

USHMM Oral History Interview with Charles Barber
RG-50.106*36

(Volunteer interview coll.)

Jason DeRose, Interviewer

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Tape 1, Side A

00:00 Born in Budapest in 1932. His father owned a liquor store. He went to a public grade school and some of the non-Jews wouldn't speak with him. There were only a few Jews at this school with him. He remembers the first bomb being dropped in Budapest in 1939. His father was drafted in to the labor corps of the Hungarian army. His mother was a tailor and sewed at home while raising him. He is an only child. His father's brother converted to Christianity to make his life better. Barber's father died after two months in the labor corps. He and his mother received a telegram telling of his death. In 1943, his mother was made to visit Gestapo headquarters at the Hotel Majestic. He suspects she was reported for listening to the BBC. One of his mother's sisters took him to live with a woman she paid to take care of him. This woman refused to keep him after Jews were made to wear a Star of David. He was relocated by this aunt to another house. His mother was taken from the Majestic to a camp for eight months then allowed to return home. Horte made a speech on the radio and announced the Hungary lost the war. By that evening, a Nazi took over the government. Soon, his mother and he moved to a new house. He remembers feeling guilty for telling his mother that he was hungry.

00:15 All the Jews were summoned to the courthouse in town. He and his mother were placed in separate lines. His mother gave him all the money she had and didn't look at him but walked away. He lived alone for a few days before his Christian uncle moved him to an orphanage of sort with a Swedish flag out front. When he was living alone for two or three days, one Christian family fed him. In November of 1944, he could hear the Russian artillery in the evening. At the Swedish house, a Nazi stood outside. Barber later discovered that the house had something to do with Raul Wallenberg. Many children lived in the house. There was no food. He was there from November of 1944 to January of 1945. He was terrible hungry. He had only one slice of bread each day and occasionally some beans. One day, he sunk out from the building to find food. He went back to the apartment that he had lived in alone and found a jar of marmalade. On the street he encountered a boy who accused him of being a Jew. There were some people on the street, but not to many because of the bombings. In the Swedish house, he spoke to several other boys, but he doesn't remember their names. They talked about their parents, about family, about food.

Tape 1, Side B

00:00 The first wave on Russian troops were not European, but from Asia. The Russians stole and raped, but he didn't care because they didn't hurt him. Anti-aircraft batteries were set up all over Budapest. After the war, his Christian aunt gave him up to the Red Cross and then several months later they sent him back. His aunt then sent him to a Zionist orphanage in Sagat. He found some cousins of his in this city whom he lived with until they decided to emigrate to Israel. Then he returned to Budapest to work in a factory. But his supervisors thought he should go to law school because he was smart. So he began law school. Then the revolution came in 1956. A man came into the law school and told the students that the Jews brought about the communist revolution. This was in his third year of law school. He decided he had to leave so he took a train to Austria and came to the United States. The Red Cross helped him to get to the US. He contacted his father's brother who lived in the US. This uncle told him he could live with him. Once in the US, he went to work. Then he went back to school and became an accountant. He didn't become a lawyer because of the difference in law systems in Europe and America. He work at a transportation company and went to school at night. He went to Queensborough Community College and then Bernard Baruch College and studies accounting there. Then he worked as an accountant for the same company. The company was called ABC Transnational Transport. He worked there for thirty years. He got married only seven hears ago. He never quite got over what happened to him. He still waked up at night from nightmares. He says he probably functions at about 70% most of the time. But at least he was able to finish his education and have a career. He met his wife through a relative of hers. This is his first wife and they have been married for only seven years. Barber took his future wife out to the race track on their first date. His wife is a survivor from Austrian.

00:15 He was not raised in a very religious household. He studied religion in school and remembers lighting candles on Friday night. He prayed every night until he was fourteen. Then when he lost his parents, he lost his faith. When he should have been Bar Mitvahed, he was herding pigs in a field. His mother went to Bergen-Belsen. He has been back to Europe once since the war. He and his wife went to Vienna, Austria and then to Budapest, Hungary. He met a first cousin who denied knowing him. He walked by his childhood home and the Swedish safe house. He went to the building which he owned. He took his wife to a place where his mother used to take him to get cake. He's glad he went back, but he didn't like being there. There is a lot of anti-Semitism in Hungary. The only graves he can visit are the graves of his grandparents. For a long time, if people asked him if he were a Jew, he would get very nervous. Now he is comfortable saying he's Jewish. He will try to talk his wife into going to Israel. His wife

is afraid of violence, so she does not want to go. He knew about the founding of Israel. He remembers the newspapers reporting on Israel.

Tape 2, Side 1

00:00 In the 1950's, he was afraid to return to the building he owned because the communists would have called him a capitalist. He told the communists that his father worked in a liquor store and didn't own it. He just wanted to get away from the communists. He has the letter that his mother wrote to him and her sister on toilet paper. He also has a wedding picture (in the Photo Archive) of his parents as well. When he reads the letter, his heart breaks. The letter says that she is lonely without him. And asks her sister to take care of him. She also asks her sister to pray for them. They died together at Bergen-Belsen. He also has a picture of his mother and her two sisters. He also has a picture of his father's brothers.