nazis entered your town?

Well, let's get back-- we moved in 1941.

You moved in '41--

In 1941--

--to another town.

--we moved into that city where was about 3,200 Jews, 37,000 or 40,000 population. For me, is a new things, experience, different environment. I have more Jewish friends. I went to school. But I don't felt-- we not-- never been segregated. I mean, it's just we lived a normal life-- for me, something new. When it come the time, you enroll, called a gymnasium.

It's like a high school.

Well, a little bit more than a high school because you must take two different languages. And you go eight years. And when you are graduating, my understanding that even if you're today graduating in eight years in gymnasium, you come to this country, you go to the second-- the third year of college, is accepting it. The Latin was necessary. And you could take German, or French, or English. Now, is-- present, would take Russian, also, if you want. But you have to take two languages. The Latin was a must. And you could choose other languages.

Well, we have, we called, numerus clausus. I don't know you aware what is it. The numerus clausus introduced in Hungary in 1928, it's just one year before I born. And that is restricted how many percent of Jews could enroll for universities, and colleges, and such.

Well, I was accepted in a gymnasium. But as the war went on, I also-- not just me, the rest of the Jews has been thrown out. May I permitted to say some fact things how we are human beings? I have a uncle I mentioned earlier, who was a college professor-- Greek/Latin.

And after the-- he was a First World War decorated hero. And I mean, I don't think only about eight or nine men has a whole country same declaration of what he has. And as after the First War is a big unemployment in Hungary, just like probably all these European country. The military academy was probably equal to, but not size, on the West Point, is looking for professors.

So he applied for the job. In that time, on a questionnaires-- on a job application was a question your religion. When he put it down, prior to-- before he put his religion down, the general was so enthusiastic. That's the kind of man we looking for. He has a field experience in a front line, is a decorated war hero, and he has a education.

But later, when he put down his education, he got a cold feet. He says, I have to be talked to the minister of defense. I

will let you know about the job. He never heard again.

But is not-- the story is not completely concluded, this one. And when I was there 1982 in Hungary, so I have a two cousin is living. And I brought up this subject. They presently live in Budapest. And she says to me, it is true. And says, but my dad don't tell you one thing. I said, what is it?

Said, when he don't get this job, he applied for the job in a Jewish gymnasium because it's such a thing as a-- and they told him he is not religion enough-- not religious to be a teacher in the Jewish gymnasium. So I think, we have a human problem. Now, if someone gets hired by his expert in knowledge or by his race or color, the Jews don't hired him to teaching Greeks because he wasn't good enough Jew for their standard. The Hungarians don't hired him because he is a Jew.

It's between.

We-- don't you think so we have a human problem in the world? But let's go back on my personal thing because this is passe, it's past.

It still happens.

This happened. And it still happened. And it's a tragedy. Again, naturally, when it's happening to one person, is a tragedy. When it's happening to millions, is a statistic, again.

Right. OK. We're talking about what happened to your family now, when the Nazis entered the new town that you're living in.

Well, the Nazis don't enter immediately. The Nazis came 1944, March 19. Are you talking about the German Army, is correct?

Yeah, right.

But you could felt way the war went on, is more and more antisemitic laws passed, more anti-Jewish law has been passed. And Jews is not-- has been called in the army, is called in a labor camp, digging trenches in the front line, and taking out mines, and making barbed wire fences, or anti-tank ditches, or traps. We heard the atrocities in the front line, what's happening to the Jews.

Again, we don't heard too much about-- not too much-- absolutely nothing about the concentration camp. We heard one incident, when they said, the Russians-- and it's after the war, turned out to be the Germans-- Germans did it, the 13,000 Polish officer has been killed. Well, the Hungarian Nazi propaganda says, the Russians has executed 13,000 Polish Army officers. After the war is came out, the Germans did it. But probably both did something.

Was your father able to make a living during this time? Or was he living off the proceeds of his sale of his land?

They still made a living. Wasn't-- is get tougher and tougher to make a living. You get-- if you are a Jews, if you own the store, if you-- the goods is get more-- less or less available. And you have been called-- if you get something excessive, something, they-- where you get it? And if you're not able to prove it, you are on a black market. So you are you are constantly on a focus of the system. But I should say, till the German Army is not entered to Hungary, was relatively comfortable. The antisemitism I more felt it more stronger, but still wasn't-- I mean, bearable, let's put it this way.

OK. And they entered in '44.

1944, March--

March.



--19, Sunday morning. My mother went down 6 o'clock in the morning to-- when the German-- we lived very close to the Austrian border. And about 5:30, we heard-- I mean, I don't heard, my mother heard. She was the most alert, like a living raider, heard the low-flying planes is coming, and they called the Stuka, the bombers and such. And she went downtown and saw the German Army is marching. Some of the Hungarians was not happy about the occupation.

It was March 19. And about 10 days later, is a law came out, all Jews has to be wear a Star of David. Well, I wasn't shamed about it. But I also-- I don't like to be get labeled as anything. Someone says forcefully, I against it. Voluntarily, I do it, but forced, no. But forcefully, we have to wear it.

And you could read in a paper some young man, or older Jewish woman, or older men, or a dozen men about age try to be concealed with the handbags or a newspaper. You have to wear it on your left side. And they put them in a court and fined them exorbitant large amount of money. That's getting more unbearable for the life.

And about a week later, if you own automobile-- if the Jews own automobile, you have to be surrendered to the government. And you get a motorcycle, and a bicycle, and a horse and buggy, and a radio. But this one went step by step, not one day.

I see.

And about April 22, 23, the all Jews telephone has been disconnected. And April 26-- excuse me-- I have to go every morning to a labor camp half day. I was out of school. It's thrown out. So all this rest of the Jewish kids has to be younger, older than me. I have to be 6 o'clock in a certain schoolyard. And we go out in the field with the shovels. And we dig some ditches for air raid shelters.

And in a corner is a barber shop, longest I live, I never forget. The barber is standing in the door, 6 o'clock in the morning. He says, why don't you go home? I said, I'm going to that labor work. He wasn't a Jewish. He says, you're not supposed to be on the street. But he tried to tell me very gentle way.

That time, doesn't occur to me. But more I think about it, is more occurred to me, even he frightened probably. He don't want to straight tell me rudely here, you Jew, you have to go home. So I want you to be turn around. There is probably-- you see it in a-- especially if you go to Paris, the billboard, those round-- where you see it in Paris in the street, those round posts.

Yes, kiosks-like.

The round when you're posting an announcement, and theater-- and you see it in Paris, Berlin, Vienna. It's not a billboard, it's posters, the round, and a big placard. And all the Jews is at-- since 5 o'clock in the morning, they stay in the home, not to leave. It's not allowed to go to the Gentiles' home. Gentiles not to go to a Jewish home. They not allowed to exchange anything till the further order.

Well, I went home. I told my parents, we don't believe that. Time we walked out of the house, we got in our houses already for the same placard. So we don't have to be go down to the corner to see it. And well, we stayed home. And we heard.

Because we are very close to the Yugoslav border, the same night is from Yugoslavia partisans, the guerrillas came in and asked for the Jews to join with them. Oh, no, I'm not going to leave my Persian rug here or my silverware, oh, no. And I'm not going to be challenge the authority. I have a family. They don't last two more weeks, family.

We waited like a sheep to get picked up. They came to our house four deputy with a rifle and bayonets. And they told us, can not get more than 20 kilogram per person-- it's about 40 pounds, approximately-- no money, no valuable, just only clothes.

So I remember, I have a long leather coat. Was in early spring. So one of the deputy came there. He says, where you

going, you don't need it. He just took the coat out of my back.

Were these Germans now or Hungarians?

No, this was a-- well, I have to say, this is only-- this was a Hungarian. I have to be also say, to be-- remain for the fact, for the truth, historically, my understanding, what I learned in the ghetto, the same day, when the local authority, or from authority from Budapest is-- said, the local police has to be do it and the deputies, they refused to do it. So what they did, they also free-- because the Jews is very much is assimilated and mingled in with the rest of the people. They felt that they're not going to be do a--

OK. I guess we're off for a few minutes till they change the tape. I wanted to drink water.