

Stefan Wohl

Tape 1, Side A

February 16, 1997

RG-50.106*0060.01.02

Abstract

Stefan Wohl was born on February 4, 1934 in Vienna, Austria and had a sister who was one and ½ years older. The family lived in Krakow half the year and in Vienna where they had a bank for half the year. The family had a Nanny for the children and a chauffeur. They lived in a 3-story house with the father's parents and an uncle. The family spoke German but quickly learned Polish when they thought Germany would occupy Poland. The father did not feel there would be a war and made no plans to leave. Suddenly when they heard the Germans were coming, they crossed the border to Romania and were jailed by the Russians. Everyone was freed except for the father who was transferred to about 18 jails before he was freed after 18 months. Fourteen members of the family were forced to take a 6-week train voyage from Kolyymia to Siberia during which Stefan endured scarlet fever. In Siberia, the adults worked the land for coupons which they used as money. The uncle was not home when the Russians forced the family to Siberia so he remained in Kolyymia and worked for the Russians and sent the family packages. After a year, Stefan's mother secured permission for them to leave. The family reunited and obtained visas to go to Bolivia.

Stefan Wohl narrates his many experiences during the Holocaust. This tape begins when he, his mother and his sister are permitted to leave Siberia and rejoin the father and uncle in Lvov. They obtain visas for the US by using their Bolivian passports. The next day war breaks out with Germany and they remain in a house they have access to due to the influence of a German official who the uncle works for. Soon the children are sent to Yaroslavl to be hidden by their former chauffeur in his farmhouse and they work in the fields for several months. Upon arriving home, the children are hidden by the German official and the uncle runs to Budapest. The family followed him to Budapest by truck and then guides walked them across the river and left them in the cellar of a military house and finally in a nearby town. Here the father recognizes his former client's daughter who permitted him to call the uncle who sent them a car. The family was taken to Budapest where they first stayed in a hotel before moving to a house where they were jailed for a short time. Then they rented a house in Lanyan Fallow (?) and ran to the mountains when this got unsafe. When thought they were being denounced, they returned to Budapest and then tried to cross the Romanian border. This time they were jailed when the guide was denounced but they were released. This tape ends at autumn of '44 and Stefan's father was sick and the mother stayed with him in the Pest Hospital while Stefan and his sister lived in Donat's servant's house in Buda.

This tape begins in 1945 when Stefan, his sister and their uncle are living in the cellar of a former servant's house in Buda and they are liberated by the Russians and soon find the parents

living in Pest. First the father goes to Vienna to determine the state of affairs in his factories and home. Then the mother and children follow. Next the parents go to Poland where they have a bank, leaving the children alone. Stefan gets sick and his sister sends him to the parents and she follows after three months. The uncle goes to Palestine to rejoin his family and Stefan and family flee the anti-Semitism they encounter in Poland. They go to Sweden to await visas for Brazil where they have relatives. Stefan's father goes to Switzerland to visit his bank but he no longer owns it so buys watches. He trades them for embroidered tablecloths at the Canary Islands on the "San Francisco" cargo ship headed for Brazil after they obtain their visas on October 1, 1946. Stefan loves Brazil and attends a Brazilian school and later Miami University whereas his sister does not feel she belongs in Brazil and heads for the US as soon as she completes her schooling. Stefan helps his father in his brick factory in Vienna for a short time and returned to Brazil where he had married a Brazilian Catholic who converted to Judaism. Stefan started works in advertising in Brazil and now is seeking work in the movie industry in the US.

Summary

- 00:00 Stefan Wohl was born on February 4, 1934 in Vienna, Austria. His father's name was Arthur, his mother's was Giselle and his sister, Leanne (?) Gross was 1 and ½ years older. They had an extended family. The family lived in Krakow, Poland half the year and half the year in Vienna where they had their business. Vienna was more cosmopolitan and his mother preferred living in their house there. Stefan's father was a banker in a bank founded by his mother where his father worked. When Stefan's father got to working age, he refused to work in the bank and went to Germany to study. His father's parents bought a bank for him and named it Holtzer, his mother's name. They lived in Vienna and went to Southern Austria for skiing. The bank was in Krakow located on the corner across from the castle. His father's parents lived on the 1st floor, they had the 2nd floor and the uncle lived on the 3rd floor. Stefan and his sister felt close to their parents but did not see them much as it was popular at that time for parents to have their own life and a nanny take care of the children. They ate separately from their parents and had different food. They saw their father each morning before he left for work.
- 05:00 The family was not very religious. Stefan's father was religious in his own way as knew the bible which he read daily. His father believed that religion was to be correct and go by the standards of the bible. He did not pray but they belonged to a synagogue. Both parents came from religious families. The bank was open on Saturday and the relatives wanted it closed so he had customers enter through the back. They celebrated the High Holidays but not Shabbos. Stefan's sister was invited to the family Seder at age five and sat with the parents. This made her happy but since they were children, they were served porridge and not food like the others. His sister cried and they were sent out and not invited again. His first language was German and he did not know Yiddish or Polish.

After the Anschluss, Stefan's parents thought they should learn Polish in case the Germans entered the city. They quickly learned and he still speaks Polish. He and his sister played in the park. His mother was the second wife and his father had two daughters from his first wife. One daughter was a year younger than Stefan and he, also, had nephews to play with. He does not recall what toys they played with or what were their favorite songs.

10:00 There was a 14 year difference in age between his parents as his mother was born in 1901 and his father in 1887. They would go to Murano, Italy in the summer and to San Anton (?) for skiing. They would go to the sea and to the forest of dwarfs which was like Disneyworld. He remembers skating but not skiing. Once he ran into the Prince of Windsor and threw him onto the ice and he agreed to have his picture taken but soon his father realized that he had no film in his camera. Stefan knew that he was Jewish. He remembers his grandfather, his father's father. They were not so close but went at Succoth to Krakow and they had a tree house and the grandparents gave him chocolate. Stefan played with the children in the park in front of their home. They were non-Jewish in that part of the city. His governess was Jewish and was close to the driver who had a big car and was not Jewish. He was an outgoing child and spoiled. His sister was like an adult as she took care of him. She was given the role of the smart child and resented it. She was 14 when admitted to Brazil and was like an adult.

15:00 At age 11 Stefan read Dostoevsky and at 12 read comics. He did not see German soldiers on the street. After the Anschluss, he and his sister were in Vienna and his parents were in Poland. They had a bank in Switzerland. His father's partner's son, Volant London (?) was Swiss and the nanny posed as his wife to get the children out. Stefan and his sister did not have their own passport but traveled on their parents' passport. The two fake parents showed their passports at the border and succeeded in getting Stefan and his sister to their parents in Poland. His mother wanted to leave but his father was an optimist and thought there would not be a war or, if there was one, it would only last three weeks. His mother had a premonition. The Germans attacked Poland but did not immediately enter Krakow. His father was walking down the street and a Bishop stopped him. The Jesuits kept their money in his father's bank and had constructed the first cable car for skiing. The Bishop told his father to leave the country and blessed him with "by the G-d of Moses and Abraham.

20:00 Stefan's father had possibilities to leave but did not want to. His father mentioned it in front of the children. Stefan's father had studied in Frankfurt and could not believe the atrocities from before the War. He would blame them on someone else, not the Germans. They got into a large American car that seated nine people including the chauffeur. His father called the Nanny's parents who agreed to keep them awhile. The Germans were advancing so they wanted to go to three towns including Kolyymia (?) where the uncle and grandparents lived in an abandoned house, Yallowswarf (?) where the Nanny lived.

They were two or three carloads of people and later 14 of them including his father's sister, her husband and their daughter, went to Siberia. Their goal was to cross the Romanian border which was not yet attacked by Germany.

- 25:00 The father's half-sister got through to Egypt and in '42 to Miami. His father was impractical. He went out for supplies when they were in the abandoned house in Kolyymia and bought two pounds of pepper. Their experience was like a dream, an adventure, and nothing bad happened so Stefan was not scared. They went through three towns and had sufficient food. His mother's brother, their uncle, saved their lives many times. The uncle worked for the Russians in Kolyymia. He had been an antique dealer and installed a museum window in Krakow. His father knew Anton Stieglitz, an art dealer who had the biggest collection of Judaica and donated it to a museum in Jerusalem. The uncle was called by the Russians as he had a truck so he got a good job and bought supplies and lived well.
- 30:00 When they crossed the border to Romania, they could only cross separately. First the father crossed with the uncle on his side and Stefan. Then the sister crossed with the mother. They crossed at night with dogs barking and the Russians caught them. Stefan spent a week in jail and was returned to his mother. His mother could not see his father so they went on alone and did not see him for awhile. Stefan had been in the same cell as his father and said good-bye to him. Stefan went with his mother and his sister. His mother could not understand why they kept the father and released Stefan. Stefan knew there was a war and they had to get out. He felt that his mother was courageous and took care of him. One night late at night, the Russians banged on their door and told them to pack one suitcase per person and to be ready to leave in an hour.
- 35:00 They only had two suitcases among them. They were transferred by truck to the Kolyymia train station to Siberia. They had clothes and a blanket but he does not recall any toys. It was a 40 wagon freight train with 60 people in each car. It took six weeks to get to Siberia. Stefan came down with scarlet fever. There was a doctor in each car. They were mostly Jews and refugees who were not from Kolyymia. There were some Catholics. This was Stalin's resettling plan. The doctor felt that Stefan had no chance to survive. They had no special diet or medication for his illness. **Tape 1, Side B.** They were in a cattle car with no windows. There were air vents on the roof. They could lift up a person to get there. The sliding door was opened at night to shove in the salty soup and once in the morning to shove in the bread and tea. The train mostly stood still. It took six weeks as they were not preferred transport like the military and cargo trains. His mother was told by the doctor that she is young and could have other children but has a choice so breastfed for a year.
- 40:00 She always told a story that in 1928 she was with a group when she was 28 years old and was happy and drinking. One of the group suddenly went into trance and stood up and

pointed to the group and said she saw a terrible Holocaust and pointed to each one and indicated who would die, who would live and who would burn. She told Stefan's mother that she would live. Families would place big pots to be used as toilets in the middle of the car so everyone tried to stay in the corners. Later they put a blanket and a rope on top of the pot so only saw the people's feet. Forty members of his family went to Siberia including his mother, his sister, his mother's widowed sister, Yanka (?), her two sons, the uncle's wife (the uncle was not home when the order came so did not go to Siberia), three children of his age, two Nannies, his maternal grandparents – 14 in the car. Stefan recuperated by the time they reached Siberia and they were picked up by trucks. His mother and his uncle had a good sense of humor. They knew how to take care of a bad situation and turn it into a joke.

- 45:00 His mother was well-read and recited Polish poetry and played verbal games. In the six weeks, they never got off the train. Sometimes people gave them things. Once in late summer of '40 they were given ice cream and his mother melted it and fed it to him. Stefan was close to his sister and they probably played together. He recalls good moments when his mother spoke to people at the stations and they were given something. Once she claimed she spoke to Stalin. People died in each car, mostly the elderly. All the members of his family arrived safely. Every day they stopped and moved. They did not know where they were headed for or why. They had not read about Stalin's plan.
- 50:00 There were both Jewish and non-Jewish refugees together. They reached the end station of the train to Siberia—perhaps near the Lennar (?) River, Yarnitz (?) and were placed in trucks for a two day trip. Two years ago he went with his sister to Siberia on a luxury train. The trucks let them out at a small settlement with wooden buildings including a wooden school. All the houses were made of logs. They were lucky to have a house to themselves as they were 14 people so they all huddled together. The bed went around three corners of the wall. His sister attended school and was taught Communism. Stefan was 6 and ½ and she was 8. He played with Eva, his uncle's middle daughter who was his age and her older sister, Mira (?). They looked for mushrooms in the forest and found one as large as an umbrella and ate it and it was good. He did not miss his father. His mother did not speak much about him. They spoke about the uncle who sent them packages from Kolyymia. He was still working for the Russians and sent them food, cigarettes (his mother was addicted to them) and letters. They sold the cigarettes for butter. The letters were funny. His uncle would say to read the comic book carefully and he would put something in it such as "rice was dirty and clean it."
- 55:00 He did not send money as it could not be used in Siberia. They could only use coupons received from working. His first skiing experience was when they made skis for him and his cousin, Evan (?) from the package. His mother worked, was beautiful but frail, got along with everyone and joked. She picked corn, wheat, and cut down trees. Her work would be weighed and she received coupons depending on the weight. Someone would

put their foot on the scale to make it weigh more. The children did not work but went to school. To bathe, they made a tub out of a barrel. Their houses had been lived in and the people progressed to better quarters. Everyone scrubbed one another and picked and combed out the lice. Their packages contained hygienic items. Some people did not send packages as thought they would not arrive but their uncle sent them packages. In the winter, it was 45 degrees centigrade below zero. The winter was eight months long, a long cold winter. Summer lasted one month and there was a short autumn. There were stores where merchandise could be bought with coupons.

60:00 Suddenly one day they might get in a shipment of shoes a certain size. The fur boots were made of felt and fur (Vurlunkins) (?). Even on Stefan's recent visit, they only sold boots of one size. Boots kept you warm and there was a weekly shipment so eventually everyone got their size boots. The governesses stayed in Siberia. One became a Communist and would not work for them and married a Russian. The other went with his family. He does not recall any sounds from Siberia but recalls there was no water in the house. They had to go to the river with buckets and axes to slice a hole in the ice. They had to keep repeating this task. They were happy when the packages arrived about twice a week. His grandparents remained healthy. The people lived to old age in the cold, dry climate. Stefan stayed home and played in the field. He only played with the children in his house and did not make friends with other children. His grandpa was the only man in his group. The children were 11 and 12.

65:00 There was a widowed aunt who had been married to a lifesaver and the Nannies who were not married. He only spoke Russian and could not read or write it. On his recent visit, he learned the alphabet and his sister remembered stories. He spoke Polish to his mother but they stopped speaking German after the Anschluss. He forgot German and after the War, they lived in Vienna and spoke German. His immediate family spoke Polish. He thought they would remain in Siberia for life so he spoke Russian. They were in Siberia for a year when his mother went by carriage to another city and upon her return was told she was free to leave. His mother had no money for a ticket to Poland and the authority told her to write to her brother for money so she did. To assure that he would know that she was his sister, she told her brother to write back and she would tell him the name of a cousin in California. She responded correctly and he sent her the money.

70:00 There was still no news about his father at this time. Stefan, his mother and his sister were photographed and several weeks later returned to Poland. When they arrived at the jail, they were informed that Stefan's father had disappeared for 18 months. They had taken two weeks to return. They had been away for 14 months. His father had been to 16 or 17 jails and did not know why he ended up in a Moscow jail with a Persian carpet. Stefan's mother thought the father gave himself airs by dropping names and indicating that he was a banker who could do things. At 11 o'clock at night they put an amphitheater on the stage and 10 minutes later he said he is Bourgeois, a capitalist

banker, and maybe they thought if they released him, he could do things for them. They became Bolivian citizens by the Bolivian consulate. They bought Bolivian passports in Poland by an American, Anne Holtzer (?).

75:00 After 15 months, they were told that his father was free. It was 1941 and the War was going on. His father did not know where the family was so he did not want to leave. Two months later, he located them and told them that he is free to go. The father did not believe them until he saw them and their photograph and then he decided to leave.

77:00

Stefan Wohl

Tape 2, Side A

February 16, 1997

RG-50.106*0060.02.03

Abstract

Stefan Wohl narrates his many experiences during the Holocaust. This tape begins when he, his mother and his sister are permitted to leave Siberia and rejoin the father and uncle in Lvov. They obtain visas for the US by using their Bolivian passports. The next day war breaks out with Germany and they remain in a house they have access to due to the influence of a German official who the uncle works for. Soon the children are sent to Yaroslavl to be hidden by their former chauffeur in his farmhouse and they work in the fields for several months. Upon arriving home, the children are hidden by the German official and the uncle runs to Budapest. The family followed him to Budapest by truck and then guides walked them across the river and left them in the cellar of a military house and finally in a nearby town. Here the father recognizes his former client's daughter who permitted him to call the uncle who sent them a car. The family was taken to Budapest where they first stayed in a hotel before moving to a house where they were jailed for a short time. Then they rented a house in Lanyan Fallow (?) and ran to the mountains when this got unsafe. When thought they were being denounced, they returned to Budapest and then tried to cross the Romanian border. This time they were jailed when the guide was denounced but they were released. This tape ends at autumn of '44 and Stefan's father was sick and the mother stayed with him in the Pest Hospital while Stefan and his sister lived in Donat's servant's house in Buda.

Summary

00:00 Stefan Wohl explains that the family took photographs so that the father would recognize them. Stefan indicates that he never considered himself a Holocaust survivor as he did

not enter a concentration camp. When Stefan's father saw the photograph, he recognized them and realized that they were alive but may not have known that they were in Siberia. His mother was not informed why only 3 of the 14 relatives were permitted to leave Siberia and why she was allowed to receive money for the tickets from the uncle. People warned them that they were falling into a trap but his mother felt that they were going through so much trouble for them so it must be true. Stefan, his mother and his sister were placed in a private compartment on the Siberian train to return home in contrast to the cattle car with 60 people for their trip there. His sister thought they had a guardian in the next car as he gave them advice about the towns they passed but they did not think he was an actual guard. Another guardian entered the train in Moscow who also gave them advice. They visited Moscow for one day where his mother caught her heel in a speedy escalator. The three of them arrived in Lvov where the uncle met them. The uncle reported that his father is all right and nearby. They reunited with the father at the uncle's house.

05:00 The three were in euphoria to return home but his mother had a hard time leaving her parents. Her mother died in 1943 in Tashkent of old age. By then all the Jewish prisoners were released from Siberia and some went to Southern Russia and on to Palestine. His uncle found out that some of the family went to Palestine and the information about the grandmother. Stefan was not upset to leave the rest of the family when he left Siberia. The Russians and the Germans were friendly to each other. His uncle had tried to inform them of the events of that time through comical notes but they learned little. When he lived in Siberia, Stefan did not know that he was Jewish. He does not recall his religious grandfather praying there or wearing tefilim; only recalled his grandfather performing these activities before the War. Nor did Stefan recall lighting Friday night candles. They did not have a synagogue in Siberia but the older people had parties and the children had a school. Stefan was happy to see his father after one and one-half years but he looked older. His father was about 50, like a grandfather, but now paid more attention to him. His father appeared thin at 66 kilos whereas he was heavy and weighed 95 kilos before the War.

10:00 Stefan felt his father was practical as he did maintenance and bought necessary items. He recalls his sister saying that their father saw a broken egg in the street and could not understand why it was thrown away. Stefan mentions that a few years ago he met an Australian who wrote a book about Siberia and asked for information about his family. He wanted to know how they were released from Siberia and returned to Lvov where the uncle was working. The Australian visited them in Bolivia. Stefan's father had a Holtzer (?) relative in New York from before the War, a Holtzer relative in Mexico, and his mother's cousin in California (Ghetlosteen (?)) whose name they used as a password to receive their tickets. In summer '41 his father went to the American consulate and showed them the Bolivian passport and requested visas. His father refused to leave their

passports with them and requested they call when the visas were ready. On June 22nd they received the visas and the next day war broke out with Germany. Since the family did not look Bolivian and they did not want the Germans to see the passports, they kept them hidden and later threw them away. For the first time, Stefan lived in an occupied German zone as the Russians had fled.

- 15:00 He remembers bombings. His father went out to buy bread and entered a patio surrounded by buildings. There was a long line of people waiting for bread when the air raid warning went off. No one moved and the bombs were falling and his father thought they would fall in the middle of the patio and they did. He felt lucky as he got the bread but did not feel lucky as he survived the bombing. Stefan did not see any German soldiers as he stayed home. Actions against the Jews had not started yet. His uncle was taken by the Germans to work in the same capacity as he had for the Russians. His father was helpless and started worrying. Most of the Jews were placed in ghettos but they were not as the uncle worked with an understanding German officer. They were the intelligentsia, people with education who closed their eyes and admired each other for their knowledge. His father arranged for Stefan and his sister to go to Yaroslavl to stay with their chauffeur. The chauffeur was Catholic and agreed to hide them in his farmhouse where they remained for many months. Stefan and his sister passed as peasants as they looked non-Jewish and celebrated Christmas there. His sister was almost blond and unless his pants were removed, Stefan had no hint of Jewishness. They worked in the fields and helped to kill pigs and make kielbasa and salamis.
- 20:00 Perhaps they slept in the fields or went there early. Stefan helped plant potatoes and ate big potatoes in the Fall which he buried in the fire and they were good. He does not recall missing his mother. If the Germans came, he and his sister would have to act like the chauffeur and his wife were their parents. They had no ID papers of their own. Perhaps their parents did not want them to know everything. Stefan fertilized the field. Perhaps he lived there for a year. His father must have been good to the chauffeur, Josef Gushlevitz (?) and paid him. Money was worthless. They held on to the mother's jewels which kept them alive for a year. Sometimes they traded emeralds for two pounds of butter. Stefan did not know where the jewels were kept when they were in Siberia. His uncle knew how to sell them.
- 25:00 They probably also paid the Nanny when they stayed in her home. Stefan and his sister were hidden by a high ranking German officer in the Wermacht who said if there was an inspection they were to come to him and call him, "papa." They were only hidden a short time. The uncle knew that things were getting out of hand and ran to Budapest, Hungary. The German officer who hid them was a Colonel or General and spoke with Stefan's parents of the possibility of the Germans losing the War. Perhaps Stefan's parents paid the officer for hiding them. After the War, the uncle was criticized as he worked with Menken (?) who lived in Holland. Menken was an art dealer who saved them and the

uncle but he was tried for killing Jews. Stefan's uncle went to Holland as a witness in Menken's favor and had a bad write-up in the Israeli press.

- 30:00 The uncle testified that Menken saved his family. They had to cross another frontier which was very dangerous as it was German, not Russian. Stefan was 8 and ½ and by this time the parents knew about concentration camps. Stefan's sister always took care of him and when the parents were absent, told him what to do. To cross to Hungary, they paid guides. His sister does not remember the trip. They went by truck which was filled with refugees. Hungary was not occupied by Germany and they were on friendly terms. They crossed the frontier at night. The guides helped them across the river and told them about boars, wild pigs, that struck people. His father lost his glasses when he was carried across the river. He was very near-sighted but the sister found the glasses. His family got separated from the others and crossed with the guides. It was frightening to cross the river as they knew that if they fell into German hands, they would go to a concentration camp.
- 35:00 They were on the opposite side of Hungary from Budapest where the uncle was staying. His father was damp as he had fallen into the river. The guides left them at a house on the frontier. They went into the cellar and were told to remain until the soldiers upstairs changed their shift. Then they ran out to another guide who took them to Muncach (?), a town full of religious Jews wearing caftans. The Jews were afraid and did not want to speak to them and the family did not speak Hungarian. The guards left them on a bench in a park and they needed to communicate with the uncle who was 400 kilometers away. The father walked to another section of the park and thought of the biblical story of Hagar being expelled with her son, Ishmael. **Tape 2, Side B.** They were in a desert with no food and water. Hagar left her son in the bushes as she did not want to see him die. It was just like their story as Stefan's father did not want to see them die.
- 40:00 His father saw a familiar woman and spoke to her in German and learned that she is the daughter of one of his bank clients. She said that she would take them home where they called the uncle and he sent a car to take them to Budapest. They had been taken to the frontier by the German officer who hid them in a truck and drove with his girl friend, thus saving their lives. Later the girl friend was killed by the Poles for sleeping with the German officer. They arrived at night to see Budapest lit up, looking lovely after three years of war but not affected by it. The uncle's earlier partner, Donat (?), got them a place to live. First they lived in Geller (?), the best hotel in Budapest which had a swimming pool where his sister learned to swim.
- 45:00 They threw away their Bolivian passports and used a Catholic ID. Now he was known as Stefan Golizki (?). When she was growing up, his mother was revolutionary and placed in a convent as she would not go to a Jewish school and did not get along with her religious parents. There she was taught Catholicism and now taught its tenets to the

family. Stefan tried hard to learn it and would cross himself every time he saw a church. Jews did not have to wear a star and the parents would go out and leave the children alone. One night an airplane flew over Budapest and the sirens went off and they had to go to the cellar. His sister got scared and cried. The airplanes were British who came to bomb the Germans. The uncle sold his mother's jewels which kept them for a year. They lived in a house owned by the uncle's former partner.

50:00 His father took them for walks in the woods and one day they saw a baby squirrel which they took home. They fed it their own food and the squirrel ate it. A few months later they were walking on the street and the police asked for their papers. They were suspicious of them and took them to the central jail of Pest which was for thieves. It was a nice jail, not a concentration camp or a political prison. In the middle of the jail was an open area where the prisoners could walk. They asked for their squirrel and it was brought to them. The squirrel lived on a tree in the jail's patio and all the prisoners enjoyed it for three months. The uncle got them a lawyer who got them and the squirrel released. They stayed in Budapest for a year and one day they could not find the squirrel which they had named "Machiq(?) but three days later he returned. It was 1943 and they could not stay in Budapest any longer so they rented a summer place outside of Budapest, about an hour away in Lanyan Fallow (?).

55:00 They had enjoyed talking and playing with the squirrel during the War. They would let him out and he returned but they could not take him to Lanyan Fallow. A new family moved in and they left the squirrel with them. A few months later they returned to the house and were told that the squirrel went to the forest and never returned. They had a Polish teacher, Helena Wolchiska (?) in Lanyan Fallow. She was married to an opera singer who did not want to serve in the Polish Army so fled to Hungary. She was his first teacher and taught him arithmetic and Polish. In Siberia they were only taught Communism. They also had plays about Polish officers and made uniforms for them. Stefan has photographs from before the War, from Siberia, from Poland and from Hungary. The tutor came to their house and also taught them Polish hymns.

60:00 Stefan recalls being taken to bed by a Polish maid and when his parents found out, they threw her out. His sister found out about his activity. Perhaps his parents were out working during the day. They left Lanyan Fallow before the fight for Budapest began. They hid in the mountains in the middle of Hungary where he was a shepherd and his parents hid in the woods. He took food to them dressed as a Hungarian shepherd. He would walk barefoot. One day his sister who was speaking Hungarian by then heard a man going into the town talking to a woman about denouncing them. She told her parents. When the man left, they tied up the woman and fled. They got in touch with the uncle and returned to Budapest where life was harder. The Germans were now arresting people and Eichmann was there. His uncle no longer worked and no longer had any connections.

- 65:00 The route to Romania, the haven for refugees, was through Sighet. When they resided in Lanyan Fallow, there was talk of a train to Palestine and to qualify one must have been a registered Zionist in Poland. His uncle was registered and his mother participated but his father did not. They took photographs as they were going to separate. His main photo was his uncle posing as his father with his mother and himself. Stefan believes there was a second train for his father and his sister which was similar to Sophie's Choice. There never was a train. There was a train on the frontier from Sighet to Romania so they planned to go to Sighet for a day or two and stay at the Count's home. They would pay the Count and a guide. The Count would give a party and at night, the guide would take them away. About one or two days prior, the Count was caught as someone denounced him and the guide was beat up. He confessed and supplied the list of refugees so Stefan and his family were rounded up and put in jail and awaited the concentration camp. His sister stayed with his mother and he with his father as they were segregated by sex. His father taught him to play a game that is on the opposite side of chessboards, mill. It uses 4 pieces. It is hard to make a chess set as they used bread and less bread is needed for a mill set. Later they made chess pieces. Stefan became good at mill playing.
- 70:00 Meanwhile, his mother told his sister optimistic stories. His sister asked why they were going to die. He remembers the uncle came dressed as a Hungarian officer and said they were important people and he must escort them to another jail. He believes that is why they were let out or, perhaps, it is just a fantasy. The sister believes the uncle got a good lawyer in Seget and paid him a good amount to get them out. The Russians arrived in Hungary. The father got sick. He was nervous and underfed and had jaundice. When they were released, the parents stayed in Seget and the children were sent away. His father was very sick and went to a hospital where he received last rites by the priest and then got better. When they lived in Lanyan Fallow, they were supposed to be inspected to determine whether they were Jewish. They got in a long line and took off their pants and a man came along with a boy his age and took their place. It was a Polish singer married to Pola Vegesinka (?).
- 75:00 Stefan and his sister went to Buda and lived in Donat's servant's house in the Autumn of '44 and tried to survive the siege of Budapest. He knew his mother was staying with his father in the Pest Hospital. Their uncle could not stay with them. He had many girl friends and was a comedienne. His wife went to Palestine and he did not get along with her. His Polish girl friend had a boy friend and she got wounded by bombs in the last siege and died. The uncle was a family man and would probably have gone on to Palestine.

77:00

Stefan Wohl

Tape 3, Side A

February 16, 1997

RG-50.106*0060.03.03

Abstract

This tape begins in 1945 when Stefan, his sister and their uncle are living in the cellar of a former servant's house in Buda and they are liberated by the Russians and soon find the parents living in Pest. First the father goes to Vienna to determine the state of affairs in his factories and home. Then the mother and children follow. Next the parents go to Poland where they have a bank, leaving the children alone. Stefan gets sick and his sister sends him to the parents and she follows after three months. The uncle goes to Palestine to rejoin his family and Stefan and family flee the anti-Semitism they encounter in Poland. They go to Sweden to await visas for Brazil where they have relatives. Stefan's father goes to Switzerland to visit his bank but he no longer owns it so buys watches. He trades them for embroidered tablecloths at the Canary Islands on the "San Francisco" cargo ship headed for Brazil after they obtain their visas on October 1, 1946. Stefan loves Brazil and attends a Brazilian school and later Miami University whereas his sister does not feel she belongs in Brazil and heads for the US as soon as she completes her schooling. Stefan helps his father in his brick factory in Vienna for a short time and returned to Brazil where he had married a Brazilian Catholic who converted to Judaism. Stefan started works in advertising in Brazil and now is seeking work in the movie industry in the US.

Summary

00:00 This tape begins when they are in Seghet (?), Budapest. Stefan's uncle indicates that he will leave his girl friend and stay with them when the Russians come. Stefan believes his father is dying in a good hospital but has no news. There is bombardment daily so they get scared and run to the cellar. The servant's house that they are living in has a cellar. Stefan says that he was the first to run when he saw the planes coming but after two or three days when he heard the bombs dropping and the noise, he would go out. First he would hear the siren, then hear the planes coming and then the bottom part of the plane opens up and they heard the noise (makes a windy noise) and boom! He could calculate from the sound whether the bomb was close or far away and would hear crying and this went on for months. Budapest was the second most destroyed city after Warsaw. He never saw bad Germans. In Poland he hid with a good German and later with the Hungarian military. Since Stefan never saw any bad Germans, he was not frightened of them. He was not scared of them even though he was Jewish but scared of the bombing.

- 05:00 A few horses fell and their pieces were picked up. His uncle was with them at this time. The uncle and his sister were his only relatives. The uncle and the sister loved each other and got along well whereas he was revolutionary and did not get on as well with the uncle. His sister wanted to go to Palestine with the uncle as he was the hero who saved them. Stefan viewed himself as a spoiled brat as he was daring and refused to eat horse meat. The uncle had his own family. The German soldiers moved into the upstairs of the house as a depot for their ammunition when Stefan and the others lived in the cellar. Stefan along with two or three other boys put bullets in a vase and played with them with a hammer. The uncle did not like that. Stefan's sister got her first job when they lived in Lanyan Fallow (?) and wanted to help him. He collected raspberries in a basket but was fired as smashed in too many and made jam. His sister bought him a German airplane with her money. The Russians were fighting house-to-house so he sat with his uncle and tried to survive.
- 10:00 The German soldiers surrendered to them as they were afraid they would be killed if they surrendered to the Russians. The Germans hid their guns in the cellar. This was 1945 and Stefan was 11 years old. The Russians came to their house and opened up the cellar and was about to throw in grenades when the uncle shouted, "Don't throw them in, we're friends." He told the sister to hide under the bed for a few days as the Russians were raping everyone. Stefan said he was happy to be liberated. The Russians represented a normal war but the Germans represented death. The Russians were fighting the German army but not civilians, just robbing and raping them. Stefan said he was so happy that he kissed a Russian soldier from head to toe though his sister was hiding under the bed. They were without their parents and knew that many people were killed and many houses destroyed by bullets, grenades and bombs. The uncle decided they should go to Pest to see the parents but there was no way to go as all the bridges were destroyed. They had to walk out of the town on foot, marching among the dead. They tried to find a bridge to Pest and somebody said the Russians built a bridge on boats. They took 20 boats side to side but it was only for the military. The children and the uncle walked 20 kilometers which took them all day.
- 15:00 The uncle had a friend nearby so they went to his house to sleep near the German fortification on the Buda side. The Germans occupied this part of the city and killed the friend's wife downstairs while they were sleeping upstairs. The next day Stefan saw so many dead people on the sidewalk so the uncle said to look up but then he saw dead people hanging in the trees. Children were permitted to cross over the bridge but adults had to take the water out of the boats. The uncle took the water out and when no one was looking, jumped from boat to boat until he got across. They arrived at the hospital late at night and saw the list of survivors but not his father. A nun came by and said his father recovered and moved out and gave them his address. They found Stefan's parents in an apartment ready to eat chicken and they ate it up. His father had got over his jaundice

and the hospital was bombed and he was let out. Now, they felt the war ended for them. A few weeks later, Vienna was liberated and his father took the train and got robbed by the Russians. He arrived in Vienna which was divided into four parts and found his brick factory on the Russian side.

20:00 Then he found his factory that made furniture and pianos on the English side. His home was in the center of town but was occupied. His father was a big investor so had these belongings. He found that Vienna was completely destroyed. He could not remove the people from his home but the concierge who lived on the bottom floor let him stay with him. The children went to Vienna and attended school because they would be fed. They had forgotten the German they learned in school. His sister took him to see "Medea" and he was bored and she cried. Their parents went to Poland while they remained in Vienna. Their uncle left to see his family in Palestine. He got on the first boat. His family and his father were still living. Stefan indicated that the entire family is coming to New York next year. Their uncle disappeared from their life. Stefan's sister never forgave him for getting old. While the parents were away, Stefan got sick as he was hungry so his sister put him on the train to Poland to be with their parents.

25:00 His mother easily fainted. One day there was a knock on the door when she was getting ready to take a bath. She thought German soldiers were entering so she fainted and hit her head and lost her vision in her left eye. After the war, she died of rheumatism. Stefan arrived in Krakow, Poland where the family had a bank and houses. He would sit on the long veranda (so it was probably Spring) and read a book a day from the Polish library. He understood Polish and Russian literature. Perhaps he stayed in the bank. Three months later the sister arrived. They received threatening letters from the Poles as they were Jews so left for Sweden to await visas. They had Polish passports and the father went from Sweden to Switzerland. It was 1945 and the father was almost 60 and invited to the US. They owned a bank in Switzerland which had many name changes from Wohl to Wohlen Landau to Landau and Kuchen (?).

30:00 They no longer had the bank so they imported watches, perhaps from the Holtzers in Mexico. The family settled in a place about three hours from Stockholm where they could cycle and awaited visas for Brazil. They made this decision as his father had a half-sister in Brazil though it was friendly to Germans and the mother and sister preferred to go to Palestine. Brazil wanted agricultural people and the family were granted visas on October 1, 1946. They sailed on the "San Francisco," a cargo ship that held 13 passengers. The voyage took a month and stopped at the Canary Islands. There the father threw watches down in exchange for embroidered tablecloths from the natives. They arrived in Brazil on the father's birthday and were met by the father's partner. They had celebrated Yom Kippur on the ship and fasted the wrong day so they fasted again. Stefan said that he did not feel Jewish and did not feel Catholic, either, though he could recite their precepts. The ship could not get a good place in the port for two days as it

was a small ship. Mr. Landau and his wife who had spent the War there were waiting for them. When they disembarked, Mr. Landau embraced Stefan's mother and said, "All the suffering you had was nothing compared to ours."

- 35:00 This made Stefan's mother feel like going to Palestine. They went to a hotel and saw a cockroach which upset the mother. Stefan's sister was unhappy as she desired to speak to others her age about the War but those her age just spoke about boys and fashion. His sister decided to go to the US. After she completed the American school in Rio, she got a visa to study in the US. She was asked for how long and she replied a year and was given a visa for six months. His sister stopped at Ellis Island where a friend of their parents picked her up. Meanwhile Stefan fell in love with Brazil as he felt free and could act juvenile. Around October they started preparing for Carnival which was in February. No one asked his religion and it was playful. His father also liked it. **Tape 3, Side B.** It was easy for him to learn Portuguese and he forgot Hungarian, Russian and Swedish but not Polish. He attended a Brazilian school whereas his sister attended the American school. When she passed her exams, the parents gave her a radio/phonograph as a present. She would play classical music so she could study and he preferred football or humorous programs.
- 40:00 About four or five years later, she left for the States and he could listen to his programs. Stefan attended a Brazilian high school and went to summer school so he could be placed in the 5th grade. His sister had all "As" so was made Valedictorian. Stefan's class sat with double desks and he made friends with Dominique (?), his seatmate, who is now a movie director and they remain friends. Stefan said he was too old for a Bar Mitzvah in Brazil but he was called to the Torah and then left Judaism. His father was friendly to the Rabbi who he knew from Frankfurt and Mr. Landau belonged to the congregation. His father was president of the congregation for four or five years and served as a mediator between the conservatives and the liberals. Stefan completed school and attended University in the States. His father wanted him to study hostelry or the watch industry in Switzerland but he was not interested. He attended Miami University for four years and then worked in a Brazilian advertising agency.
- 45:00 Stefan married a Brazilian Catholic who converted to Judaism. His mother feared that he would marry a non-Jew. His father was a Communist and his brother was a composer and agreed to convert. His mother visited Israel a few times to see her father. In 1956 while Stefan was in the US, his father got his brick factory back in Vienna. He spent half the year there and invited Stefan to work there. He did so but did not like it. He was a Junior Director and got a car. He met someone from the theatre and got into a nice group. He was the only one with a bath so the entire group used it. This was 1958 or 9. He knew that he was Jewish. There was a couple in the group consisting of an Israeli girl and a German boy. They were written up in an Israeli magazine and they went to Israel and spoke on the radio and the TV. He said that he loved her and they got married but

divorced later. Since Stefan's wife was in Brazil, he returned there and went into the movie industry. He had an Israeli partner married to a Brazilian and they went into distribution and lost money.

- 50:00 Stefan also worked with a Swedish director and is now trying to get into this field in the US. He often thinks of his Wartime experiences. He believes the whole world has been thinking of it more for the past two years because people are dying off and the doors to remembrance are closing. A few years ago people did not realize how important it was to talk about it but Spielberg made them realize the importance. If he had a choice, he would choose that the War did not happen. If he had to make a choice to participate in it or not, he would choose to participate. It was an intensive experience as he had to fight everyday to survive. He gave up his childhood so wanted it back when he arrived in Brazil. That's why he chose the movies and theatre as he could show his emotions. He feels that he got some of his childhood back. He loves people and Brazil but feels that it is terrible that there is so much violence in Rio. He does not get reparations as they had no property in Germany. His father got some reparations and they have some property in Poland.
- 55:00 When asked what sights bother him, Stefan replies that he has no phobia to get on trains. Once someone held him with a gun to get his car and he was not upset. Since he was five years old, he fights with his sister as she is sensible and he is not. He never spoke to his sister about their Wartime experiences. He never knew who took them out or why they survived. He spoke to his parents about this. His wife is interested in Judaism and tried to speak to his father but he won't speak of the War experiences. He has a half-sister who has a husband and a son. Stefan is around the son's age and the half-sister around his mother's age. Sometimes he goes skiing with his nephew. Mr. Landau married Leslie in New York. The Holtzers were his father's family and they were nice and he died.
- 60:00 Their son, Lester, got married and the wife vanished. When asked whether his acting during the war influenced him into the theatre, Stefan denies it and replied that he does not believe that he would make a good actor. He feels that if their bank had stayed intact, he would have lost money as he is not a banker. Stefan believes they survived through a guardian angel. Their name Wohl came from the Middle Ages. First they were Katzen Ellenbogen (?) as lived in the Castle Ellenberger which is a well-known legend. They lived 300 years in Italy with the name, "Mayer," all were Rabbis. He saw the cemetery there before his father died in Austria. A young Polish prince who had no money studied in Italy and wanted to return to Poland. The Rabbi gave him the money and later he returned it. Stefan looked up information on the Polish prince and found out that Poland was one of the few countries that elected their King. The Prince made friends with Solvan (?) Bergen (?) who was known for his wisdom and became King for one night

65:00 They made laws protecting the Jews. Their name Wald (?) changed to Wohl (ox).
Stefan's name is Saul Wohl in Hebrew. He feels Polish, not Austrian where there was so
much anti-Semitism but in 1988 he saw some anti-Semitism in Poland.

67:00