United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with George Pick
November 13, 1997
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PREFACE

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GEORGE PICK
November 13, 1997

Question: This is the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **George Pick**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz** on November 13th, 1997 in **Arlington**, **Virginia**. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is tape number one, side **A**. Could you give us your full name?

Answer: My name is **George Steven Pick**, **p-i-c-k**.

Q: Is that the name you were born with?

A: The first name is Anglicized. The original name was **György**, but I changed it when I became a citizen because nobody could spell it and pronounce it. **George** is an equivalent English version of **György**, which was my name.

Q: And your family name was **Pick**?

A: My family name was **Pick**, correct.

Q: And where were you born, and when were you born?

A: Yes, I was born in **Budapest**, **Hungary**, in March 28, 1934.

Q: Now let's talk a little bit about your family. How long had they been in that area?

A: My family's history had been quite intertwined with the Austro-Hungarian empire's history. I have records which shows that my family was in **Hungary** for at least 250 years. I have actual birth certificates and – and other do – documents

which document this. And I had a very large family. I did a little bit of genealogical research. It showed that I had roughly 250 family members in the empire. And I am saying this because when the empire broke up after this first World War, my family sort of stayed to – stayed in the geographical locations they were, but all of a sudden they were citizens of three different countries, **Czechoslovakia**, **Hungary** and **Austria**. And some of my relatives also lived in **Transylvania**, so they became Romanian. And this was the situation between the two wars. We were a fairly closely knit family. People were keeping in touch with each other. And I know, for example, of what my great-grandparents did. One was on my father's side, a physician. And the other one on my father's side was a merchant, an importer, who imported mostly fruits and spices. My grand – great-grandparents on my mother's side, one owned a lumberyard, and the second one was a lawyer. And so I have quite a bit of – of information about them. My grandparents of – my maternal grandfather was an engineer, a mechanical engineer. Worked as chief engineer of a – of a factory in **Hungary**, and my grandmother was a housewife. My other grandfather was a director of a lumber company. My father was a – an engineer and my mother was a paralegal secretary. So that's the background. I am an only child, I had no brothers or sisters. I have a number of cousins, I have a –

Q: What are your parents' names?

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A: My father's original name was **Istvan**, which is translated roughly to **Steven**, and my mother's name was **Margit**, which is **Margaret**; that's what she Anglicized her name to when she came to this country.

Q: And her maiden name?

A: Her maiden name was **Kornhauser**, and that's her father's name. Her mother's maiden name was **Spitzer**(ph). And my grandmother on my father's side, her maiden name was **Augenfeld**(ph).

Q: And you said your father was an engineer, what kind of engineer?

A: He was a – a mechanical engineer, and he worked for a short time as such. Because of some of the Jewish laws, which came into effect in the late 30s, early 40s, he lost his job in January of 1939.

Q: Yeah, we-we'll get to that in a moment, yeah. All right, you are born, you said, in 1934. Did – was your family living in the center of the city, or whereabouts?

A: Well, my family lived in **Buda**, which is the other side of the – the **Danube** river, and we lived there until I think I was about six or seven, and then we moved to **Pest**, my father, mother and I.

Q: Do you have any memories of **Buda**, living in **Buda**?

A: Yes, **Buda** is a very – very nice hilly section of the city. We lived near a – a large square, where – and a – and a hill, **Gellért** hill. And my mother took me, when

I was a child, walking there to both the – the hill and the square. And I – I do remember very well the – th-the area.

Q: Was this a Jewish neighborhood?

A: No, it was not. There was a Jewish neighborhood in **Pest**, but not in **Buda**. And we did – we were very – we were not very religious. We were fairly – we – we were really –

Q: Assimilated?

A: Yeah, assimilated, I could say. And were not very conscious of – of living in a Jewish neighborhood, although we – we know that we are Jews, of course.

Q: Did your family have any kind of religious observance?

A: I th – we – we observed the high holidays, but that was about it. My father's side of the family had a number of people who were – who married non-Jews, and they were, I would say, completely non-observant of any religion. A few of them had converted before the war, but most of them stayed Jewish, but were – were completely secular, I would say.

Q: Do you think you knew you were Jewish by the time you were six – up to the time you were six?

A: It's an interesting story. When I was about four or five years old, my mother took me to a little gymnasium. The gymnasium, in an English sense, was in a

Jewish high school, and we went there once a week. And the teacher was Jewish, and it was a little bit of a physical education type thing. And on the corner, just across the street from this high school, there was a – a Catholic church. And I always insisted that we should go into this church, because I liked the way people were – were praying there. My mother didn't say anything, and we went there. However, on – by age six, my mother enrolled me into a Jewish elementary school, and by then I knew very well that I was Jewish. I was also sort of forced into the reality of being Jewish after my father lost his job and he told me that he lost it because we were Jews.

Q: What language did you speak at home?

A: Well, we spoke German, mostly my mother and father and grandparents. I would say they did, I didn't. And they spoke it because they didn't want me to understand certain things. I was taught German when I was in kindergarten, and I spoke fairly well for a few years, but then I've completely forgotten it. Hungarian was the main language, essentially.

Q: Was your father, or your parents in any way Zionists?

A: They were not. They were not Zionists at all. There was a – I had an uncle who came to the **United States** in the late 30s and he first wanted us to come, and sent papers. This was in 1940. **Hungary** was a neutral country until June of '41, so

people could theoretically at least, leave the country. My uncle, who was a physician when he emigrated, brought – took our papers and sent us some affidavits, but my father was very reluctant. He – he didn't want to start again, and the un – my uncle was fairly discouraging as far as the possibilities of employment, because on – he was telling my father that he would be sort of a tradesman, maybe a mechanic. Well, my father was an engineer and a businessman and he didn't want to step down the ladder, so we didn't do anything. Then in 1940, he offered my mother that he would adopt me, and that he would take me, but my mother declined that offer. So, because of that, I got stuck in **Hungary** with my parents, of course.

Q: When was the first time that you remember hearing the name **Hitler**? Granted, you were very young in the 30s. Do you have any memories up til 1939 of your parents talking about this man, or what was happening, how conditions were changing?

A: I have very vivid memories in 1938 of **Hitler**, because **Hitler** speeches were broadcast in the radio, and I remember this frightening voice, and – and his yelling and screaming, and –

Q: And you were only four and a half.

A: Correct, but I remember it very vividly because it was frightening me. I mean, I didn't understand the language, but the way he spoke was – was very frightening.

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Q: Did you say anything to your parents, or do you remember them comforting you?

A: I don't remember them comforting me, I think I – I said to my parents that – that this man was a very frightening person, the way he spoke. And we had **[coughing]** excuse me – we had a prime minister at the time who was also a great anti-Semite, and I remember – well, I don't remember the – the speeches, but I do remember the kinds of – of expressions he – he – he used, which again, were – were frightening to me, although I was only a youngster. I was a fairly precocious child and I was well aware of some of the politic – political figures, **Churchill**, **Roosevelt**, **Hitler** and all this. And in fact, it was a sort of a joke in the family that people always ask me, you know, who was the Prime Minister of **England**, or who was the president of **America**, or whatever else, and I always knew the answer, even when I was in kindergarten. So I was sort of regarded as a smart kid, and I – I was more aware, probably, than an average four or five years old, about what was happening.

Q: Okay, let's move now to 1939. Is that the year you said your father lost his job?

A: Yeah. In main of – May of '39, when the second Jewish law came into effect, my father lost his job, but it was more than that, because that particular law, also allowed what they called people who were not trustworthy for the government. They allowed the government to induct them into labor brigades. And of course,

these groups included communists and Jews. And because of that, a number of my uncles, and among them, my father as well, was impacted very shortly. Actually, 1940, my father was inducted into a labor brigade. And they took him to **Carpathia-Ruthenia**, which at that time was already occupied by **Hungary**. And they sent him to build roads, strategic roads in that area.

Q: When did you say he was taken away?

A: This – this was in – in September of 1940, 1940. And –

Q: What did he do between the time he lost his job, and being taken away?

A: Okay, between the time he lost his job and being taken away, many Jews figured a way to go around the – the laws. According to the laws, which were designed to squeeze the Jews out of the economic life of **Hungary**, a Jew could not practice business. But what they did, what the Jews did is they hired a Christian person who would then take out the business license, and they would work under him. And in our building where we lived, there was a super by name of **George Dudek**(ph) who was a very kind man. He was a friend of my f-father's, and he volunteer – he – he essentially agreed with my father that he would take out the license, and of course my father paid him a stipend, and under this – with this arrangement, my father was able to – to do that – some business. Now, when I talk about business, it was not a f – it was not a formal store. What – what they have done, and this is a fairly

interesting story, is they – they went to coffeehouses, and they met there Jews and non-Jews and they made business essentially on a handshake **[indecipherable]** and they sold them both things. My father, being an engineer was more familiar with engineering materials, so he – he sold scrap iron, scrap materials and bought – bought them as well. And he had some partners who were – and business partners who were both Christian and Jew, and that's how he essentially made a living. And bet – and after '39, he has done that for – for quite awhile. As you see, he came back after the 1940 induction, and then he was inducted another time. But between 1939 and 1944, he was home most of the time, and when he was home, he was doing this, he was practicing business.

Q: When you were very young, did you have non-Jewish friends?

A: I did. I remember one, I don't remember his name. My grandparents had a little home – a little home, a little yard and a – a small bungalow, about 20 miles from **Budapest**, which we used, as well as some of my other relatives for summer – a summer cottage. And I remember in 1940 particularly in the summer of '40, we went there. My mother and I stayed there for maybe a month, and my father came out on the weekends and we had some – I had some next door neighbors, little mini-farms, and kids came over, peasant children, and the – we played. And there was absolutely no talk about whether you were Jewish or you were not, they were just

friends. And – and as I said, I had a number of them from that – it was a little village called **Gerdaler**(ph) and we had a next door neighbor, was a Serbian couple, and we were very friendly with them, and some others, also. The building we lived in in **Pest** had a few children. In fact, our next door neighbor had two girls, and the next door neighbor was a professional soldier. He was a – a – an officer in the army. And I was extremely friendly with their kids. I was – if I wasn't home, I was there, and they sort of regarded me as – as a family member. When there was Christmas, they had a little gift for me under the Christmas tree. And I have a number of pictures with the – with the two girls. One was my age, and the other was a couple of years younger. The next neighbor next door was also very friendly. They – they had a – a girl who was my age as well. And the three girls and myself, we were almost inseparable friends in the age four to seven or eight, even up to 10. And again, there was very little, to me, was very little awareness of – of what's the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew.

Q: So you're saying you didn't experience any anti-Semitic remarks at that time, during that interval?

A: I – I wouldn't say that. What I was saying is that I did have non-Jewish friends. We had a number of anti-Semites in the building. And there was one incident which I remember very vividly. There was a teacher, who was a – quite an anti-Semite and

he disliked me and I disliked him also, and once he asked me something, and I sort of a smart-alecky answer and he gave me a big slap on the face. And I – that was the first time I have ever ha-had – even my parents didn't do things like that to me, and I was very upset. And the interesting end of this story was that a couple of years – couple of days later, this fellow came over and apologized to me that he did this, that he shouldn't have. But I know that his feelings were not very friendly. But he –

Q: Do you think that's because you were Jewish?

A: I am almost positive that that was the case, that because I was Jewish.

Q: How do you know that?

A: Well, I think he was a member of some sort of a Hungarian Nazi party. And he was certainly – he was the warden, the air raid warden there, and he was very gung-ho on – on the war. This was the first year of the war, when this whole thing happened, in 1941, and I know that he was – he was nationalist at least. But I – I – I always had the feeling that he was also an anti-Semite.

Q: What was it like for you as a young child to have your father tell you that he lost his job, his work, because he was Jewish? Do you remember what your reaction was at the time?

A: Well, I – I don't – I don't remember what my reaction was, but I remember when he lost his job. I do not recall whether it was a panic time or not. But he has

lost his job many times during the – the depression, and he always found something to do, and somehow to make a living. He was a man who could make a living on a – in **Antarctica** probably as well. He was a very ingenious person.

Q: So you don't remember feeling particularly threatened in 1939 because you were Jewish?

A: I did not feel threatened economically, but as I said, I had this – I mean, I heard **Hitler** and I heard the prime minister of **Hungary** speak and yell. I certainly was frightened by this. Maybe I was not completely conscious as to what could happen. But just the – the voices were disturbing.

Q: What kind of relationship did you have with your parents? Was it a very close one, did you feel you could talk to them?

A: My relationship with my parents at this time was close to my mother and not very close to my father. My father was a fairly cold person. He was not a kind of a person who would – would color, or who would tell me that he loves me, or something. And he was not a kind of a person who would want to take me to places. There was always a great disagreement between my mother and father as to how to bra – how to bring me up. My father felt that my mother was coddling me too much. He called it a monkey love, and he wanted to make a man out of me, and he felt that I was just too soft. And over the years, this – this translated into a – a fairly

distant relationship between myself and my father. Even later in my years, I – he felt that I – I just did not meet his expectations in terms of physical prowess. My family, particularly my father's family had a number of gymnastic champions and – and great sportsmen. My uncle was an Olympic – he was a European champion of gymnastics and seven times Hungarian champion. And both my aunt and my uncle on my father's side were attending the **Los Angeles** Olympics. My uncle also went to the **Amsterdam** Olympics and **Stockholm** Olympics as a – as a part of the Olympic team of **Hungary**. And with that, of course, with that kind of competition, no, I was – was not able to compete. My father was, in his younger days, pretty physically active. In his 40s he was not as active as he was earlier. But he expected me to follow his footsteps and his brother's footstep, who was a – a great skier and mountain climber, and I was never able to fulfill these kind of things, so he sort of gave up on me on that.

Q: Now you said that your family moved away. Was it in 1939, from **Buda** to **Pest**. Why did they move?

A: If I remember correctly, in **Buda** they lived with my mother – maternal grandparents. This was right after they got married, and they really could not afford to live apart. In the late 30s, they had improved the financial conditions where my father beg – was working for a couple of years there, and I guess they were able to

afford to move away. They didn't want to move into a very expensive neighborhood, first they moved into a – a fairly low – middle class neighborhood. But then later, in 1940, me – we moved into an upper class place in – in **Buda –** in **Pest**, in – which at that point was sort of considered a suburbs.

Q: And when did you start school?

A: I started school in September of 1940, and I went to a Jewish elementary school. It's called the Jewish Boys' Orphanage, but it was not just an orphanage, it was an elementary school for other children. And it wasn't even for boys only, it was a coed school. So we had about 30 students, I guess 20 boys and 10 girls.

Q: Why did you go to a Jewish school?

A: Well, there were several reasons for that. One of it is that school was considered very good, and at that point I think my parents became aware that I should be more aware of my – my Jewishness. And so they decided that this was a – a good school for me. And indeed it was. I had met children, both girls and boys, who were – essentially who became lifelong friends. In fact, I still have a number of them here in this country, whom I known since age six from first elementary school. And so it was a – a – a great bond, as it turned out. We had a great teacher **Arn**(ph) **Magda**(ph) who was a – a young woman at the time. And I remember the school as a very friendly school, and as a very friendly place to – to go to. I also remember

that my mother took me every ni – every day. The school was about a half an hour walking distance from where li – where we lived. And I always woke up late. Actually, my mother didn't have the heart to wake me up early enough, so that we ended up running all the time. And – and she – I remember very well that she always had my – hand my – held my hand, and we ran through this city park to get to the school. And I also remember the other teachers, other than just **Arn**(ph) **Magda**(ph).

Q: In the early 40s, did you – or even in late 30s, did you notice any refugees from other countries coming to **Budapest**? Jews from **Germany**, **Poland**, **Austria**?

A: Yes. Actually, they were some of my relatives who were able – there was one uncle, his name was **Gustie – Gustav**. He lived in **Vienna**, and after the **anschluss** he was arrested, and they took him to **Dachau**. And for – and I am not sure and I don't remember how, but after about a year and a half in **Dachau**, he was let go, and he managed to slip over the border to **Hungary**, and became an illegal alien. And I remember him very well. He – we used to have a family gathering in my matern – paternal grandmother's and grandfather's house. They had a little house, and it was a family tradition that we got together every Sunday afternoon. My cousins, my aunts, uncles and ourselves. And I remember Uncle **Gustie** came at that time and he was telling us stories about the camp, and his life. And we sort of didn't

believe him very much. He was a very nice man. I didn't realize it until after the war that he was a multimillionaire who at the end did not survive, and who left all his houses for nobody. Ma – on my mother's side, there were several great-aunts and children and – who lived in **Bratislava**. And I remember **Ileanor**(ph) and her – her 16 year old boy **Garbore**(ph) and her husband, they were able to slip across the **Danube** in 1942. And they lived again as illegal refugees in **Hungary**. We, between 1942 and 1944 were able to hide them. It will – this follows, we had a fairly large family in **Budapest**. They – every night they slept somewhere else. And so every week or week and a half, we were the ones who were hiding them, and my mother and grandmother were particularly fairly nervous when they slept in our house. Had – they had some papers, but they were not very good.

Q: Was this nervousness conta-contagious? You were eight and nine years old when this was going on, and if so, how did it manifest itself?

A: Nervousness was contagious in a sense that I was aware that these people were – were illegals, that they came out of horrible things. We knew about the ghetto.

Q: How did you know?

A: Well, they were telling us about the ghetto, they were there, and the – and that people went into hiding, into forests, and also the – that they were di – taken away.

Q: All this was believed?

A: All this was not believed very much. We – we didn't think they were lying, but we certainly didn't think that it could happen to us. And so, although we were nervous about their status, and we obviously were family, and we helped them as much. There was, for example, one uncle who – who was a very nice guy. He was – his name was **Louie**, and he was a very religious Catholic al – although he was not born Catholic, he was a Jew who converted. And he was a great family man, and he was the one who got false papers to these people. Somebody – and I do not know who and why and how, betrayed him, and he went to jail for six months, because he not only helped the relatives, he helped other people in getting false papers. At that time, there were approximately 10,000 Polish and che – Czechoslovakian Jews living illegally in ha – in **Hungary**. **Hungary** at that time was regarded as some sort of a haven, a safe haven for – for Jews. Again, the Hungarian government sort of knew about their existence and tolerated them, but that they were still illegal and they had very little possibilities of – of doing anything. They couldn't work, they were essentially charity cases for the – for their families.

Q: In 1942 and 1943, did you notice any rise in anti-Semitic incidents on the street, or to you personally?

A: Yes. The – in 1943, there was an interesting incident, which really brought home the frightening reality. My father was – as I mentioned, my father was inducted in

1940 to **Carpathia-Ruthenia** working on strategic roads. He was let go three months later, and in 1943, he was inducted again. This time he was taken to **Kluge**, **Transylvania**. **Koloszvár**, which is a – was again, part of the occupied territories by **Hungary**. He was doing some roadwork there as well. We visited him, because we had some relatives who lived there, in **Kluge**, and we the – I remember very well that he was quite lucky, because his commander was a decent man. His name was **Andoor**(ph) **Altoi**(ph), and he was a very humane person. He recognized this whole thing as being really ludicrous. And they – the – the men were able to, for example, organize groups. Some of them we – more well-to-do men paid money into a fund to get furloughs, and that money went to the families of the destitute. And the – the man who ran, **Altoi**(ph) who ran this – this brigade, this labor brigade allowed this to happen, and he did not allow the lower, non-com officers to – to hit the Jews or – or – or do any kind of inhumane things. So in that respect, my father was quite lucky in that. After he was deactivated, which was in the summer of 1942 – three –

Q: Let's back up. What's it like for a nine year old to see his father in a – you know, taken away and having to do this kind of work?

A: Well, we had a family tradition, we never went to – to the railroad station. We always said goodbye at home. And it was a very traumatic experience, of course, he

– I remember his rucksack, his – his thing, he carried his things with him and he bought good shoes and things. And it was – we were always terribly distraught, because of course, we never knew how long my father would be taken, or if we would ever see him again. It never – it's sad, you know, you are inducted, and you have to go to such and such a place within 48 hours. But we never knew what his destination was. And then, of course, when we heard from him, when he was taken to a – to **Transylvania**, it took roughly a month before we knew where he was.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview of **George Pick**. This is tape number one, side **B**, and you were talking about when you would say goodbye to your father at the railroad station. And then you had also mentioned – when he was taken away – and then you had also mentioned that you and your mother came to visit him one time, and I was just asking what it was like for a young boy to see his father in that position.

A: Yes, as I mentioned to you, our – our family tradition was that we were not – we – we never went to the railroad station, we said goodbye at home and then he went to the railroad station himself. I – I like to step back in time, in 1942, because it was very important and a very traumatic one. In April of '42, when 50,000 Hungarian

Jewish slave laborer servicemen were inducted, men between the ages of 18 and 40 were inducted and they were taken to **Ukraine**. Among these were three of my uncles. My moth – my father was lucky because he was one year too old to be inducted, but my three uncles weren't. And I want to mention that there was a very large catastrophe which happened to them as well as to the 50,000, as well as 200,000 Hungarian army personnel in January of 1943. There was an offensive in the middle of the f – winter in the **Don –** bend of the **Don** river in the **Ukraine**, where the Soviet army had a counteroffensive and they – in six days they wiped out 200,000 Hungarian army men, and 50,000 Jewish slave laborers; among them, two of my uncles died.

Q: What were their names?

A: Their name was – one was **Bondi**(ph) **Kornhauser**, and the other one was **Yanu**(ph) **Pick**. And two of my other uncles, **Lazlo Kornhauser** and **Lazlo Pick** survived. We did not know that they did, but – but in fact, they did. And they came home about a year and a half later, but the other ones died. And many friends whom we knew who went, did not come back at that point. So I wanted to mention that. I also wanted to mention that we found out late in 1942 that the German government asked the Hungarian government to implement the Final Solution in budap – in **Hungary**, and the Hungarian government refused at that point. And this, of course,

was a – was a great relief for us, and we really believed that the Hungarian government is – is not going to let us go. We did not know what happened to the rest of – of European Jews. We were completely ignorant. And it is interesting because my father and I and my mother listened to the **BBC** every day, and there was very – there was a lot of news about the war, how the war went, and I remember very well that we had a big map at home, and my father had pins, red pins and white pins and we always looked at the – th-the map, and they were telling us where the – the offensives were, or what kind of battles, and my father was a – a vivid follower of all this. And there was a Hungarian speaking colonel on **BBC**, who spoke not very good Hungarian, very accented Hungarian, but he was the – the war correspondent, and he was the one who talked about all this, and we were very – very much listening to what was happening. There was no word, to my knowledge, which said anything about camps, or labor camps or deportation, or what happened to the Jews. Was very little, or nothing, nothing to my recollection. And in 1943 when – when this **[indecipherable]** breakthrough occurred, was a great sadness in **Hungary**. And I think that even the Jews, of course, felt sad because they knew how many Jews were killed. And as I mentioned, my next door neighbor was a – was an army officer, and my father and they – and he very often spoke about the – how the war was going. Now **Hungary**, of course, was a Nazi

ally, and I – today I – I – to-today I – I – I wonder, you know, this man, he really had a great amount of goodwill, because he could denounce my father. I mean, my father was trying to convince him that the Germans lost the war in 1943, and in the beginning of '44. And this man, of course he di – he – he – he talked to my father, but I mean, this was a very dangerous thing my father was doing, and this man was really decent enough not to – not to do anything. On the other hand, I remember another man who lived in our building, who was a commander of a Jewish brigade, who took this Jewish brigade to the **Ukraine**. And when he came home on furlough, he was very proud of the fact that among his Jewish slave laborers, there were a number of extremely Orthodox Hassidim whose beard he personally cut and shaved and taught them the delights of eating pork. And this man, by name of **Drexell**(ph), he was – **Drexler**(ph) rather, he was very proud of this.

Q: What was his first name?

A: I – I do not remember his first name, but I remember his last name. and he was much frightened after the war, because he knew that he made all these statements, and he was particularly frightened when he – when we returned, and he thought we would denounce him; we did not. Going back to 1943, my father was deactivated, and after that we went to a – take a – a week – one week vacation to the mountains. And it was a – a luxury hotel, and Jews were allowed to go there. There was only

one hotel, which was not open to Jews, which was open to army personnel, army officers actually. And it was a beautiful summer and we enjoyed ourselves very much. One afternoon, my mother and I took a walk in the woods. And there, in the woods, we saw a large group of men in Nazi uniforms. They were the Hungarian Nazis, called the **Nyilas**, and they had the rally there. And that was the first time we really saw these people, and they were yelling and screaming and we were really frightened. And we sort of managed to slip away, but – but this really sort of banged reality to our consciousness in terms of – well, here these people, we – we thought these people were underground wi – they were e – theoretically illegal, they were not allowed. Their leader was in jail, but yet they were organizing and they were meeting in these places out in the mountains, in faraway places from **Budapest**, and – and we became more aware that these people were real. I mean, we – we – we knew the propaganda, we knew that these people existed, but this was my firsthand encounter with them.

Q: What's it like to see someone in a uniform like that when you're nine years old?

A: Well, it was quite frightening. We – we understood, and I understood what the uniform stood for, and –

Q: How did you understand? You're nine years old.

A: Well, I have seen a lot of propaganda leaflets, and they have, all over the city they had these – these big propaganda photographs and – about the war effort and how the – these people look in **SS** uniform, how did the Hungarian uniform look and how did this Hungarian Nazi uniform look. Particularly the one which we were well aware is the armband which they wore, which were red and white stripes with a – a large Arrow Cross in the middle, green Arrow Cross. And we – we were – we recognized that. And as I said, it's just the way they behaved was frightening enough and what they were yelling, slogans, all this kind of things. They were mostly nationalistic and racial slogans, and they were yelling slogans, you know, death to the Jews and all that. And of course that was quite, even at age nine, it was quite clear to me that these people were not our friends.

Q: And how did your parents interpret this to you?

A: Well, we didn't talk very much about it. I knew that my mother was very frightened, and we sort of left, and we tried to sort of not to speak about this. We thought – we didn't ignore it, because I remember it, but we did not want to – she didn't want to emphasize that, look, these people are terrible, and we are going to have terrible times. We really hoped at that point that the war is turning, that we will be able to survive. That before anything would happen, the war would be over.

Q: So it's 1942 - '43, and you are still going to this Jewish school?

A: Yes.

Q: And then what is the next big change that you remember?

A: Well, the – the – the next big change, what I remember was that in 19 – end of 1943, beginning of 1944, my mother decided that I am now old enough to learn a little bit about music and culture. And next door we had a lady who happens to be Jewish – happened to be Jewish, and who was a violin teacher. And we went there – actually it was maybe 1943 when I started violin lessons. And I never got too far, but what I did get out of it was a love of music. And I remember that in 1943, my mother decided that we were going to buy some season's tickets for a musical and opera performances. All the Jewish performers were thrown out from their jobs in 1940 - '41. And in **Budapest**, in the Jewish community center, there was a cult – there was a – like a hall, culture hall. Small hall.

Q: This is in **Pest**?

A: In **Pest**. In **[indecipherable]** 12, and it's called the **Goldmark** Hall in memory of **Karl Goldmark**, who was a Jewish composer. And curiously and – and ironically enough, the people who were thrown out for the first class, the best singers, the best musicians. And so what they did, in order to make a living, they essentially organized their orchestra, and organized their – an opera company. And almost daily they had concerts and opera performances, and it was a very vibrant

and I would – should say a better quality of performance than in the opera house. So my mother bought tickets, and I remember that my first opera, which I saw, was **Rossini's** "**Moses**." And I saw a number of operas, **Faust**. And we had opera tickets like once e-every two weeks, on Sundays. And we had opera tickets for "**The Queen of Sheba**," which was a **Karl Goldmark** opera for the – on the 20 – on the 19th of March, for the 19th of March. And it was a sort of a birthday present for me because my birthday's the 28th of March. So, we never went. Why didn't we? Because on the morning of the 19th, the Germans came in, and the performance was postponed indefinitely. The school went on for a couple of more – I think maybe a week or so.

Q: The Germans came in, what do you remember about that day? Can you talk about March 19th?

A: Yes, I remember the Germans came in, the tanks came in and it was very frightening.

Q: What do tanks look like to a 10 year old?

A: Huge. I remember the **Tigers**, they were – they were unbelievably big. The **Tiger** tanks were the – the largest German tanks. And I remember, as they rumbled through the city, and the street – we lived in a s – on a street which sort of led into the center of the city. It was a wide street, and it was very much – it had streetcars,

but it ha – it had enough room for tanks. I remember also 12 years later in 1956, when the Russian tanks rumbled on the same street, toward the center of the city. But on that 19th of March, it was absolutely frightening because we did not know what was going to happen. We knew that something terrible had happened. We heard the radio, and it was, you know, every hour on the hour there were more things, saying, you know, orders given to various units. Hungarian units do this, you know, fari – code words or code numbers, you know, 12th Hungarian division, be alert, or bring – bring yourselves to whatever city, and so forth. And what I remember is the confusion, and the – the disbelief that this could happen to us, and the – an-and the belief that – that now, something which we didn't think would happen, will. And of course, the optimist would say well, you know, what can the Germans do? The Germans came in because – we know why they came in, because the Russians are pushing the German army toward the west and the Germans want to make sure that the – the German army has a retreat, you know, it wants to make sure that – that – that it could retreat. We also knew somewhat earlier that the Hungarian government was already discussing peace feelers with – with the Brits, and that that government was quite liberal and looked the other way. Well, that all changed on that day. In three days a new government was sworn in, **Döme Sztójay**, who was a – p-prior to this was the – the ambassador of **Hungary** to **Berlin**. And he

was essentially a – an – he – he didn't speak very good Hungarian, he was a German himself. There were these Germans in the west side of **Hungary**, groups of Germans living there, we called them **Schwabs**. They were the – th-the ethnic Germans, and **Sztójay** was one of them. And his government was containing the extreme Nazi elements. The only thing which was relatively heartening to us is that the – that **Horthy**, who was the head of the government, stayed. Now, we found out that **Horthy** was out of the country, and – but he came back later that afternoon. He was with **Hitler**, and of course that was the trick **Hitler** used; while **Horthy** was out, that's when the – they came. We also found out that a couple of days later, that **Eichmann** and company also showed up in **Budapest**. The reason why I know this is that my mother had an uncle who was a very prominent lawyer, and who was still practicing law in 1943. And the reason why he was – were two reasons. One is that he was a World War I hero, a very decorated captain of the Austro-Hungarian army, and he was exempt from Jewish law. And secondly, he was a good friend of the German ambassador, **Jakov**. Well, **Jakov** left, **Veesenmeyer** came in. And va – before **Jakov** left, he told my Grand-uncle **Paul**, **Paul Kornhauser**, whose son was lost in **Voronezh**, that **Paul**, things are changing. But **Paul** was a Germanophile all his life, a-an admirer of **Germany**. Never really believed that anything could happen to him. He was a prominent Jew. He was not very religious, but he was very

active in the Jewish community. Many of the Jewish leaders told him that he's on a list, that he should go into hiding. Well, he didn't. In fact, when he got his summons, the first one ha – **Eichmann** did the same thing as he did everywhere else, he's – he summoned the prominent Jewish leaders the first three days or four days after this occupation, to a – a interim camp, and my uncle, my great-uncle took his dress uniform, his Hungarian dress uniform with all his medals and went in and demanded to be exempted from all these things. Well, they didn't exempt him at all. In fact, they – they captured him and in a week, he and a hundred prominent Jewish leaders were sent to **Auschwitz** and he died there. So we knew that things are happening. We also knew that by the fifth of April – on the 28th of March, my 10th birthday came out a – the law that we must wear the yellow stars in a week. So by the fifth of April we all wore the yellow stars. That was sort of my 10th birthday present.

Q: How does it feel to wear a yellow star?

A: Well, it – it certainly was – was something different. I was not very easy to accept that now everybody knows that I am different. I mean, up until now I – people the – we – we lived in a house where – in a building where two or three Jewish families lived, the rest of them were not. This was not a – an issue, I mean, although anti-Semitism we knew about, but as I said, there were a number of

Christians who were friends, and sympathetic. But now, this was a – a – a huge sign on one's coat. It was easy to see who was. And of course, we did not know who the – the – the enemies were. Whom, we didn't know. And it was –

Q: Were you – were you unhappy about being Jewish?

A: No, I was not unhappy being – being Jewish. No, at that part – time, I was already very consciously Jewish. We had the Bible studies and Hebrew in – in elementary school, and I was much more conscious about being Jewish.

Q: Would you have preferred to be something else? I'm talking as a 10 year old.

A: Oh I cert – I would have preferred to be not there, so – for sure, but I don't know. I – I would say that I was – I was a proud Jew. I w – I was – probably wouldn't prefer to be anything but a Jew, but I certainly would have preferred to be not a Jew who is – who is going to be sent to the slaughterhouse. And what – what happened there in the – on the same day when we started to have to wear this Jewish star, my father and other Jewish men from 18 to 60 were inducted again. So essentially, my mother, my grandmother and I stayed behind, and my grandparents.

Q: Did your mother sew on the Jewish star on your clothes?

A: Yes, and I remember that – that it was in the newspapers, you know, they were – they were telling us exactly how big is has to be, and how yellow and y-you – you could buy this material, but it cannot be orange, it has to be very lemon yellow, and

it has to be this big and this wide and all these things. And I remember how we – we were cutting it on the – on the table, on the dining room table, these things and we were counting how many we need for the outer garments and inner garments, and it was a – and then my mother and grandmother were sewing it. And we had to wear it on the – right above our hearts on the left side. But what was really traumatic was – is as I said, is my father had to leave again, and this time, of course, what do we do? And we didn't hear from him for a long while, and about a month or so later, we heard rumors that the – that the Jews in the countryside – and I had 150 relatives – are starting to be gathered into ghettos. And there was an interesting things which happened, which was another lost opportunity. My mother's family had a friend, and his – he was a – a romane – he was – he was a Romanian, or he lived in **Romania**, but he was Hungarian. And he came to **Budapest** in April, middle of April, and came to my mother and said –

Q: 1944.

A: Ninte – 1944, correct. And he said to her, he said, look, things in **Romania** are come and gone. I'll take **George** with me, and he'll be safe with me. My mother refused. So this was another missed opportunity. And then he went and we never heard of him afterwards. We n – we don't know what happened to him and his family. But he is a – he was an old friend, and he was a trustworthy friend. But,

whether it would have been better for me to go with him, or not, who knows? Obviously, in the final **[indecipherable]** I was okay at the end. That happened in April. We didn't hear about my relatives except these rumors, and these rumors were getting more and more disturbing. Then we had a lot of different rules and regulations. We had to submit our radio, our bicycles, our telephone. And we were cut off from the world, because we had no radio, for example. So we didn't know what was going on.

Q: You had to give up your own bicycle?

A: I – I – I had to give up my bicycle, I had to give up my – our radios, jewelry.

Q: What that difficult for you as a 10 year old, to give up your bicycle?

A: Yes, I did. I would say yes. I – I – it was difficult, and probably more difficult was the radio, because it was a lifeline for us. And –

Q: What were you and your other 10 year old friends talking about? Did you used to talk about the war, or did you just talk about typical children's things?

A: Oh, we would – we talk more – more about typical children's thing, in the school. The school was abruptly ending. By the middle of April, we had no school, it was all finished. It was the – I completed the fourth grade, I got my paper saying that I completed the fourth grade and – and the Jewish kids no longer were allowed to go to school. I remember the fi – about two weeks after we had the – the red – the

yellow star on us, we still went to school, but then it was over and they told us that we should come in October to rigi – to register for the gymnasium, for high school. October was not a good time to register that year, unfortunately. At home, there were just too many things happening. We were listening – the radio we couldn't listen to, but they had these – these announcements which they mounted on the walls. And every day there was 20 - 30 different things, you know. We were rushing around and we were trying to make sure that we have food at home, we were –

Q: These are loudspeakers on the street, or in the buildings?

A: They were – they were newspaper, mostly the newspaper was used. There was one thing which I remember in April; my father was still there, before they took him. It was the first raid on **Budapest**, bombing – bombing raid. And my grandfather, as I mentioned, on my father's side, who lived with my aunt, whose husband was also inducted into the **Ukraine**, they lived in a small house, not too far from where we lived. And in this particular raid, their house was hit. We didn't know this, but my father, after the raid was over, went – was worried and went over to see what happened. And it turned out that they were in the basement, and except for my aunt, who got hit by something in the face, and bleeding, the grandparents were okay, and there was also a cousin. So all – all of them were brought, my

mother, my father brought them over. And my aunt was bleeding. Her name was **Elizabeth**. And in our building, there was a doctor. And he was visiting – actually was not living there, but he visited his sister and his mother, who lived there. They were ethnic Germans, and he was an – an **SS** officer. And I don't know how and why so naively my father and mother went over to him, and asked him to help, give first aid help to my – to my aunt. So, rather naively my father went down to ask this **SS** doctor to help my aunt. I was there with him, and – with my aunt. And this man – I never forget his expression, he had very light blue eyes, and the amount of hatred which – which came out, was incredible and indescribable. What he said, I'd never forget, he says, you dirty Jews, you think I will help you? He says, you will – you will die just your brothers and sisters did, very soon. And then took and slammed the door in front of our faces. And I was completely flabbergasted, and I was surprised and shocked by this. We knew his mother and his sister for years. They lived – they were just a couple of – lived a – lived just a couple of doors away from where we were. They were never very friendly people, but I – we never realized that, you know, how much of a Nazi they were and he was. In fact, one of the interesting side – not interesting, tragic, I should say, was that he also at that time – I found out later on that he was bragging that he himself killed 20 Jews. He was one of the Nazi doctors who did experiments apparently, in the camps. I don't

know what happened to him after the war. I know that his mother and his sister survived and stayed there.

Q: Their names?

A: I – I wish I could tell you the names. I – I – I – I wrote down the names, but I don't have it in my head. It starts with an **H**. A-As – if I remember, I – I'll – I'll let you know later. But that was right before my father was taken away in – in the middle of April. Once my father was taken, and as I mentioned, we were in a – in a panic every day because they had pages and pages of new regulations and orders, which in – which affected us. What we have to – what we cannot use, what we have to give in, and then finally, when we heard these rumors about what happened to the – the Jews in the provinces – you know, these were just slight rumors, and then we got – but we were very busy then, because we – we got the order that we have to vacate our apartment, and we have to move into these special Jewish houses.

Q: Can we just back up a little bit? Do you think your parents ever considered getting, as some people tried to do, getting a baptismal certificate? Do you think they ever thought about that?

A: Well, I know that my father never thought of it. My mother, in April heard that if you get a baptismal certificate, you may be exempt from something, and she talked to my father about it, and my father said, well, go ahead if you want to do it; I am

not going to do it. And I remember that she and I went a couple of times, maybe twice, to a convent not too far from where we lived, where we had these – they call them white sisters. White sisters' convent. And they were giving a group of Jews lessons about the catechism. And we went, I think, maybe twice, and then my mother saw the futility of it, and she said no, forget it. So –

Q: Did it bother you to do that?

A: It – it didn't bother me to do it. I didn't understand the catechism at all. I couldn't understand what – it was like Chinese to me. But – but the – the sisters were kind, and it was – if it were something which would really help, I would say why – why not to do it? I mean, a lot of people did it. It turned out that – that conversions did not help at all. My – my uncle, who was converted because he believed in Catholicism, by the Primate of **Hungary** in the early 30s, and who went to church every Sunday, was inducted as a Jew, because both his parents were Jewish and he was Jewish and his conversion was too late, and the only difference between him and my father was that he wore a white armband while my father wore a yellow armband. And – but he got the same treatment, in fact worse, and he ended up in **Auschwitz** and he was gassed. So we knew that – that conversions were, at that point, ineffective, but when in – when you are in a situation like this, you try anything and everything you can. But it always struck me and it always stayed with

me, that despite of the fact that my father was – I don't think he had gone into a synagogue a half a dozen times in his last 20 years of his life, he still would refuse to do this, and that he was very much of a – a – a Jew. But he allowed us to, if he wanted to, they gave us this – this – this choice. So, what happened to us then, May came, and we got the – the order that we have to move. And we moved in June, toward the end of June. We were not allowed to take any furniture with us, only beds, and only the most crucial clothing.

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with George Pick
November 13, 1997

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **George Pick**. This is tape two, side **A**.

A: It was June 17 when –

Q: 1944.

A: – 1944 when we had the, essentially the deadline to move. And my grandmother, myself and my mother moved in – in with my grandmother's younger sister, who lived about two or three blocks away.

Q: How did you get the order? How did they notify you?

A: Well, they – they – they notified by – via newspaper, essentially everybody – the newspapers came out, as I mentioned, with many, many orders every day. And repeated deadlines, you know, when you have to move out and what houses are available and so forth. So it was av – a lot of bureaucratic – but very fast. I mean, the time the deadlines were days instead of weeks or months. And it was quite lucky for us that we had, in this apartment house where we moved to, we had several relatives living there, on **Columbus** Street. We lived in **Elizabeth** Street, which was a main street. **Columbus** Street was like a side street.

Q: Did you take anything special with you from your own apartment?

A: Yes, I – I took some toys; not very many, because there was just no room for that, because we moved into a two room place. The si – the three of us occupied one room, and my grandmother's sister, her daughter, and the – and her daughter's brother occupied another room. And then we had a meet – or ev – or almost every apartment had a maid room – maid's room over the kitchen. And they took a single woman there, so she was the seventh person living in a two room place. And the only thing we could take is a – is essentially our beds. And I remember, the room was not that ver – large, and it was wall to wall beds. We had nowhere to eat, or we had to sit on a sofa bed to eat, essentially. And this was the – as I said, the 17th of June, and we heard rumors that things are happening in the countryside. We did not know precisely what.

Q: Were these houses marked in any way?

A: They were – they had the large yellow star, as if to tell people that this – this is a building where, you know, Jews live, or lepers live, whatever you want. There was one apartment which was occupied by a Christian family. The man was the super of the apartment, his name was Mr. **Vargo**(ph), **Janus**(ph) **Vargo**(ph). He was a decent fellow, and as you will hear, the – his actions were quite crucial in saving our lives; both my grandmothers and the relatives there, and my mother's and mine. We settled in, essentially in the last week of June. There were a few young people, I

was the youngest kid, there were no kids. There were a few teenagers, mostly older people. And almost daily, toward the end of June, we started to have to go down to the air raid shelter, because of air raids. I remember one particular day very vividly, and that was July the second, 1944; it was a Sunday. And even before, I was always worried about air raids, because evas – ever since the April air raid, ever since my aunt was hurt, I was afraid. And I remember once Mr. **Vargo**(ph) **[indecipherable]** was on the second of July, he – after everybody was ordered to the air raid shelter, he took me upstairs to the – just to the street level, to show me how beautiful those airplanes are. And they were, I mean, indeed, huge airplanes coming in, hundreds of them. And I – I can never forget the – the tremendous number. I mean, they almost covered the sky. And we were out there maybe one or two minutes, and then I said no, I don't want to stay there, I want to go downstairs. So we did. And we sat there very quietly for about 10 minutes and then all of a sudden we heard this tremendous crash. At first is a whistling sound, a crash and the whole building shook up. And I started to scream and everybody else did too, and my mother sort of put my – my head against her – her bosom and trying to put her hands again – in my – on my ears so that I wouldn't hear this. And a few minutes later another, even larger sound, and it was like an earthquake. And we saw – we had these blast do – doors leading to the outside, and – and it's – this – this is a very heavy steel door. And

along the door you see this brilliant light coming in. Of course, by then the electricity was gone, and we were sitting in the pitch dark. And – and this – this was like – like hell. And it went on for three hours, and we had four more very close hits, and we didn't think that we were going to survive, and then we did. And after three hours we came up, and what we saw was incredible. We had – this building was a three story apartment building. It was sort of stood by itself. About a hundred yards behind it, there was a six story apartment building, which was hit. And the only thing – and it was a Jewish house, with the same yellow star like we did. The only thing which stayed up there was one fire wall, and everything was down on – in a big heap, and people were dead. Across the street there was a villa, a private home, before the raid. Afterwards, there was just a huge crater in the – crater in the – on the – on the – on the earth, and you could see body parts. You could see hands and legs and **[indecipherable]**. And this – the right side had four tennis courts, nothing but a big crater. And the left side was a – just a vacant lot, and a crater. So essentially, within a hundred yards of the building, we had four huge bombs hit. And I could almost feel even today this – this smell of – of – of death there and – and – and everything was smoking, and it was blackened, and purple, the sky was purple. And some people were optimists. I – I just can't believe that people said well, maybe this is the end. Maybe – maybe this was used as a – as a camouflage to

– to drop paratroopers here, and maybe the Brits and the Americans are here, and we will be coming – we'll be freed. And of course, that was not the case at all. What was the real story was that it was the first carpet bombing of **Budapest**, and 30 percent of the city went – was in ruins, and the Jews were blamed for it. And –

Q: How are the Jews blamed for it?

A: Well, the propaganda, I mean, the – the radios were blaring that it was a Jewish conspiracy, that Jews left their lights on their buildings to show where the – where the city was, because of course we had blackouts at – at night. Well, blackou – and – and of course, if you were caught with any kind of light seeping through, that was a punishable – death punishable offense. And when – we were very careful looking around all the time, to make sure that there is no light, because we were accused of – of spying, too.

Q: Was this the first time you had seen dead bodies?

A: It was. Actually, these kind of dead bodies. There was one dead body I saw a few days before this. And this happened because there was a pharmacist who lived in our building and who poisoned himself, he committed suicide, and I saw him.

Q: This was a Jewish pharmacist?

A: Jewish pharmacist who lived there, and I saw him being taken away in a stretcher and he was – his hands were – I didn't see his face because it was turned,

but his hands were yellow and were sort of hanging down from the stretcher. And that was the first dead body. But the number of dead bodies after this raid, they were – they were really huge. And the first time that I saw this kind of – it's not just dead, I mean, they were bloody. It was – was – was – was like hell.

Q: How does a 10 year old process something like that?

A: Well, I was absolutely frightened. After this, every t-two – twice a day, all regular like clockwork, at 11 o'clock in the morning, the – the westerns allies came, and then nine o'clock at night the Russians came in bombing raids. And every time this happened, my mother had a huge pillow, which she put on my head. And to show you how traumatic it was, it took 30 years for me to be able to sleep without a pillow over my head. And – and it was – it was an absolute trauma. I mean, I – I – even today, if I hear some unexpected large noise, loud noise, I would jump. We did not know it at the time, that besides the air raid, we had an even deadlier situation developing in **Budapest**. What had happened is 3,000 gendarmes came out – came up to **Budapest** two days before, in process, or in – in the process of wanting us to be deported. In other words, by this – by the first of July, most of the Hungarian Jews from the countryside were deported. The only community alive was **Budapest**. My 150 relatives were largely dead by then. We did not know this, but what had happened is the extreme Nazis wanted to commit a coup, and get rid of

Horthy. And they got these 3,000 gendarmes for two reasons; one is to prepare for deportation of the Jews, and number two is to get rid of **Horthy**. And there was only just a few, the courage of a few army officers who were available and who were ready to follow orders. And one single army unit, a **Panzer** division was willing to come to **Budapest** to counteract this – not necessarily the deportation of the Jews, but the – the coup against the region. And by the second of July, they were around **Budapest**, taking up positions. By the seventh of July, they forced these gendarmes to leave. And **Horthy** declared that that day, that they deportations would stop. And that, of course, saved our lives, because with 3,000 gendarmes, we would be deported in probably a week, or two weeks. I mean, in six weeks, almost 500,000 Hungarian Jews were deported from the countryside. You can imagine that 160 to 180,000 Jews in – in **Budapest**, were concentrated, could be deported in a matter of days. But we were not. And that saved our lives. What happened after this was a – a little miracle. **Eichmann** left. He was frustrated by this inaction by the Hungarian government. And he also knew that things were not going well in the front. What we didn't know, but he did, and many of the Nazis did, is that the Hungarian government started again some negotiations with the western allies and even with the Russians. And these negotiations, essentially, they wanted to manifest this – their good will. So the way they did it is they essentially replaced the

government with a – a government of army officers, who were not as extreme. And

–

Q: Did you ever see **Eichmann**?

A: I did not personally see **Eichmann**, no.

Q: Did you ever see **Horthy**?

A: I have seen **Horthy**, yes, when I was a kid, yes.

Q: What did he appear to you to be like?

A: Well, he was a handsome old man. He was – he was an **[indecipherable]** but he was a – a horseman, and he – he rode the white horse. And we had a national holiday on the 20th of August, which was a holiday for the first king of **Hungary**, Saint **Steven**. And what I remember about – maybe I was six or seven when my father took me to this day – the – the Saint **Steven's** day on the 20th of August was a great holiday, because his right hand was, as a miracle, was preserved. Now, this man died a thousand years ago, and his right hand was the icon of **Hungary**, and they took this right hand and – and they took it all around the city, you know, there's a whole procession. And **Horthy** used to ride the horse, also. And I remember this procession in the late 30s, when this had happened. And I saw him once after that. In 1938, if I remember, there was a huge, Catholic congress in **Budapest**, where the pope came, and – or at least the man who became pope later,

Pius the 12th. And he spoke and **Horthy** was with him and I saw – I remember that I saw – this was a huge thing. He was not just a Catholic thing, he was everybody's thing, and I saw **Horthy** that time again, the second time.

Q: Was he a hero to you?

A: He was not a hero to me, but he was not a villain, either. We knew that he had Jewish friends. We knew that his best poker partner was a Jewish industrialist my – by name of **Goldberger**(ph) and **Weiss**(ph). And his wife was connected to – there was a rumor that his wife had Jewish blood in her. And that – we knew that his older son, married to a – a countess who was very much pro-Jew. In fact, it turned out that – that she was working for the – the – the anti-Nazi resistance. And she's still alive. She's a very old lady now. And we knew that – that **Horthy**, if he was not pro-Jewish, he had friends, and he was not the worst. He was not a hero, but he – as I said, he was not a villain either. So going back to my story, we did not know, but we were saved. After **Horthy** changed the government, things started to be a little easier. Up until then, we only had like one or two hours where we could go out to the street. We were – we had a – given a couple of more hours of freedom, free time to go to the street, to shop, for example.

Q: What did you do inside the apartment when you couldn't go out?

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A: Well, I was a lonely child, I – I didn't have people to play with, so I played with my toys, and I was with the relatives. They played cards, and I sort of sat next to my mother, and they had a – a game which they played every – a day, which was a sort of a superstition. I – I don't know if this game exists here, I guess it does. There is a **[indecipherable]** like a – a **[indecipherable]** with alphabets, with – with various **ABC** and so forth. And what they do is they put a – an upside-down – a turned water glass, and they put their hands on and then supposedly a ghost comes and then pushes the glass and then spells out things and tells you your answers, you know, and most of the questions were, are we going to have an air raid tonight, you know, and of course we didn't need to know the answer, we knew that it was coming. But, you know, some people believed this, and we played that every day. That was a – a – a game we played. And we also, as I said, we played various – various games, word games, and I was sort of tolerated by the adults. And I was trying to be a fly on the wall most of the time, and didn't do too much. Wasn't very happy and wasn't very active. I was reading a lot actually, I had a few books and I was reading. I – I was – my favorite author was **Jules Verne**, and since I was all **[indecipherable]** up, I was reading about "**20,000 Leagues Under the Sea**," and Five Weeks in the A-Air – Air Balloon, and things like that. I – I was always interested in – in adventures, and it was certainly an ironic time to read about those

adventures. And that's what I did. And the summer went relatively fast, and – and it was lucky, because my father's unit was brought back from the western parts of **Hungary**, where they built fortifications to **Budapest**. And my father was lucky because his commander was a decent man again. Turned out that his – the commander's fiancée was Jewish, and she lived in our building. And the commander sort of looked the other way when half of his brigade sort of disappeared every evening, and reappeared every early morning. This was strictly illegal. If a man was caught, he – under the circumstances, he would be subject to immediate execution. Nevertheless, my father, about two, three times a week, took this chance and came home late at night, after curfew, and Mr. **V**argo(ph) let him in. Mr. **V**argo(ph) got a few hundred **pengős** for this act, but nevertheless, he took a chance too. My father came in for a few hours, and then he went back early in the morning. So it was happiness that we have seen him at that time. And again, the eternal optimist said well, it couldn't last long. The Russians were already fighting. We knew the Romanians were out of the war already, and – and they know – we also knew that, you know, the war couldn't last for more than a week or two. I mean, the Russians were less than a hundred kilometers from **Budapest** at this point. So the October 15 rolled around, and October 15 was a very tumultuous and very important day. That was the day when **Horthy** declared that **Hungary** was

becoming a neutral country, and that **Hungary** essentially threw in the towel. Well, I can tell you that it was unreal for us. We heard this on loudspeakers, and we went out, and we ra – ripped al – our yellow stars off, and we were absolutely hysterical. But the people around us were yelling down from their windows that we are just a little bit too premature, we are a little bit too happy. And they said, well, you dirty Jews, don't think that you will survive. And indeed, they were more prophetic that we realized, because in a couple of hours, the – this – this coup was over. In fact, with German help, the most extreme Nazis, Hungarian Nazis took over. The ar – the Arrow Cross. And we heard Mr. **Vargo's**(ph) radio, he was nice enough to open his doors so people could hear through the radio, when they were looking for **Barakti**(ph) **Burger**(ph), who was the extreme Nazi general to come to **Budapest** immediately to assume the – the – the command of the – the troops. And we heard by the end of the day that **Horthy** was arrested and then that **Szálasi** became the head of the state and a new government was sworn in. And this was the 15th. Ten days later, all the women between the ages of – Jewish women, ages of 18 and 40 were ordered to come to a soccer field, which was the **Kishauk**(ph) soccer field. And this impacted my aunts, **Elizabeth**, who was 29, with a baby of three years old, and **Yoli**(ph), who was 38, with a cousin of mine, who was my age, 11 – 10 – 10 and a half. And my mother was 43, so she was too old to go, but they did. And

10,000 young women went. The women who had children were excused, and **Yoli**(ph) left, but **Elizabeth** didn't. She was too tired, she was just – she said, I – I – I just give up. And the – she was one of the ones who were deported. At that time they had no transportation except to walk. They had these death marches. And she made the death march, we knew that she did, because her friends who survived told us. She got to **Ravensbrück**, and she died a few days before liberation. She was 29. Her baby daughter, **Susan**, was hidden by an aunt who was not Jewish, who was a wife of my uncle, **Lazlo Pick**. Now **Lazlo Pick** was one of the uncles who went to the **Ukraine** in 1941. He was a thin, skinny man, but he was a tenacious sports person. And he walked the 800 miles. He just got back in March of 1944, just in time for the next round. And he was to be deported in September, but he didn't wait for that, he took his rucksack, left it and went home, where his wife, in an efficiency apartment not very much bigger than this one, hid him in a closet for three months. And she also hid the baby, my cousin **Susan**, and they survived. My father came home in the beginning of November, with the news that he got the 24 hours furlough, and that he is going – he wa – if he is going back next mon – next day in the morning, he is to go to the railroad station, and he knows that he was going to be taken to **Germany**, and he was not about to go back. He had a friend, and they had a plan. The plan was that they were going to my grandfather's abandoned building,

which was in ruins, but the basement was in fairly good shape. And they knew the war was going to be over in a week, so they would go there and they would just stick it out there. And my father left, and we didn't know what happened. This was the sixth of November. We didn't know anything. On the 22nd of November, a – an army man came over and we were very surprised, I mean, you don't see an army soldier coming to a Jewish house. And he came in and he wanted to talk to my mother and he handed her a note. And the note said that – was a one sentence that said, you and **George** follow this soldier and come immediately where he will take you. Well, my mother was unhappy about this, because she didn't want to leave my grandmother and everybody. And – and – or the – the message was not to tell anybody anything. And so we went, but my mother didn't take anything except me with her. And we went to this place, which was a factory building on the other side of town, in a blue collar neighborhood, called **C**hango(ph) Street. And it was a factory, a textile factory. And the soldier took us there and we met my father. It turned out that this factory was a camouflage place, where they had a bunch of Jews, Jewish men, hidden. The outs – for the outside world this factory was a factory for army uniforms, Hungarian army uniforms. My father was quite mad at us when he saw that we just came with nothing, and told us to go back immediately, and come the very same evening, come hell or high water. So my mother saw when

– when – when she saw – when she saw that he was mad, we went home. We got back and we were terribly rushed, because we had maybe a half an hour before curfew. And she threw in a couple of – she – the thing which she was most worried about were the family photos. And she threw in a f – the family photos in a small bag, which I still have. And she also put a little food in, and nothing else. While we were in the midst of this desperate packing, the house was raided by two teenage Nazis. And they came in, one must not been – I don't think one was more than 13 and the other one maybe 16 - 17. They had submachine guns with them. And they went and they rampaged the whole place. They – they broke things, they stole things, they made a mess. They saw these little thing which my mother put together, this little bag, and threw it on the floor and stomped on it, and they terrorized everybody for a couple of hours. And then they finally left. And this was after the curfew. So my mother put everything back and begged Mr. **Vargo**(ph) to let us out. Again, little money changed hands and **Vargo**(ph) let us out and we went. And we got there – this was end of November, toward the end of November, so it was a short day, just like today. And by six o'clock or so, it was quite late la – quite dark. We got there and my father was really relieved to see us, and told us how he got there, because we didn't know what was going on. So he told us that he went to this rendezvous place with his friend, his name was **Gargutzi**(ph). And **Gargutzi**(ph)

never showed up. He was caught in a raid, and he was killed. So my father was in a panic, and went to a friend of his, by the name of **Gaykis**(ph), who was a Christian business associate, and told him that he needs to hide somewhere. Well **Gaykis**(ph) told him that he would be happy to help. He gave him this address, it's **Changutca**(ph) **6B** address, and gave him a note. Told him to – not to talk to anybody, just go there, hand the note to the commanding officer of this army – factory. My father did just that, and he handed the note to the soldier and – and the soldier took back the note to the army commander and then the door opened and he was let in, and the army commander went to see him. The army commander turned out to be a Jew who was a friend of my father's, and who was playing this role. He was a spit and polished army – army commander uniform. And he told my father that 65 people who escaped from deportation are also there. They are all men, and he is welcome. And this was in the beginning of November. Toward the middle of November, the man who heard the news – they were much better informed, of course, than us, that things are happening throughout town, they knew about the deportation of the women. They started to bring their families in. So my father also took this – sent a soldier who was a deserter – a real, bona fide soldier, but a deserter, to the note – with the note to my mother, and that's how we got there. Well, my mother didn't bring anything and so my father's overcoat served for the

next three months as our blanket. We did not know what had happened, but this is what happened, the very next day: the Arrow Cross raiders came back, and took everybody from the building where we lived, to the brickyards. And at that point, Mr. **Vargo**(ph), who knew of a brother, my grandmothers had a – two sisters and a brother in **Budapest**. And a brother lived in a Swedish house, Swedish –

Q: Safe house.

A: A safe house, correct, safe house, which was a – was saved by **Wallenberg**. And Mr. **Vargo**(ph) ran to this man, by the name of **Beyla**(ph) **Kornhaus – Beyla Spitzer**(ph), and tell him that – told him that his three sisters were in the brick factories. And **Spitzer** was able to get in touch with **Wallenberg**, who went and took the three ladies, and one lady's daughter with her – with him, and took – took – took these four people to the safe house. The other ones were deported, and – by foot, and none of them came back. We would be among those who were deported, and who would have been, of course, the victims. This we found out later, after the war. In the place where we now were in the factory, we had about 120 - 130 people. They had a bunch of kids, young women and in a few days we found out that there was a group of young people who were running around in Nazi uniforms, but they were Jews. And they had a – a group of five or six people who went to the deportation trains and to the roads, to snatch some people back. They had papers, wi

– which were forgeries, which said that such and such people would have to be brought back to headquarters because they wanted to interrogate them. And this way they brought in more than 50 people back from the road, who were already to certain death, mostly – mostly young women, and some young men, but mostly women. And so in the next week or so, the number of people went to about 170. We had about 22 kids, some of them were younger than I, and it was a – a great camaraderie. I mean, since – since the early spring that year, in 1944, I haven't been with kids. And it was a lot of fun, and what was fun about it is that this – this factory had a bunch of machines, big textile machines and we were av – able to explore these, and a few of us were curious, particularly one fellow. His name was **Foti**(ph). **Foti**(ph) **Yonchee**(ph) and **John Foti**(ph). And he was my age, and he – we went on, and we played with these machines and it was just a lot of adventure. We also found that there was a garage, or sort of a shed, which had a – a lot of hay. And the hay was important because attached to the factory, there was a horse, and a – and a lorry. Horse and a lorry. And the hay was, of course, his food, horse's food. But what we found out, which was very interesting and uk – unexpected is that one of the young men who was in this resistance told us that under the hay there was a car, a personnel motorcar, which they use to rescue people.

End of Tape Two, Side A

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Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **George Pick**. This is tape number two, side **B**.

A: Okay, so what we found out is that under the hay was this car, and they gave us the permission to go into the car, and it was, of course, very exciting. This – this car was an early **Škoda**, model 1930s. And at that time, in order to start the car, you had a piece of – a steel rod you had to put in in the front and make it, you know, move it around. But these people told us, and I am sure this was a fib, that in fact – in fact that's thing was not a part of the starter, but it was a machine gun built into the car, and that this would be used in case something happens here. And we believed that, it was a good – good fib, and it was certainly an interesting story. Unfortunately the reality was a little less interesting. What had happened is that on the second of December, we heard a – a very powerful knock on the door, and there were only f – a few seconds before we heard running steps. We – our – our rooms were on the second floor, second story of this place. It was really camouflaged as work rooms, but by the time we reached this number of people, there was not enough room to sleep on the floor, so they build these multiple – actually three story –

Q: Bunks?

A: Bunks, I guess you can call them. And they brought the hay from downstairs and we – we slept on the hay and we used the army uniforms, we had several hundred of those, as blankets and pillows, whatever. And we were in a middle bunk, and I remember the **[indecipherable]**

Q: Did you ba – did you stay with the children, or did you sleep with the children, or with your mother?

A: No, I slept with my mother and my father. The families stayed together. Underneath there was another family with a little girl I remember, her name was **Onchee**(ph). She was about two or three years old and she made a racket and she made her grandpa – Papa, very, very mad all the time, and she knew how to push his buttons. And it was hilarious, I mean, it was really funny. Very close by, there was a young lady, young woman. Her name was **Cotto**(ph) **Ferhier**(ph). And she was a – she was married, she was 22 years old, and we got very good friends. She – she was patient enough with me and I talked to her about my stories I read and all these things, and I was 10 going on 30, and we really became very good friends and my mother and father didn't mind that at all, because of course, they didn't have to babysit me. And that was another friendship, but she was more interested in another fellow, who was a young man by the name of **Bondi**(ph). And **Bondi**(ph) was one of the – the refugees there, the – the one who was able to escape from deportation.

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And **Bondi**(ph) one day, and this was the very end of November, I think the 30th, got very, very sick. And he got high fever and he was delirious. And the committee who ran this place had a real dilemma, they didn't know what to do. If they bring in somebody from the outside, you know, they may jeopardize 129 – 69 people, and if they don't, they may have **Bondi**(ph) dead within a day or two. Well, they decided the next day, when **Bondi's**(ph) condition became worse, that they were going to bring somebody in. And – and they brought a Christian doctor in late at night, and he gave him sulfur drugs, it turned out that it was an infection. And in a day or so, he got better. The date is very important, this was the first of December. In the morning of the second, we heard the running steps, and as we were trying to scramble for some shelter, we saw five men running in with submachine guns and yelling and screaming us and saying that we know who you are, you are just a bunch of dirty Jews who are trying to – to hide here, and we are the police, the Nazi state police. This was the gest – the Hungarian Gestapo. And they sorted out the men to one side of the room, and women and children to the other and we thought that this was the end. I mean, there was just no way. Within the few seconds of confusion, one man, **John** dove out the window and into another building. It was like six or seven feet, and he really jumped, and he crashed through a – a – a glass door – glass enclosure. And his luck was that it was a haystack underneath, so he

got into the haystack. And they ran after him, they tried to push the haystack, they couldn't find him. But we were captured, and we thought that this was going to be the end. But for a while nothing happened, and about 20 or 30 minutes later, the detectives, one of the leaders of the detectives came out of the office, and made the following startling statement, that henceforth we are under their protection. And we just couldn't figure out what happened. There was only one arrest which they made, and that was a na – a man by the name of **Kormus**(ph). **Kormus**(ph) was the – the leader of the group. Not the commander, but the real leader, the organizer. I didn't know much about **Kormus**(ph), but I found out later what – who he was. They took him and they took us, oh, 10,000 dollars in cash, which by sheer luck was there, because there were a number of extremely rich people in hiding. So in other words, they bribed these detectives. And they left with **Kormus**(ph) and the money, but they left us behind. After the war I found out that they took **Kormus**(ph) and they – they tortured him for two days because they knew that this, our place, was not the only one. In fact, it was a network of four places, all of which **Kormus**(ph) ran. They knew of three, our place, and another two. And what happened is **Kormus**(ph) was betrayed. We thought that the doctor did – betrayed us, it was not the doctor. It was a man by name of **Althurdi**(ph), who hid **Kormus**(ph) and his family for months. And the speculation was that he was either blackmailed, or he didn't get

enough money, but he betrayed **Kormus**(ph). He knew of three places **Kormus**(ph) could have been, and he knew of a fourth place, but he did not know the address of the fourth place. So when he – when **Kormus**(ph) was betrayed, they raided three of the four places, **Kormus**(ph) happened to be in our place. But the fourth place they didn't know. The fourth place was a factory in another part of **Budapest** with 350 Jewish slave laborers who were essentially also hiding there. But they, the slave laborers were armed, and they had a mission there. They were armed, and their mission was that they would save the utility companies of **Budapest**. The paper said – they were all in army uniforms – their paper said that they would be the last one to stay, to blow up these utilities, the gas – gas company, the – the wa – the waterworks and so forth, and the electric company. That was the paper which said, but the real mission was to, in fact, save these utilities. And every day they were trained like soldiers. Every night on the other hand, they we – they had a little factory underneath and they forged papers. And they worked with the Zionists and they worked with our little group, and they were part of the Hungarian Jewish resistance, and **Kormus**(ph) was the head. So **Kormus**(ph) – they – they knew **Kormus**(ph) knew about this and they tortured him. He did not speak, and because he didn't show up for two days, they knew in the fourth place, that things were bad, so they left. They – they – they – they couldn't accomplish their mission, but they

were all safe, they were able to escape. And then **Kormus**(ph) was sentenced to death, and they took him to the **Danube**, but he was able to escape. He was very sick because of the fact that he – they tortured him, but he escaped. He was able to hide, and he survived the war. The other two places which were raided, were not as lucky as we were. They had not many rich people there and they were deported. One was deported on foot to – to **Germany**, and they all died. And the second part was taken to political headquarters, and they – they were among the ones who were sentenced and 70 of them were taken to the **Danube**, and only **Kormus**(ph) was able to escape. The rest of them were shot into the **Danube**. So our group was essentially the – out of the three groups, our group was the only one who survived. After this happened, the committee who ran the building decided that the 22 children were not safe, so they decided to take us from – ranging from age of six months to 11 years, I was among the oldest. And one lady who – who had the six months old son, I think, they took us to a – a Red Cross building which was in the middle of the city. We took the lorry and the soldier brought us to the Red Cross building. And the idea was that this was a protected building, we would be fed there and we would be okay. That was the theory. The practice was that when we got there, there were about three or 400 children, crying, hungry, dirty and maybe a half a dozen adults. I didn't like the place at all.

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Q: When you said this was a – another protected building, protected by whom?

A: By the Red Cross, Swiss Red Cross building, okay? They were the – they had about 30 buildings throughout town, which were run by the Swiss Red Cross, like the Swedish buildings, this – but this was not within that enclosure, you know. There was a – what they called an international ghetto, where the Swiss, the Swedes, the **[indecipherable]** and the Spanish had rented buildings, about 32 buildings. This was in a part of town, and they were all concentrated. That's where my grandmother and my grand-aunts and uncle were. The Red Cross buildings were throughout the city, they were essentially Swiss protected. Not very well, as you will hear in a minute. But at the time that I got there they were protected, and they were concentrating children there. Now, the idea was that there were adults who would supervise these children, they would bring hoo – food and everything. Well, the – that was the theory. The practice was that the building was almost empty. I was put in with a friend of mine, into a room where we had about 35 children of my age. No furniture, we were sleeping on the floor and we were told that there is no food for the day. Well, I wandered around and I was crying, and I met a friend of mine from school there, who was there with his sister. I knew him, his name is **Mike Vairmas**(ph). He now lives here in this country. And he was telling me that he wa – he just came in a few days earlier and they are thinking about leaving the

building, escaping, because they haven't gotten any food there since they came. So, a young girl saw me there crying, and asked me why I was crying, and I was saying I was hungry and I was lonely for my mother. This young girl has a boyfre – had a boyfriend who was in a Nazi uniform, and who told me that he would be more than happy to take me back. Well, I knew that that was not the right answer, and I knew that I had to escape now, cause I knew that if this man would take a – take me back to where we are hiding, you know, he would betray us. So **John Foti**(ph) and I decided that in the very next morning, we are going to take off. And the building was locked from the inside, so we couldn't just walk out. And the next morning when the employees came, there was a kindly lady who came and we asked her to take us out so that we could buy some food. And as she took us out, we ran away from her.

Q: Wasn't that a very brave decision? You're 11 years – 10 years old, to do that?

A: It was a brave decision, but it – we had no choice, because if we went back, the Nazi would recognize us, would take us to where my father and mother and the other people were hiding. I didn't want to take that chance. The chance was that they would catch us somewhere, because they were looking for kids too, and of course we didn't wear our – our yellow star. That was the chance I had to take. It took us a couple of hours to – to get back. We were sort of ducking various little

groups of Nazis who were patrolling the streets. We bought a newspaper, which we pretended to read. We took a number of streetcars to go, and we knew where – where the place was, so we had to change like three times, and we got back there. My mother couldn't believe that I did come back and we came back. We were the only two kids who – who did come back. After the war I found out that about three days later, the Nazis raided the building and they took the children to the **Danube** and they shot them. And my friend **Mike** and his sister escaped just a day or so earlier, but not the rest of them; the rest of them all died. So here we were, this was, I think maybe the 10th of December. A few days after this, two policemen showed up in our building and told us that the detectives sent out – sent them to let us know that we are under suspicion by some of the Nazis, who live in the area, and they are about to report this suspicious building and people. And that they da – they suggested that we should follow them, they would take us to the ghetto. The ghetto in **Budapest** was established at the very end of November. And the people who were still in the – the yellow stone – yellow starred houses were taken to the – to the places. Now, many of the yellow starred houses were raided, and many of the people already were deported, but in the middle of December, which is what – what was, there were – **Budapest** was almost completely surrounded by Russian troops. And so the Nazis decided that they would concentrate the Jews who are left in

Budapest into a small ghetto in the middle of town, which was the – used to be the Jewish quarters. And then they would do something. And so, on the 14th of December, the ghetto was already established and these policemen told us that they would go ahead, we would be behind them, they would not look back, and nothing else was said. Well, of the 150 people roughly, only 65 arrived in the ghetto. The rest sort of evaporated along the way. My father decided that we have nowhere to hide, so we went back to the ghetto. The ghetto, as I mentioned, was in a very poor section of town, the Jewish quarters. The center of it was a square, **Klauzál** square, and in that square, or one part of the square was a market. They took us to the market, where the Nazis – a number of Nazis were there, Hungarian Nazis, told us that, if you have any jewelry, money, they are going to do a body search, and if they find anything, they'll shoot us. There was a dead body to sh – to prove the point. And we didn't have anything, but a couple of people did, and they would throw the – the jewelry into the sewer rather than giving it to these people. Of the 63 of us who got there, we were separated into several groups. The group which my father and I – my mother and I stayed with were about 20 people. We were just taken to the other side of the square, is **Klauzál** square seven, a three story old building. Turned out that this building housed a – the remnants of a old age home, old age Jewish home, brought in, and the first two stories – floors, were quite chock full of

people, but the third story was empty. So they gave us two rooms there, and it was dirty and no food. And I remember that after – the day after we arrived, my father, who was always enterprising, he was looking around and he found a piece of bread, which must have been six months old. And bugs were jumping all over the place out of it, but he said, that's okay, because we'll toast it and then we can eat it. That's precisely what we did, somehow we toasted it, bugs all got fried and then we ate a piece of it. That was the food for that particular day. People were not very choosy at that point. My father also went around to see what – what was the situation in the ghetto. The ghetto was – th-the area originally was an area for about 12,000 people. By the time we got there, they had about 40,000 people living there, and at its peak they had 70,000 people. So you can imagine that there were not – there was not much room around.

Q: Did you feel older than your age by that time, because of what you had been going through?

A: Absolutely yeah. I didn't feel like a kid at all. I mean, all these things age – age people pretty rapidly, and – and I remember that, you know, walking around with my mother on the – on the streets and seeing people in – in terrible physical and mental condition, and dirty and broken down, and it was – it was very depressive.

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Q: Did you feel any responsibility for your mother or your father, or did you feel that they were still taking care of you? Had the – was it still a parent-child relationship?

A: It was still a parent-child relationship, essentially, yes. And my father was not a part of – you know, he was a take charge person, he was not a person who would – who would break down. In – in fact, you know, he was my hero, because he was very brave man, as you will hear what happened there. What he did is he looked around for possibilities, and one possibility was to join the ghetto police. Now, the ghetto police in **Budapest** was a very different from the ghetto police in **Warsaw** or **Lódz** or any of these other places. This is now the middle of December in 1944. The Russians are completely surrounding this place. The ghetto police's mission is different. The ghetto police's mission, ridiculous as it may sound, was a defensive mission. They're supposed to persuade or – or – or fight off the Nazis coming into the ghetto. And the means for that was a nightstick and a – and a Swiss beret and a – a armband, a white armband which says ghetto police in three different languages; Hungarian, German and Russian **[indecipherable]** languages. And he had an **I.D.** card saying he was ghetto police. Well, one of his lucky strokes was that he found, in the basement of the building where we stayed, a hardhat. These – you know, what – what the –

Q: Construction workers?

A: Construction workers wear. Actually, the firefighters. And he always wo-wore that. That saved his life more than once. And the reason why he want to – or wanted to join the ghetto police force was that the ghetto police had double rations, and he wanted to bring the ration home. The policeman's life were very difficult. They were on patrol 12 - 14 hours a day. And as I said, their mission was – their main mission was to try to fight off the Nazis. Well, you don't fight off people with machine guns when they come in, and of course, they couldn't. Many of them died because of that. They tried to be polite to the Nazis, who simply let a – a slug of – a slug into them. There – a few days after we moved in, at night, we heard this tremendous noise and a huge crash. We found out that the shell, an artillery shell was shot into the ghetto. We don't know who shot it, but it landed in the next room from where we were, and the people who were there, died. And it was a wall away from where we were, where my father, mother and I were. I got hysterical and I said, I'm not staying up here, and my mother and I and **C**otto(ph), who was with us, the – the young lady who we met in **C**hango(ph), the three of us moved down to the basement. The basement was very deep. It used to be the shop of wood maker and it was covered with wood saw, and we just slept there. They had a couple of workbenches there and I never moved out of that place after that happened. I never

needed to move out because in about two days, the – which was Christmas day, the siege of **Budapest** began, and everybody moved on. The food supply was catastrophic. We had people who were old – and I mean old – battle hardened Hungarian Jewish slave laborers, the remnants of the people who were taken out in 1941. About a half a dozen of them ended up in our building. A number of them were very religious Jews, and they were Hassids and they were praying all day long. A number of them were not too religious, but none of them were willing to risk their lives at that point to bring food. There were food available about a block or a block and a half from where we lived, but somebody had to go there and get it. My father always volunteered, but he was not enough just by himself, and a few people went and some got hurt. And so our food supply, because of this, was very precarious. People knew that the war couldn't la – end up – I mean, how long could you live like this? There was no water, there was no electricity, gas, nothing. What we had was about 200 people in a small basement, which had no electricity, with a couple of slit windows eight feet high or nine feet high, and a couple of cans of floor wax. I remember that I contributed one of my shoelaces as wicks and we put – put it in the can and that was the – the light which 200 people had. My father – I haven't s – you know, I – after the siege begun, my father was mostly out, he – he didn't come home very often. One time I remember when he came in, he came in

only for – for a few minutes. He came in with the good news that he found his own parents in the ghetto, and his parents were in reasonably good shape.

Q: What were the sanitary conditions like in the basement in the ghetto?

A: Well, the sanitary conditions were – were horrible. What they had to do was to dig a – a latrine in the middle of the room. And they had some old bed sheets, and they got a couple of pieces of wood and you know, you sort of leaned against it when you had to do your thing. But the stench was unbearable. And then, because we were very close together, people started to have lice, and because we were close proximity, everybody got it. And the way we – we lived there, we – we raided the bil – the upper part of the building and got the – the doors out and put the doors down and the people essentially slept on the doors. We still had my father's overcoat, who would have really needed it in his forays in – outside, but he didn't have it because we were using it.

Q: How did you keep yourself clean?

A: We didn't, we couldn't. There was some little water, but it was negligible, and most people just gave up on it. And you know, for the last two weeks, two or three weeks, it was just nominal washing. Some people tried to do it. Interestingly enough, the – the more well educated were the ones who sort of gave up; the least well educated ones, who tried to keep their – their cleanliness. And it was a – it was

an interesting Darwinian selection. One of the things which happened is that old people died. They starved to death and we found them in the morning. And in a lull of fighting, a few men volunteered to bring them out of the building, and threw them on a pile of dead bodies which were piling up in the middle of the square. I went –

Q: Was it – was it easier for you by then to see dead bodies, since you had seen so much?

A: No, it wasn't easier. I think it – it – it – it never was – was easier for me. I – I knew that those people were alive a day before, and I knew them, I spoke to them, some of them. I could never take this for granted. And I remember once when I – when the lull in the fighting sort of persisted for an hour, I came out and I looked out and I saw this – this hill of bodies. And I knew that if something will not happen very soon, we would all e-end up there. I did not – did not think that any one of us would survive. And then January came, and we were all lethargic, we were sort of sitting there, weak. And tha – at that point there was very few who had any spark left. And on the fourth of January, a group of about 30 or 35 young ladies, young women were brought in. Turned out that they were from **Wallenberg's** houses. **Wallenberg** was very concerned that he could not really protect people any more at

that point, and he decided that many of the people who were still alive there – his houses were raided by the Nazis – he decided –

Q: What di – what did you – what had you heard about **Raoul Wallenberg** previous to this date?

A: Very little. This was the first time that I heard of his name, from these people who came from his house. I-I – most of the things which I knew about him, I learned after the World War. I knew that **Raoul Wallenberg** was trying to save people, and it wasn't just **Wallenberg** incidentally, but other people in organizations. We knew about the Swedes, we knew about the Swiss. We had, for example what they call **schutz** passes, safe passages. The – they had forgeries by the hundreds of thousands. Everybody had a couple of them in the pockets. We didn't know whether they were real or forged. At that point, sometimes it helped, sometimes it didn't.

Q: Did your family have any **schutz** passes?

A: Yeah, we had – we had **schutz** passes. My mother had them, I had, my father had.

Q: How – how did they get them?

A: I – I guess at that point, they were given. They were given away by Jewish organizations. I sa – I'm sad to say that some of the – the Jews did not give them

away for nothing, they – they made money on it. We were – we didn't have very much money, we never had Swedish passports, which was expensive. So we had the Swiss, which was cheap, or nothing. But it wasn't – it really didn't matter most of the time. I mean, most of the Nazis really didn't look at the paper, they – they threw away. But sometimes you never knew whether it had or not. So – for some people it had sometimes.

Q: Did you ever have to show yours?

A: We never had to show ours. We had it in our pocket, but we never had to show ours.

Q: Did your parents try to get into one of those safe houses?

A: No. As I mentioned to you, our – our – our story was that my f – my mother and I stayed in the – in the re – in the yellow star house until we went into hiding. And the only people who went into the safe houses were my grandparents – my – my grandmother actually, and my grandmother's sisters who, through the good offices of **Raoul Wallenberg** were able to –

Q: I meant, did they try to get into any of the safe houses.

A: No, they did not, no. Not that I know of. Remember, there was very little communication between people at this point, there were no telephones. Each house, each yellow star house was sort of an island. We did not know what happened to

fair – friends, relatives, anybody. And we did not know what was going on in the outside world. So at this point, this was the first time we knew about, or I f-found out about safe houses. I found out that these safe houses were no longer safe, and these people were brought in. They were better fed than we were, but they were very frightened. And we squeezed them in as everybody – at that point it was not that much of a squeeze because most of the older people died already. So this was the case. Tenth of January rolled around, and we were even weaker. A young **SS** soldier came down. He was surveying the building. He told us that the whole ghetto is mined, that we will not survive, and just forget it. They will not allow the Jews to survive. The Russians were very close, but before the Russians would get there, they would blow them up – blow the ghetto up. Turns out that – that the real plan was even more sinister. I do not know whether the – this – this was really a fake story or not.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Interview with George Pick
November 13, 1997

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **George Pick**. This is tape number three, side **A**.

A: The – the real plan was more sinister than the one which the soldier disclosed to us, namely that they would blow up the ghetto. The real plan was to massacre us on – for the 16th of January, there was a massacre in plan, 500 **SS**, a couple of hundred Hungarian police. The number of Hungarian Nazis would come in with submachine guns, and would line us up essentially, and – and mow us down. It turned – turned out that fortunately, **Wallenberg** found out about it on the 15th, and he sent a message to the **SS** general. His name was **Schmidhuber**, that if this happens, he would personally guarantee that **Schmidhuber** would be hung. Apparently **Schmidhuber** was a middle-aged man and he was now concerned about his own welfare. And he called – called this action off. That obviously saved the people, my life, my father's, mother's, my relatives and the 7,000 people who were still alive in the ghetto. This was on the 15th - 16th. There was one little girl in our building, her name was **Alice**. She was about eight years old, and she was a weak little kid. She was not very alive. She had a mother, and a grandmother. The mother was diabetic, and the grandmother was also. And she came sometimes to play with me, but I didn't like her that much. This day, on the 17th, she came not just to my mother, but

to everybody to beg for some food for her mother, who – who was in a diabetic shock. We had very little, namely and specifically, we had about a quarter of a pound of sugar. As I mentioned earlier, when we left our house, our home, the Jewish re – yellow star home to go into hiding, my mother took very little food with us. This food was shepherded along since November, now it's January. The la – the – the – a month of food which is left in that little bag is fa – is a half a pound of sugar. My mother kept it for me because she felt that maybe a few sugar cubes would save my life if – if it all comes down to that. So my mother refused to give **Alice** any food. This was the 17th. On the 18th of January in the morning – on the evening of the 17, my father came home and he decided to stay home. On the 18th there was a strange quiet. We didn't know what happened. It wasn't as quiet for – for weeks. I mean, this was a 24 hour a day artillery duel and bombing raid and we didn't know how much was left over of that city. And all of a sudden it was – was strange. So somebody climbed up to that slit window, about nine feet about the – the floor of the basement and saw some strange boots. They were not Nazi boots, they were Russian boots, and we were liberated. There was no elation. We vid – we really even didn't say anything to each other. It was fear that the Nazis would come back. Was indecision what to do next. The one thing we found out is that **Alice's** mother and grandmother were both dead, and my mother felt terribly guilty for the

next 47 years of her life. Nobody could tell her that she was saving the food to her son, that was a choice between somebody whom she didn't know, and her own son, and there was really no choice in the matter. She felt still guilty til the day – day of her death. I remember that some of the younger people evaporated first. They didn't ask, they didn't say anything. We didn't know what happened to the people whom we knew. My father and mother decided that, around noontime, that it's time for us to leave. Both my mother and father were so weak that the little suitcase which we had, which contained a half a pound of sugar and the family's pictures, they couldn't carry. I was the one who carried them, I was the – the strongest one. My father, who was 43 years old, looked like 70. And in his two or three weeks of patrol, he lost three of his partners, and he was more dead than alive. And then he – we started to walk out of the ghetto, that was not – not an easy walk. There were very few walkways there, half of the buildings were on the street. We heard the shrapnel zipping and making this awful noise above our heads. The artillery fire was going on, the – the siege of **Budapest** was still going on. It took us three hours to get home, and we decided, like homing pigeons, to go back to our home from which we were thrown out by the Nazis in June of 1944. We went back, it took us three hours, two and a half miles. We saw, in that journey, many dead bodies, many dead horses, and one live Russian. Which was almost ludicrous because this man

was singing. He was singing, he wa – must have been drunk, but he – he had a happy face, he was smiling and singing. And we looked at him as if he were crazy, instead of the world. Maybe he was the ones – the only sane people in that – person in that whole – whole mad, maddening scene. And as we were walking, these shrapnels were hitting buildings, and whole walls came down, tumbling in front of us. I mean, we were in mortal danger, we – we were crazy to walk there, but we did. And we walked through the city park, and we were held up by a small group of Russians, who wanted us to, for all other things, break up the ice on the sidewalk. I mean, breaking up the ice, and he gave us these ice picks to do it. My father couldn't lift it, you know, and he finally said well, forget it, and they gave us a loaf of bread. That was the first loaf of bread we have seen for more than a month. It was – was a square loaf of bread, I remember. And they just let us go. And we stumbled home, and it was maybe four, five in the afternoon by the time we got there. And the man whom we met first was Mr. **Dudek**(ph). Mr. **Dudek**(ph) was the man who was giving my father the paper under which he was able to work for years, and who also hid a large suitcase full of food, which we left with him in June, and which he gave back to us. I remember the suitcase was a green suitcase, it was a canvas, but it was full of canned food. He didn't take any. But the rest of the people who lived there were rather frightened. They looked at us as if we were ghosts. Not

just because of our physical appearance, but because of their bad conscious. Here these Jews came back. Now what will happen? There were – we knew about those extreme Nazis, Mr. **Drexler**(ph), who was – who was boasting about his adventures with the Hassidic Jews whose – whose beard he cut off and whose stomach he filled with – with pork. And some others, who were no less guilty. They thought they will – that we were going to denounce them to the Russians. We were too tired, too sick to – too nothing to – to do anything. The miracle which happened to us was that a few hours later my – my maternal grandmother came home. Turned out that she was in the ghetto. And revenge was the furthest from our minds. My grandmother was born in what is now **Slovakia**, so she spoke the language. Russian troops came down, everybody was frightened of them. We found out that they came a few days earlier, raped a few women. But my grandmother spoke their language and they were very, very friendly. And I remember that Mr. **Dudek**(ph) made room for us, and on the evening of the 18th of January, we s – we went to sleep in another basement, in another part of town, and the siege of **Budapest** was still on. In fact, it was still on for more than a month, because **Buda** was still defended by the Nazis for a month after **Pest** was liberated. The life came back slowly. The first thing we tried to do is to get some food somewhere. My father found a rucksack somewhere and went out and scrounged for frozen potatoes, whatever. We had this suitcase full

of food, which helped a great deal for the next few weeks. But of course it doesn't – you know, I mean, we were – my father was like 90 pounds, my mother was like that too and my grandmother too, and so we really needed to eat something. There was very little food. There were no utilities. Water came about because we were the fru – we had the ice, you know, in the – in the yard and we cut it up and boiled it – boiled it with water, or whatever.

Q: What was your physical condition like?

A: My physical condition was the best of the three of us, cause if there was food, I ate it. I was weak, but maybe not as weak as my mother and father. And I probably bounced back in a couple of weeks. We lived in the basement there, and we were trying to find some other arrangements. As the end of February rolled around and **Buda** was liberated, people were free to move back up. Our old apartment was occupied; they gave it to another family. But the apartment next door, which was the apartment of the **Surka's**(ph), the man who was a professional soldier and whose two daughters I used to play with, they went to the west, they left, and their apartment was empty. So Mr. **Dudek**(ph), the super, suggested that we would go and occupy that place. At that point it was like catcher's catch can. A number of apartments were also burned out by shells. That particular apartment was in fairly good shape, so we went up and we occupied it. Many months later, the **Surkas**

came back. There was a law by that time that if somebody occupied an apartment for more than a certain number of months, they were the owners of it. So the **Surkas**(ph) couldn't have a claim. They were a sad lot when they came back and I felt very sorry. The yo – the older daughter died. They went to the west. The father was a soldier, they got liberated and they came back, and then they disappeared. I don't know whether they left **Hungary** or not, but at that time – this was in May or June of 1945, and that was the last time I saw them. Our next door neighbors who lived in number five, they stayed and – and most of the neighbors who – who – whom we knew before the war, stayed there. There were some new neighbors, some people left, but all in all, we had about 20 apartments in this apartment house, about 15 of them were familiar faces. So what happened next? In March, the schools opened, and my mother and father and I decided that I'm going to go to the Jewish high school. It opened in the – what used to be the rabbinic seminary, the old building which was in **Aboni**(ph) Street was not given back at that point. And people somehow, and I don't know how, they got the news that it – school's garin – going to be open, life is going to start again. In the beginning, in March, there were no streetcars, so it was like an hour and a half walk each way. My mother –

Q: Was the school in – in **Pest**?

A: In **Pest**. In the middle of **Pest**. We lived in **Zugló**, which is sort of outside. Say was about a good three miles, three and a half miles from where the school was. So every morning we got up fairly early, and my mother and I – my mother took my hand and we walked to the school. And every – and then she waited for me in front, and then when it – school was ended, she took me back, we had the same walk. And my mother became such a familiar face that the – the teachers all knew her and they invited her and then sort of she said – there were some mothers, not all of them were like that. But some of the mothers whose sons were all – whose – this was a Jewish gymnasium for boys, boys' gymnasium. We had a girls' gymnasium also, but this was the boys' gymnasium. And so we started out fairly large, we had about 72 students in my class, two **[indecipherable]** classes. I was happy to see some friendly fa – and – faces from the elementary school. But we found out, very sadly, that the – the orphans did not survive. What happened to the orphans, one day they – they raided this orphanage and took out those orphans who were my classmates, 10 of them, with the teacher and took them to the **Danube** and they shot them. So they didn't – they didn't survive. But many of our classmates who were in elementary school did, and – and we saw them – I saw them in the gymnasium. It was very primitive in the beginning, we didn't have anything, it was just an empty school building. And the educ – and th – and many of the teachers didn't come back

from deportation, or from school yet. They sort of trickled back throughout that – from March to June. That was a very truncated year. It was supposed to start, of course, in September of ’44, end in June of ’45. Well, it never started, but it ended in June of ’45 anyway. And by then, the streetcars started to run, and by then life started to trickle back. We got a telegram in early June, I believe, from **America**, from the **United States**, from my uncle, the one who wanted to adopt me, telling us that they found us through the Red Cross somehow, and that they’ll happy that we are survive – that we survived, and th-that he and his wife had a son who was born in 1944, and they are fine and happy and we should write to them, and we did. And we started corresponding and this – they sen – they said they would send us papers. But my father decided against it. He felt that **Hungary** is going to be a good country now. And indeed, after the war there were some possibilities. My father restarted his business. It looked like there was going to be a democracy. People were – were having some hope. Many of the surviving Jews decided to join the communist party, my father and mother joined the social democrats. And some of the people were out for revenge. Many of them decided to join the political police and they were after the Nazis. **Kormus**(ph), for example survived, became a head of a people’s court, and as such, his mission was to put away as many Nazis as possible. And he accomplished it. My father was not that kind, and my mother was

neither, and we sort of tried to reconstruct whatever we could. We looked around the neighborhood, we found that some of our furniture was not do – too far from where it originated from, and we got it back from the neighbors. And we just tried to rebuild our lives, somehow.

Q: By that time, when you had gotten your strength back and had food and so forth and school had started, by then did you feel free, and feel liberated?

A: In a sense, yes. I think it took me a long time to really feel liberated. Probably 1946. I remember 1945, and I remember the first of May of 1945, which was a huge demonstration by the social democrats and the communists. And I remember the struggle, the political struggles.

Q: You – you mean a May Day celebration?

A: May Day celebration and the political struggles for power. I now also knew that most of the communist leaders who came back from **Moscow** were Jewish. **Rocco Shagerra**(ph), **Farkosh**(ph). And most of the Jews were not unsympathetic. Some of them were. Obviously the – the ones who were rich before, saw that the communists are not going to retain them as – as capitalists again. But my family was never really rich. My father was a – an engineer, he figured he would be able to do business, he would be able to find a job, and we were not very worried. In fact, in 1945, **Dudek**(ph) – my father was able to reward **Dudek**(ph) and **Dudek**(ph) not

only saved some of our food, but he also saved some of my father's material, you know, ma – business, and so my father gave him half of it, and they started out a business, a little business right in the building. **Dudek**(ph) was not a good businessman, so he – he didn't do very well, but my father was, and – and he started to deal with the same people he dealt with du – before the war. And it was a good time. I mean, inflation was there for sure, but there were possibilities. And these possibilities ended in 1947. What were the possibilities? Well, one was, you know, we were Jewish and the Joint from the **United States** had sent food and things, clothing. I remember in 19 – I believe it was the summer of '46, and I went to a camp which was run by the Joint and Zionists. And I was not a Zionist myself. We had a lot of Zionists in our – in our school, and many of the teachers were Zionists, and they had socialist Zionists, such as the **Hashomer Hatzair**, and then they had Orthodox. And one of the things which bothered me is that there was some animosity and definite animosity between both the teachers and the students who were of various persuasions. I remember a particular teacher who didn't like Orthodox Jews and who hit them, hit their heads, to hit their hats off and – and things like that, and I could never understand it. After '44, how could a Jew hit another Jew because the Jew wears a hat? And there were some very passionate discussions about, you know, **Hashomer Hatzair** and **Irgun** and all these others.

And **Betar** and – and whoever else. And some people who were orphans – many of my students – fellow students were orphans, moved into these Zionist camps, these little – they had houses. And they lived like – like – they were told that they were like adults, I mean, 13 - 14 year old kids, they were adults, they could do anything they wanted to. And I was fortunate enough to have my parents, and in a sense I was a little bit jealous that they could do anything and I wasn't. I was still a son, and I was still a child. And despite '44, you know, I – in a sense I reverted back to childhood. I couldn't accompli – completely in a hundred percent, but – but largely, and I was expected to. And I was expected to forget about all those things. And it been – and it had been bothering me for a long time, you know, what do you remember, how could you remember, you were too young. And the authenticity of these remembrances were always questioned, not by me, but by others. But life went on and we were told, you know, that we shouldn't dwell on the Holocaust, we shouldn't dwell on this. We shouldn't –

Q: When you say we were told, you mean your parents told you that, or other people told you?

A: My parents told me, but mostly other people, and the – and th – and the newspapers, and the – an-and the school, you know, now you have to learn, now you are back to school. Now you worry about your homework, now you worry

about your exams. Now you do things. You know, we joined first the Boy Scouts, and then when the Boy Scouts were disbanded, the Young Pioneers. And there was always something to do. There was some excitement too, I mean, how did we – how did we build – rebuild our lives? What do we – what did we do? How did we do it? And as I mentioned, I was taken to one of these camps, Zionist camps, I was – we had four languages in the same time, and I was never a good linguistic expert. We had Hebrew, Latin, English, and for a while German, but then that was dropped. But three languages were more than enough for me, and I was not very good in either of those. And the only way I could not flunk Hebrew is that the – I promised my Hebrew teacher that I was going to go to a Zionist camp. And they took me and I was unhappy and I s – I escaped. I escaped after about a week. Went home, my father was very upset with me. He felt that I was just a coward, that I just couldn't do it. I disagreed with him. But these things were not for me, I was – I was too much of a mother's boy still, and I was still with my mother. I was only 12 years old, I mean, it's not that I was – and this camp was not exactly what you would call a camp here, it was hard. And we didn't get that much food, and the food was mostly split pea soup, which reminded me of the ghetto, which was the only food there. But I had friends, and I started to – to form relationships. But I didn't have too many friends of my own age. The building we le – lived in had a – a number of

young girls who were older than I was. I was always attracted to young girls, and I was – these young girls were 16 - 17 - 18. And I was more mature than my age and I started to have – sort of strike up conversations with them. And I thought that I was enough of an intellectual challenge to – to talk to, to be talked to. And our next door neighbor was a – her name was **Miriam**. She was not Jewish, she was 16 and she was telling me about the facts of life, and there was another girl downstairs who was – she was – her – her name was **Maurika**(ph) and she was 18 and she was a very studious girl and we had nice, interesting conversation about – conversations about literature and art and music and things like that. Of course, they all had their boyfriends, but I sort of fancied myself as being somehow a surroga – surrogate boyfriend and – and was there. And so my – my – my life, my social life sort of started to evolve among these people, my neighbors. And many of my friends, too. And then I got involved in the Young Pioneers, and some other various organizations. There was one organization, Young Workers. They were usually three, four years older than I was, and they were not Jewish. And once I got into a – a real fight with them, and they told me that I was just a dirty little Jew, and they chased me out and chased me to – through the streets. And I – sort of it occurred to me that, my God, you know, these people are the same. They are not – they are not different any more. They are just the same. They are still calling me dirty Jew two

years after the war, and they are still chasing me down the street. And then I had some doubts whether it was a good idea to stay in – in **Hungary**. But these doubts were not, at this point were not very bad and very pronounced. This was 1947. We had a – an election and the communists came in distant fourth. We still had a democratic government.

Q: Did you have a Bar Mitzvah?

A: I had a Bar Mitzvah. My Bar Mitzvah was an interesting one. It – in **Budapest** there were two orphanages, a girl orphanage and a boy orphanage. The girl or- orphanage was very close to where we lived, so – and they had, of course, a shul. And Rabbi **Schwartz** was the rabbi there, and he instructed me. In 1947, I had the Bar Mitzvah there. And my mother decided that I would have a Bar Mitzvah lunch, and well, what can you do with a lu – for a lunch, you know? I invited the following people; there were a couple of communist kids in school, they were about three years older than I was, but they were friends. And there was a fellow who was a friend of mine who was sort of a literary guy. And then a few friends, contemporaries. And I borrowed two girls from the orphanage, they came also. And we had a very nice lunch, and the adults were in the other room. That was my Bar Mitzvah. And I remember, I got a book, which I still have. It's in Hungarian, of course. It's about Jewish Middle Ages. It's about **Spain**, the Spanish Jewish Middle

Ages. And it was by **Roth**, Sir ce – Sir **Cecile Roth**, famous historian. I didn't read the book, it was way above my head at that time, but for some reason or another, I – I got it – my mother got it out of **Hungary**, and I found it many years later and I read it with much interest, and I still have it. My Bar Mitzvah present. And then a stupid thing happened. A friend of mine was tackling me in school, right after my Bar Mitzvah and pushing me back and my shin broke. And so, I missed about two weeks or three weeks of class. I was in a cast for six weeks. And after the cast my father and mother decided that I should go to a camp, a real camp. And they send me to this camp, which was run by Jews. Was run by a Olympic – Jewish Olympic wrestling champion by the name of **Karpathi**(ph), and it was called a **Karpathi**(ph) camp, it was a sports camp. And most of the kids were Jewish and I had a great time there. And it was three weeks. I didn't escape there – from there. I learned how to bike again, because for some reason I forgot, and how to swim and how to do all those things; how to dance. There was a girl there who was 18 years old and who was really the owner. **Karpathi**(ph) was sort of the manager. **Kerienyi**(ph), who was another wrestler, was the owner. And **Judith** was her – his daughter, and she was up there, sort of helping out with the kids. And I got very, very friendly with her, and we talked, and she was engaged to another wrestler, to be married. And she figures in my later life, that's why I'm telling you this. Anyway, **Judith** and I

became friends and even after the camp I saw her many times and then we lost in touch maybe a half a year or so later. Five years passed by, and I met her again. And I'm going to cut this story, because there will be some significance at that point. But now we are still in 1947 – 1947 and 1948. I had a happy education, particularly in one particular subject, which was history. My homeroom teacher and my history teacher was one and the same, he was a young ma-man named **Paul Poch**(ph). He turned out to be one of the great historians of **Hungary**, and he was very young man and he – one of his claim to fame was that he was also the director of the statistical survey run by the Joint, of the **[indecipherable]** remnants. And you find a copy of the book in our library. What they did is 400 people, in 1945, in August of '45, went through every building of **Budapest** and found the **[indecipherable]** remnants of – of Jews in **Budapest**. Found 68,000 of them. There were – there were probably more, but many of them did not want to be registered. My family and I were – my family's name and my name were – are in the book. **Poch**(ph) was the one who did it. Besides that, he was a brilliant teacher and he was my homeroom teacher for four years, and I wanted to be a historian. **Poch**(ph) left the school because he became a professor, a full professor at age 28 in the University of **Budapest** in the – the economic university of **Budapest**. A few years later he became the – the dean, and a few years after that he became director. Then

he became a absolute world class historian. The one thing which he did however, is that he completely changed his point of view, he became a Marxist economic historian. And he wa – he became one of their authority. And – but he was a humane person, and one of the interesting part was that one of the classes he taught in the Jewish high school, who graduated in 1948 - '49, of that class, three men went to his – his faculty. They became very famous historians. One of them became the president of the Academy of Sciences, his name is **Ivan Berendt**. He came to this country, he's now a professor of history in **UCLA**, and **Poch**(ph) helped him and helped others. Helped one man by the name of **Rankey**(ph), who became a – a – an authority on Hungarian Holocaust.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **George Pick**. This is tape number three, side **B**.

A: I was saying that **Rankey**(ph) was not a communist. He was – he became a Holocaust expert, historian. And because of that his – his career during the communist ye-years was really jeopardized. **Poch**(ph) helped him a great deal, and he helped others. So although **Poch** became a communist, he was still a – a great human being and helped a great deal of – great many men and people in their – in

their career. So I must say that I am personally very thankful to him and grateful, because for one, he taught me the love of history, which is – which I wanted to become my – my profession. Thankfully which did not become my profession, but a lifetime hobby. 1948, **Poch**(ph) leaves and a number of other teachers leave the school. Passover, **Pesach**, nine four – 1948. We say goodbye to many of our friends who went to a camp, Zionist camp. After **Pesach**, our s – our class of 38 became class of 13. The rest of the people left. We found that they went through the **Bricha lea**(ph) to **Israel**. Many of them are still there. And we stayed – I wasn't a Zionist – with this small, shrinking class. They combined the other class with us, which also shrunk, and of the 72 people, we had now a class of roughly 30, a combined class of 30. We had other teachers. Some teachers left with the **Bricha**, some teachers stayed. I became very interested in acting. We had a little acting group in our school. I became interested. We had put on full three act plays. My father became interested in this school. He wanted to help the school. He found out that the school, of course, lost most of its labs, and he wanted to raise money, so he figured a – a way to ask famous performers to come to the school for nothing, and have fundraisings. And he became involved in many of these kinds of fundraisings. And you would not believe the most famous singers came to sing; Jews and non-Jews alike, and they are always sold out performances, and my father was really a great

enterprise **[indecipherable]** and – and got enough money to rebuild the physics and biological libr – labs. And in 1950 or ’51, they dedicated a greenhouse on the top of the building which my father raised money for. And so my father became the president, or the **P.T.** and then my mother was very involved and I became involved with the – on a student level. And it was from ’48 to ’50 - ’52. They were – despite of the fact that – that there were – th-there were terrors, and – and – and worsening political situation and crisis, there was an island there. The school became a – a separate island, where we had a dicono – dichotomy where we shared both what we needed to share, such as you know, what you needed to talk about, you know, the great communist camp, and the **[indecipherable]** the imperialist camp and all this phraseology, which we had to also say, but then we talked about what was the Voice of **America** saying, you know? So it was a really funny, ironic situation. The same people who were parroting the phraseology were talking about the Voice of **America**. And the teachers who had to parrot the phraseology also, Marxist phraseology, which they didn’t believe in, who were Hebrew teachers before he beca – they became Marxist, quote unquote, teachers, who were teaching Yiddish instead of Russian, which they ended up teaching for a while, you know? These teachers knew that this is a big joke, that nobody believes in this, but we pretended that something had to be done, and – and we did. Except for –

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November 13, 1997

Q: Di-Did the tightening of the government, or what you had to do, did that bring back any memories of the war?

A: Well, it certainly did. Of course, the – the tightening of the government, and the – the loss of rights brought back a lot of memories. And people who were deported during the Holocaust, were deported again. This time not because they were Jewish, but because they were capitalists, and capitalists couldn't live in **Budapest**, so they took the – took away their – their homes and they deported them to the countryside.

Q: Did that make you more nervous?

A: It absolutely did, but there was no choice in the matter now, of course, that the Iron Curtain was shut. In 1948, after the **Bricha**, and very shortly thereafter when the communists took power, things were over. And by then, of course, those of us who recognized too late, and too belatedly that we were pretty stupid again, we were there. So what could you do, you know? Well, what you could do was what we did, which is to go along outwardly, and go to the May celebrations and the November celebrations, and at the same time talk about **BBC** and Radio Free **Europe** and trying to keep each other in – in a Jewish era. We were – we were still studying – not legally at this point – Jewish things, Jewish history.

Q: Did you feel more Jewish now than you had many years ago?

A: Absolutely. In the next – in the first two years after the war, Jewish gymnasium meant that we were not studying, we were – we do not have Saturday classes, but instead we had to go to the synagogue. So we did. That wasn't a pleasant thing for me, I was never a synagogue goer. But it made me want to know more Jewish history. It made me much more of a conscious Jew. And after the communist takeover, the synagogue was closed, we couldn't – the – the – the synagogue of the – the gymnasium was closed, it was no longer there. So – but – but we still had some spark, and – and many times the spark was nothing more than, I know you are Jewish and you know that I am Jewish, and you can trust me. And that was not always the case, unfortunately, although I think we always knew whom we could trust, within the school. We knew that there were a few people who – who we could not, including teachers. And this came to a head in 1950. In 1950, there was a letter, which was drafted by a teacher and a student, which was circulated in the school, demanding of the government of nationalizing our school. And they tried to intimidate the students and the teachers. And it came to a head because there was a conference, a te – a teacher-student-parent conference. And it was supposed to be a secret letter, but somebody told that – the principal of what was going on. And this – all hell broke loose. And I was there and I remember. There was a parent of a classmate of mine whose – who told the students and the teacher, who did not want

to identify himself, that they are cowards, they are damn cowards, and they are traitors. And it was really embarrassing because this was a communist inspired thing, you know. And this was toward the end of the school year, and in the next school year, we had from 200 students, to 45, including the teacher who was – who – whom we found out was a – was a defector. And he left, he became a principal somewhere else, and all these students. But I stayed, and 45 of us stayed. Our class of 30 became a class of 13. This was our sixth grade, it was junior high school. And we stayed, and we became more Jewish, although outwardly we could do less. We couldn't talk about Jewish history. We couldn't talk about Jewish things. But we could talk about books written by **Stefan Zweig** and **Berfer**(ph). And we could sabotage learning Russian, for example. An ex-rabbi was teaching us Russian, who did not know from Russian from a hole in the head. I mean, he was always a – a lesson ahead of us, but that was it. And – and we took this as a joke, inside. But we realized more and more, and more and more keenly that this island for us, is going to come to an end. And then what? And that end came in 1952, when I graduated. Now one of the motivations of the – all of my classmates who left, was that nobody's going to be accepted in a university from a parochial school such as the Jewish gymnasium. That was the motivation why they left. It turned out very ironically, that out of the two – four – 13 of us who graduated, 11 of us were

accepted. Because the regime in 1952 wanted to show the world that there was such a thing as religious freedom. Much less of the people who left were accepted, percentage-wise. The only two who were not, were bad students, period, who didn't even want to go to school. I was accepted. And here came the big shock. The big culture shock, because I was trusting to the university, the technical university, **Budapest**, where we had a class of 1200 people, from 13 to 1200. And we had this huge theater and we were sitting there, you know, men and women. And I found myself in – very much in a minority. This was the year where it made a difference who's – who your parents were; if your parents were peasants or workers, you got accepted regardless of your qualifications. If your parents were businessmen, you wat – you were rejected. My father was in-between, and I sort of, because he was a – what they call an intellectual, or a professional, that was not well thought of, but it was better than a businessman for sure. My father wasn't a businessman by then, he worked for another company. And so in – I was able to slip in on this, but I found my colleagues to be very different from me. The chemistry worked there. Very quickly we found from each other – o-of each other, who were Jewish. Of the f – of the 1200, roughly about 150 of us were Jewish, which was a large percentage. And as I says, the magic of chemistry, I mean, we didn't know from **Adam**. We found us, each other and we drifted toward each other. The way the school were – was

divided up, we had subspecialties within mechanical engineering – this was only mechanical engineering. We had specialties on textile engineering, shipbuilding, whatever else. And in my subspecialty, which was naval archy – naval architecture, we had 30 people, I was the only Jew, and the rest of them were not. And we were sort of drifting in and out. I was – I was never really very friendly with these people because their culture, their – their interests were very different from me. I felt sorry for them because they were not really qualified and they were really struggling with the material. They didn't know elementary algebra when they had to learn calculus, and they really had a heck of a hard time, although the regime gave them all sorts of scholarships and stuff. I have to step back now because there is a – an important thing which happened in my life, right before graduation, personally. And that – what happened was that I fell in love, 18 years old. This was right before graduation in February of 1952. Fell in love with a young girl who didn't understand my – my feelings, and I was very brokenhearted when my feelings were not reciprocated. And I was so brokenhearted that I fell sick. They thought I had mononucleosis and other diseases and I was in the hospital for a month. And this was in February - March of '52, just before graduation. And my wa – mother and father were worried that I was going to se – lose that year. But my colleagues were very nice and they brought me up to date very f – very fast. Then April roll – rolled along, and walking

on the street, in a nice, bright, April afternoon, I met this girl who was very familiar. Made a long story short, it was the girl, **Judith Kerienyi**(ph), whom I met five years earlier in a camp. Then we started to talk, she was, at this point, just graduating from college. She became a singer, she never married. Didn't marry the – broke off with the fiancé, and she was single. I was 18, she was 22 - 23. And it was a romance, and it was maybe an antidote to the love, the unrequited love I had before. It became a very hot romance, not to my mother's liking and my father's liking, who felt that I should really learn and study. The way it went in our school system is that we finished the school early, in May, and then we had six weeks of real study, after which we had a five hour oral exam. And it was almost like a **PhD** thing. And the six weeks we supposed to cram in everything we need to know about the oral. And we had these little **[indecipherable]** things, they had hundreds of questions. We knew the questions, we just needed to learn the answers. Of course, that was the trick, you know, you can't learn eight years of answers in two months. You really had to learn some other things. But at that point, you know, the – the summer was full blown and – and I was too interested in – in – in everything, mostly **Judith**, and less interested in the study. But I studied a little. And – and it was just the hottest romance we had. It was sort of crazy. The – her parents worked, my parents worked, so both of our apartments were vacant during the day and we

took advantage of it. And it was my real – first real romance. I mean, I had some sex before, but they were occasional type things, mostly prostitutes. This was really a woman. I didn't know what – and she didn't know how to handle it either. Which was too bad because she was 22, I was 18. If I didn't know how to handle it, well, that was something, but she – she should have known better. Made a longer story short, she became pregnant, and of course, my father and I didn't see eye to eye through this. I wanted to marry her, of course, it was moral obligation. My fa – my mother told me the same. My father said absolutely not, I am – you are a minor. In – in **Hungary** you were a minor until 21, and I'm not giving your permission and that's that. Make the long story short, we didn't marry and she had an abortion. And there is a letter which I still possess, which my mother wrote to **Judith**, where it was a woman to woman letter; a very sad one, in fact. And saying that, you know, she understands the – the pain and the sorrow. But she has to understand that I am too young and I am just starting my – my schooling, and she should have known better. And that romance stayed with me for a long time. That was really a very potent one in many different respects, and I never forgot it. It was a happy ending, if you want, because she had an abortion, and then she got married and she has children. Nothing bad happened to her. But perhaps I am kidding myself, I don't know. And I went on to school, and I had this – and I had another girlfriend about a

year later, who was more to my level of interest maybe, and same age as I was. And the shock went on for four years, from 1952 to ’56. I had the same girlfriend this time, **Erica** was her name. And we had a tempestuous relationship. But there was a – there was something important which happened, not just with her but with my circle of – small circle of friends. We still kept going to – to – to operas. We went to theater. We kept a cultural core, which the country in itself did not, you know, they – they sort of sank into this **Bolshevik** slide. But we kept a western level of culture, and I think that kept our humanity, too, in a – in a great degree. Between 1952 and ’56, times were hard, and I was working very hard in – in school, trying to earn my college tuition, which I did. We were not rich, and I really needed to work. In the summertime, I did. I went to – this was not my choice, I had to do work once – one month every summer, work – we got paid – in industry. And one month every summer, we had to go to the – to the army. And I had a hard time in the army, I must tell you. Both – I had three summers which I had to go to the army, and all those three summers were very, very hard for me, I was not cut out to be a soldier. And that in is – in itself a story of itself, but I’m not going to go in there. Fifty-six came around. The winds of change started to be felt, and then tragedy struck. My father all of a sudden got sick and died. He got celebra – cerebral hemorrhage. He was a chain smoker, and finally got to him. This was at the end of March, right

during my period of exams, final exams. And I was very scared, and I didn't know how to handle it. I was 22. I had a ver – a very good friend, his name was **Dionege**(ph) **Brock**(ph), he was stud – he was studying to be a rabbi; in fact, he was already a – an ordained rabbi and I asked him what he thinks, what he thought. He knew **Erica** very well, he knew me very well. He was a very, very close friend. He sort of said look, I think you should pull together. You should have a better – a bigger family. You should really be not one – I mean you – my family, my real family was not very close knit, particularly after my father died. In fact, even in the last few years before my father died, my mother and father sort of drifted apart, and I drifted apart from my father. And I drifted – the only person I had close was my mother. I had a couple of cousins I wasn't that friendly with. My maternal grandmother died. My paternal grandparents still had this family gathering every Sunday, but after 18 I didn't want to go. I found them strange, I had nothing to say to them. So here, after my father died, I had literally very few people to go to. And I was scared, so **Erica's** family, she had a sister and mother, father; they were very nice people, I liked them, and I liked **Erica**. And – and essentially I felt that maybe this is the time when – when I should have my own, and then I engaged – I became engaged to her. And we had an engagement in August. And we were planning to get married after I graduated from school, which was at the fall of 1956. It was going to

be in October of ’56. And in fact, in October of ’56 – I just completed my last exam on the 22nd of October. The 23rd of October became a notable day, but for me the 22nd was the – the real clincher. There was a meeting late in the afternoon, right after my exam, where I went to, student meeting, which lasted until three o’clock in the morning, and which, at the end, we declared that **Hungary** must be an independent state and should declare neutrally – neutrality and the Russians, we demanded the Russians get out. And we agreed that on the 23rd in the morning, we would all come back to the university and we would have a – a demonstration. Came October 23rd, I went to the university, we waited until late afternoon, we finally got permission for the demonstration. I was there in **Parliament** Square, and then I went home and then the shooting war started. I went back to the university about a week later, and I participated in some of the – the skirmishes which had happened there. November second, the Russian tanks rumbled through our neighborhood.

Q: Wh-When you say you participated, what did that mean, in the skirmishes?

A: Meaning I was shooting guns at whoever was shooting guns at us. This was a shoot –

Q: And you – you – you – you were shooting guns after seeing – being much younger in a war where you saw other people being shot?

A: Remember, this is a revolution against the Russians now. I am now with the good guys. I am – I am fighting for Hungarian independence. I am just a graduate of a university. I feel that maybe we have a chance, although some people think it's ridiculous, and I find out a few days later that it is ridiculous, the world is not going to help us. Second of November came. The Russians came in. I felt that it was futile, and at that point I wanted to stay alive, I d – I didn't go out to shoot any more.

Q: Ho – and seeing the Russians coming in in their tanks, did that trigger any memories for you?

A: It did, it certainly did, th-the memory of that March Sunday, when the Germans – German tanks came in the very same route, toward the – the center of the city, and that – that memory also triggered that, you know, what is happening here is – is history repeating itself, or not. But there was not very much time for thinking here, because there was a war going on and for two weeks there was a – a real fighting. I mean, at that point we went – everybody from the building where we lived when down to the basement, just like we had in 1944, and '45. It was artillery duels. And by November, by the 20th of November, the inside of the downtown was completely demolished again. I mean, 10 years after the war, the downtown area looked just like it did in 1945. Twenty-second of November – oh, during this period of time, we

are listening to radio free **Europe** and a voice of **America**. And I was particularly appalled by the fact that I was sitting in **Elizabeth** Street, in a basement, while a bunch of people are already sending messages from **Austria** to their relatives, saying that they are already in **Austria** and they don't know whether they are going to **Australia** or **Canada** yet. And I'm sitting as – like a rat in a basement in **Budapest**. And I, just to mys – I am saying to myself, I mean, how many mistakes can I make? I mean, my mother and father made enough mistakes. I'm not going to make the same. So, on the spur of the moment, I called my fiancée and a friend, that in the next morning we are going to meet in **[indecipherable]** railroad station and then we'll see what happens. And I bicycled there, because there was nothing else. Said goodbye to my mother. The decision took all of a half an hour, and in the next morning we met at the railroad station. We had a vague plan, which is to go to a border town and then feel our way around. We never got there. After the – the – this is chaos now, there is no central government. The Russians are occupying part of the country, not all of it. There is still fighting going on in the countryside. Railroads have no schedule, government is nonexistent. People are doing their thing. Obviously a lot of them are already outside of the country. The train was completely packed, maybe a thousand people. And shortly after we started, we found out that most of the thousand people had the same idea, to go to the western

border and get out. We were told that it's dangerous to keep maps, so we throwed the maps away. I had a couple of things in my pocket, two overcoats and a few other things. Couple of pieces of jewelry sewn into my pocket and who knows who to bribe, how to do whatever is going to happen. We had no idea.

Q: What's it like to make decisions yourself? Previously, in the war, it was your parents who made the decisions.

A: Well, it – I was 22 years old and I felt that in the war I made a few decisions which saved my life, and I am not going to stay around. I knew that some people knew that I was participating in the fighting. I knew that the Russians are not going to be very merciful for those who were participating. I could end up in jail, or worse. So I didn't have much of a choice and I really wanted to leave. I – I thought this was the most psychologically opportune moment in the world for me. I had completed my undergraduate education, and here is an opportunity I would – would pay, you know, I would take whatever chances there was. To make the long story short, the train never reached the town where we went to. It stopped in a smaller town, some 20 – 25 miles from the border. We slept there, and the very next morning went to the station, we got into a cattle train. The cattle train stopped in the middle of the day, in the middle of nowhere, and then we walked for two days, and ended up at the border. And I didn't like the situation very much, because in the

border there was some fighting at night. So I told my fiancée and our – our friend to – we are moving back. We moved back to a small village. I met a – we met a fellow who told us that he would help us the very next morning, because he knew a way. And we also told him to go back to our parents and see if they would be able to come out. The next morning we went out bright, early morning, and he told us that between those two haystacks, if we stay between them it's okay. That haystack – beyond that haystack are the Russian, beyond that haystack are the Hungarian communists, but in-between is okay. And that's what we did, we went in between. The only problem was that right before no man's land, there was a quarter of a mile of completely cleared land, and behind that there were towers, watch towers.

Q: Do you think your experience during the war helped you get through this?

A: Probably. I do not know. At that point I was only thinking about the now and the then. Th-The moment. We knew that we had to go – go through. We knew that we also had an excellent chance of being shot in the back from the watchtowers. We also knew that in front of us, which used to be a minefield, the mines were removed a few months before, and we have no other barrier. And this was the chance. And I think there are some points in life when one does not think too much, and hesitate too much, because if one does, one gets paralyzed. So what I just did, I started to curse in Hungarian, started to yank my fiancée as fast as I could. We ran though this

part, and it took us probably all of two minutes, but it il – seemed like an hour. And then we were there, we were – we were in no-man's land, we saw the Austrian flags, and we were on the other side, and then in about five minutes later, the Austrian border patrol intercepted us. We didn't speak the language, but they didn't want. Turned out, when we ww-went to **Lutzmannsdorf**, which was the first little town, is that the night before, the border police all defected, and so nobody was up there, but I didn't know that. So my – my luck was still – still with me. And then the very next day, the Joint came to **Eisenstaedt**, which was the next largest city. They took us to **Linz**. It was already organized, all the hotels in **Linz**, which was **Hitler's** hometown, were reserved for the Jews, and that was an ironic twist of fate. It was **Wiesenthal** – I don't know if you know the name **Wiesenthal**, **Simon Wiesenthal**, who was in charge of that operation. We had hundreds of Hungarian Jews there. The non-Hungarian – Hungarian non-Jews were thrown into a camp, and we were there for three weeks. Meanwhile, the Joint fed us and paid our hotel room. There came recruiters from **Canada** and from the **United States**. When they found out that I was an engineer, young engineer, they said absolutely, you should come. When they found out that I had an uncle here, they said no problem at all. And three weeks later, on the 19th of December of 1956, our plane touched down in **Newark**, and we went to Camp **Kilmer**, and a day later I was in **New York City**.

Interview with George Pick
November 13, 1997

Q: How did you feel putting your foot down on American soil?

A: Well, it was unreal. We had a 30 hour flight. We stopped in **Reykjavik** – in **Reykjavik**, **Iceland**, we were in **Scotland**, we were in **Labrador**. Not the jet planes, th-they – they had no jet planes in '56. It was a – it was an exhaustive – exhausting trip because the night before we started, we already were going – we originally were going from **Linz** to **Salzburg**, and in **Salzburg** we didn't have a place, so they sent us back to **Linz**, and from **Linz** to **Muenchen**(ph). And so we were on a bus for 14 or 15 hours before we had the 30 hour flight. So I was sort of in no-man's land. There was one thing which happened a day before we left, which was very important. We visited **Mauthausen**. This was an inoculation against **Europe** and against any kind of – of – of wanting to go back to the old – to the old – to the old country.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Interview with George Pick
November 13, 1997

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **George Pick**. This is tape number four, side **A**.

A: Prior to leaving **Austria**, my mother and I were in almost daily telephone contact.

Q: Le – you were talking about maut – going to **Mauthausen** though.

A: I'm sorry. The day before we left for the **United States**, we decided my – my fiancée and my friend and I decided to inoculate ourselves against any kind of homesickness, so visited mau – we visited **Mauthausen**. **Mauthausen** is in a fantastic place, it's on the top of a hill. Beautiful view, and unspeakable horrors. In '56, **Mauthausen** was very different, I am sure, than what it is now. It was much closer to what it was in 1944, and we had a vivid sense of what had – what must have been. And – and it certainly recalled all the horrors which we read about and which we heard about from the surviving friends and relatives who came back and who – some of whom came back from **Mauthausen**. I have a number of uncles who were in **Mauthausen** and who came back. And so I could now put together the – the name and the place, and it certainly cured me for – for many, many years, for 38 years from – from any kind of homesickness. And then the next morning, as I mentioned, we were bound to go to – to **Salzburg** and then back and forth until we

got to the plane. Prior to leaving, finding ou – we only found out that we were coming to the **United States** about a week before we left. We did not know precisely what was going to happen, how long things would take. And shortly after we left **Hungary**, my mother and I, and my fiancée's parents were in daily telephone contact. The original plan was that her – her parents and my mother would essentially come to **Austria** and then we would meet there. The peasant who helped us over, indeed went to – to **Budapest** and he on – he also told them that they could come with him and he would help them. But they didn't want to take the chance. It started to be fairly late in December. My mother and a cousin of mine went down to **Szeged**, which is close to the Yugoslavian border. They tried it there, they couldn't do it, they were turned back. And I told my mother not to go anywhere, just stay in **Budapest** and see what happens and leave the country legally. I didn't want to wait for her because by then we had the papers and I didn't want to miss the opportunity to come to the **United States**. So, late at night on the 19th of December we touched down. On the 20th, I met my uncle, who was very strange, or somewhat strange, told me that you don't need those Jews. You come with me, I live in **New Jersey**, and I'll take care of you. I told him that, that's nice, but I came with my fiancée and I'm not going to let her just drift away. He reluctantly took her also with him, and us. We went to this **New Jersey** place, it's

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Wharton, **New Jersey**, it's a small town, small Hungarian town, sort of. Most of the Hungarians who live there, lived there since either the 20s or 30s, or after the war, which meant that most of them were Nazis. Now my uncle is a fisi – was a physician. I didn't know it then, but I found out very soon that he converted, and he wanted to keep his Jewish origins a deep, dark secret. This led to a fallout, and a very irreconcilable difference between him and me. Until I left **Hungary**, I went to say Kaddish for my father every day. When I came to this country, I couldn't. There was no Jewish synagogue in **Wharton**. My uncle arranged for me to have a job, mean – two – two weeks after I came, as well as my fiancée. She was a chemist, she spoke English, she got a fairly good job. I got a general helper's job in a small factory, not a very satisfactory job for an engineer, but that was what I cou-could have. What – and it went on for a couple of months, but what really broke things is that in March was my **Yahrzeit**, and my fiancée and I had decided to go to the next town, which had a little, small synagogue. And we – to say Kaddish. So I went to say Kaddish, and there we met a friend of my uncle's whom we – knew we were Jewish. And that friend told my uncle a couple days later that we saw **George** and his fiancée in a synagogue. You know, ho – what – what's going on? Well, my uncle was quite furious about this and told me that – why didn't I tell him this, he would have taken me a hundred miles somewhere, where nobody knew him. So it

was a big fallout. I wrote to my mother very angrily, and so angry that I forgot to put the address. And it – the letter was intercepted by the mailman, who was a Hungarian, who gave it to the Hungarian priest of the town, who opened the letter and in short order found out who the letter came from, and with e – much glee I am sure, gave it to my uncle, who almost killed me. And wrote a letter to my mother that I will end up in a gallows in this country and I will – and I am just a terrible person. My mother, who was absolutely petrified as to what will happen to me. Anyway, make the long story short on that, I was able to get a scholarship at **Temple** University to learn English, and in March of 1958, which was – '57 rather, sorry, three and a half months after I went to live with my uncle, I left. My fiancée stayed there. I went to vi – to **Philadelphia**, I stayed there for over a year. My fiancée and I sort of broke up at this point. She moved to **New York**, and later on she got married. My uncle and I broke up quite a bit, quite severely, and my mother left **Budapest** in August of 1957, with a visa to **Israel**. She never went to **Israel**, she stayed in **Italy**. My uncle, who was her brother, helped him – her a bit, however, in reality what he did is he told me that I have to help my mother. And I sent my uncle a certain amount of money every month so that he would send it to my mother. After **Temple**, I got a job as an engi – junior engineer at **Westinghouse**, and I was there for about four months, after which I got a scholarship at **Drexel** and

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I started to study engineering. And I did that until March of ’58, at which time I found out that my mother was going to come to the **United States** and she will be coming in the next six months. And my uncle very specifically told me that he was not going to help my mother come to the **United States**, or help her when she’s here. So I had no choice in the matter, I quit school. I went to **New York**. I was unemployed there for a little while, and then my friends have it – my friend’s help, I got a job. And with another interesting story, I met a Russian princess who helped me to get the job here in **Washington**. This Russian princess happened to be the cousin of the **Lazar**(ph). Her name was Princess **Trumbetskoy**(ph), and for some reason and another, hil – she liked me. And she called Cardinal **O’Boyle**, who was the chancellor of the Catholic University of **America** and told him that, here is this refugee boy, and that she would like to help him. And I got a interview, and I got a job as an instructor there. I also enrolled in graduate school there, I stayed there for seven years. I taught there mechanical engineering, a-and endi – ending up as an as-assistant professor and receiving my Master’s degree in mechanical engineering in 1962. In 1960, I met a young, Jewish girl, and we got married that summer. That marriage was a disaster and we divorced nine months later. Two months after I came to **Washington** in ’58, my mother arrived here. And I live with my mother from ’58 until ’64. And I worked in the university and my mother – most of the

time my mother didn't work, essentially. She found a little job to get a social security, finally. And the university was – the university experience was – was not as rewarding as I was hoping for, it – it's a small school. At that time Catholic University was a rather backwards school in terms of theology. They still didn't step out to the 15th century, and although they tolerated me as a Jew, they didn't tolerate me as a divorced Jew, and I got some flack and by the time I realized that that's not much of a future for me, I got another job, and I left. Well, actually, divorce wasn't as bad as my remarriage in 1964. I met another Jewish girl here, and we married. And that – after that, things became very intolerable. By then I only worked part-time at school. I got a job in a research inst – a research in – firm, a small firm, and it was very interesting. One thing which happened after I got my citizenship in 1962, shortly after I got my degree, is I got my passport, and I took advantage of still working in a university and I went to **Europe** for two months, which was the first time since '56, and the first time I really had a chance to travel. And it was a fabulous two months of – of – of not just vacationing, but – but discovering western **Europe**. It was very interesting, because I sailed on a ship, which was called the **USS France**. On the manifesto of that ship, there was a girl, her name was **Toby Yaspar**(ph). She became my wife a year later. We didn't know that we were sailing on the same ship, or if we were traveling together. We met in a

– in a Jewish get together, about a half a year later. In 1966, I went to join the – work for the navy. At that time I already finished all the courses which I needed for my **PhD**, and I needed a thesis. And the university had no laboratory which was really capable of doing anything. So one of the lecturers there, who worked for the **David Taylor** Model Basin, told me to come to work for him, and then I can work on my thesis there, which is what I did. I worked there 11 years. I worked there in high energy gas dynamics, and I wrote my thesis. I never got my degree, because by the time I wrote my thesis, I lost my minors, which was nuclear engineering, and I just didn't – I was in – in school studying 12 years at that point, and I had enough of it. And I really didn't think that I needed it. So I had all the **PhD** courses finished, and I – the thesis finished, the comprehensive was the only thing I didn't. It was 11 years of research; nice years, interesting research. I wrote more than 50 papers. I was involved in the professional development there. And then in 1977, I had an opportunity to get a promotion somewhere else, which I did. I moved from 19 – from **Maryland** where I lived, to **Virginia**. Unfortunately, my family life did not turn out as well as my career. After six years, my wife and I, with mutual consent got divorced. Reason why we did – and this was a – again a fairly long story, is I had a problem having children, wanting children, and she wanted children. We went through three years of therapy and the therapy resolved nothing except that her

biological clock was running and that the only way that she could have a child is if she will marry somebody else.

Q: Did you not want children because what of – you went through when you were a child?

A: Precisely. I didn't think that I would be a very competent father after which I went through, and the father which I – whom I had, whom I adored in one sense and in another sense I was very ambivalent about, and I was afraid that I would be just like him and I would be incompetent and I didn't want anybody to have that kind of a life. I went through three more years of therapy after this, because I wasn't sure that – if it was the final decision, but it was. Then we divorced in '73 - '74. And it was during our separation when I went to **Israel** the first time. It was a fantastic experience in 1970. It was a real revelation, and the first time in my life, perhaps, I felt home. And I didn't feel home in a sense that I wanted to live there, but I felt a real close kinship. I had many friends there, and – and the land was just indescribable. I went back two more times in the next 15 years after that. I traveled a great deal, I was single for 20 years. I traveled every year abroad, from the **Far East** to the **Middle East** to **Europe** many times. My career went fine. I worked for the navy two more jobs. From 1977 to '88, I worked for a high energy laser project, where I became a project manager, and it was a very exciting, new edge, high –

high tech e – envelope program, edge of the envelope program. And the next one is – ha-happened from 1988 to 1994, where I worked for a multi-national project office, which was the **NATO [indecipherable]** office, where I very – where I jokingly said I wanted this job because I – al-always in my job I was the only one with an accent, and this – in this office, I would be in the majority, having 13 different nations, and people from 13 different nations work there, although I was the only Hungarian. And we had a lot of fun, it was a very interesting project, developing a – a vertical missile. And I was very instrumental in that. After the project was over, which was in 1993, unfortunately things for the navy became a little bleak, and the technical challenges – whereas the money sort of went away. And at the end of 1994, I decided to – to retire. There were two things which happened in the early 90s. One is that my mother got sick at age 89. We lived apart, but very close for 20 years. Now, we moved back together, she moved back. She was an invalid and I took care of her for 18 months. And the last 18 months of her life perhaps was the happiest for many years for her, in spite of her sickness. She felt that we were again together. In her 90th birthday she beca – she got the heart failure. They pulled her out for some reason, she lived six more weeks. And then in May of 1991, she died of heart failure, her fourth. In 1990, after some unsuccessful relationships, some long term, some short term, I met a woman who was as far

away from my culture as anybody could be. She wa – she's Mexican, her name is **Letitia**. And what I found out, actually it was in 1991, and I found out that when my mother got sick, that my American girlfriend didn't stick out with me, but this woman, whom I met only two or three weeks earlier, did. And she stuck with me for a year and a half almost, with – under these conditions and – and I found not only a kinship, but also love. We got married in 1992, and we are still married. She works in the Mexican embassy and we are pretty happy now. So I think that's the end of the story.

Q: Well, there are just a few more things I want to ask you now about working at the museum as a volunteer. What was your first encounter with the museum before you went to work there? How did you learn about the museum?

A: I learned about the museum probably 10 years before it was built, through some solicitations and through friends whose – who provided some funds to the museum. I did not know very much about the museum until I saw an ad, I think in the "**Washington Jewish Week**," where the museum advertised for volunteers. This was in 1992. And I went to the **L** Street, where the museum headquarters were at the time, and I didn't know what was going on, and I volunteered and I said I could help in the library, could do some translations from Hungarian to English. And I got – I – I worked a little bit with – with a car – with **Sheri**(ph) **Shebo**(ph) – you know

– I don't know if you know **Sheri**(ph). She – I think she still works up in the library. And I worked there for a couple of months until the first course started for the volunteers for the visitors' services. And I was in – in that group.

Q: Why – why did you start working for the museum?

A: I felt that the museum fulfills a mission for me. I am a survivor and I had a responsibility and a mission until I can, and I'm capable of, to associate myself with projects which have something to do with the Holocaust. My awareness started before the museum, in the mid – mid-80s, when Holocaust became a subject, which they spoke again about. As you know, the Holocaust was a taboo subject, even in this country, for many years. Although I read a n – a number of books, it's astonishing how little came up between say 1956 and 1986. There were a few books only, and not very much of the Holocaust. I think where I became more aware is the gathering. I was a volunteer there, because I felt that I was really not a survivor, that – that, you know, this was for the older survivors, and the concept of child survivor did not hit me at that point. It hit me a couple of years later, when I started to read about child survivor groups. And in 1991 I got associated with a group here in **Washington**, called the **Washington-Baltimore** area child survivors, and I became very active. We had a conference in 1991, and at that time I knew about the museum, and I became very interested in that, as well as the child survivor group. I

started to write, I started to read more, I started to speak to groups. And by 1992 - 1993, I was a – a full-fledged volunteer who is – was more than eager to do something, and I liked the idea of wanting to educate the public, as well as others, about the Holocaust. I felt that the people, even the Jewish people, were ignorant and that they really need education, and I felt that the museum was a – was the vehicle for that. And so when we finished, I was more than eager to start working there. The first thing I did is I, when the opportunity arose, I – I completed the learning center specialist course, and I finished another cor – specialized course for – for student, and then for teacher guides in the permanent exhibition, which I still can do, and do occasionally. And then I got associated with the speakers' bureau in 1980 – in 1995. And in '95 - '96, I – I spoke to a number of outside groups: among them Pentagon, a number of army establishments, schools, synagogues and churches. And I feel that – that that aspect of – of my work, in conjunction with the museum is very appropriate for me as a – as a survivor.

Q: Are the talks that you give to these groups different?

A: Some of them are different. Most of them center about my own story, you know, survi – as a survivor. But I have spoken to high schools, such as the **Lee** High School in **Silver Spring** about other things, such as the relevance of – of the Holocaust in today's world. It's a – it's amazing how many people think that the

Holocaust is really not relevant, and how I feel that that's wrong, and that there is tremendous relevance even today and will for the future. In a sense, I am very desperate to – to – to preserve the memory, which whatever means that takes. I wrote up my story, which was published, incidentally, in 1993 also, as a – as a collection of stories with 11 other Hungarians and – and it's published in a book. And I – I am writing now a – a lo – long – longer autobiography which will be probably a full-length book. Not just my Holocaust, but my post-Holocaust experience in life in general.

Q: How has working at the museum affected your life? Has it affected your memories of the Holocaust?

A: It certainly has. It induced me to – to learn a lot more. I thought I knew the Holocaust fairly well, through roughly 10 - 15 years of reading, but I found out that I needed to learn a great deal too. And in the last five years, oh, I read maybe a couple of hundred books on the Holocaust and I took a number of courses, mostly in the museum. There are tremendous courses in the museum, for learning center specialists and research department. I try to go to every course and every lecture and every one or two day cour – one or two day –

Q: Seminars, conference?

A: – sem-seminars, wherever it's offered, then wherever I have time. I – I went maybe 50 of them already. So I am – I'm really immersed, and it made me very conscious about a lot of things. A lot of things which a lot of people just sort of don't care about or – or feel that it's not – not relevant any more, and I think it is.

Q: Why do you think it's relevant?

A: Why is it relevant? I think that it's relevant because people are – most people in this country and everywhere else in the world are still as disinterested in what happens to other groups who are discriminated against, or who are being killed, as they were 53 years ago when the Jews were killed, and I think the message is still fresh. You cannot be disinterested, you must be involved, because involvement is the only insurance for the world to prevent mass genocides.

Q: Do you think, as a staff member at the museum, you bring special insights because you are a survivor?

A: I do believe that that's the case. I believe that every time that I say to a group who comes, and whose – and I give group – little – little group orientations when I say that my name is **George Pick** and I am a survivor and all of a sudden everybody looks at me. And it – it – I think a survivor is a – is the only direct link people have to the Holocaust, and I believe that that is a unique thing I bring to the museum, and

all the survivors who are there, bring to the museum. And I think the museum should take maximum advantage of that.

Q: With your survivor friends, have you ever tried to encourage them to volunteer at the museum, and if so what – what did they respond to you?

A: Yes, I do, I – the – I have two sets of survivor friends. The – some of them are older than I am. The ones who are Hungarian, and who are in their 70s, and some of who gave considerable amount of money to – to the museum. Who can afford to, but they do. And who are – some who are not as wealthy, myself included, who would give our time. I know that a number of us are volunteering in the museum who are Hungarians and who are survivors. Same thing from the survivor – child survivor group. And I am –

Q: So the – so the response to – when you ask people to volunteer has been good?

A: Not as good as I would like it. I would like to have more of them volunteer and more of them go out, but each year I can – I can persuade a few more people to – to get involved. And as – that's always pleasing to me, and I'm always gratified if that happens – if – when that happens. And I'm trying to keep people's minds out – interestingly enough, few – few of my friends who really suffered a great deal through the camps, are not willing to speak out and not willing to face, maybe never will face the horrors they – they had gone through. And – and I sympathize and I

understand that. But I encourage everybody else, who are capable of talking, to – to talk to the museum, talk to the foundation, the **Shoah** Foundation, and give testimony.

Q: Can you describe your relationships with the other volunteers at the museum, who are survivors or witnesses to the Holocaust?

A: We have a very close-knit relationship. We know, of course who the survivors are, and we speak perhaps more among ourselves. We have now a group who meet about twice a – about once every two months. We have now the – the director of survivor affairs, and **Martin Goldman**, who is encouraging us to interact with him and with each other. We are very concerned about the museum and we are concerned about the direction the museum takes. We want to make sure that the – the Jewish aspect of the Holocaust is emphasized and that the Jewish aspects of the Holocaust are not going to fall by the wayside. We understand it's a – it's a government institution, but we still believe that the main event of the Holocaust was still the – the Holocaust against the Jewish people. And we emphasize that among ourselves, and among the – the visitors. We do not think this is in contradiction with any kind of museum policy, should not be, and must not be. And so we are – we feel that we want to preserve the museum's main mission, which is to explain the Holocaust and show what – what had happened during that period.

Q: Do the – you think the emphasis is becoming less Jewish?

A: I do.

Q: In what way?

A: Well, I think we have now, this year particularly, succeeded in steering the – the museum back a little bit. I was unhappy about the – the Nazi Olympics. I think it was – it make – it first of all, cost a lot of money and a lot of resources, and I don't think it has a direct relationship to the Holocaust. I mean, it was a – an event, a Nazi event, but there were many, many, many other events, which had direct relations. I am very happy now that the **Kovno** ghetto exhibit will come. I was happy with the **Fry** exhibit. But the – but I thought that going – going with that Nazi exhibit – Nazi Olympic exhibit was essentially going away from that. I was also unhappy for the same reason of that little exhibit we had, which was the faces of **Bosnia**, or whatever they called. Which I sympathize again, I felt that it was a terrible genocide, and you know, I sympathize with all this, but again, that served to – to steer away the muse – from the museum's main mission. And I don't think we can afford that, we have too many other – too – too many things which is not in the main exhibit, which should be said in the various other exhibits.

Q: Such as?

A: Well, such as – what, for example was the – you know, the Jews, as victims are shown pretty well in the main exhibit. But what about the Jews as contributors of European culture and science? We were not victims before **Hitler** came; we were great contributors. There is – I think the museum has that part – the museum's mission is very integrated with that, to show that – that our contribution, our 1,000 year old contribution to European culture and civilization and technology is more than just six million deaths. And I think the museum should have an exhibit for that – pretty soon, as a matter of fact. That's one idea, and I had about 20 or 30 other ideas which I wrote up as a – in a memo to the management, and which I submitted to the ma – high management in January of this year. I really believe that they are looking at some of it, and some of these ideas are already bearing some fruition. But I think they have a long way to go, and many years to do it. And I think that – that – that management should not forget these aspects of the Holocaust.

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **George Pick**. This is tape number four, side **B**. Describe your impressions of the museum's non-survivors volunteer and staff, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

A: My impression of the non-survivor volunteers?

Q: And staff.

A: And staff.

Q: Those who are Jewish, and non-Jewish.

A: Okay, yes, of course. I think that it is not a coincidence that in the volunteer corps, probably 95 percent are Jewish, whether they are survivors or non-survivors. I feel that, and I very much encourage anybody who volunteers to volunteer for the museum whether Jewish or non-Jewish. But there is, I think, a reason why Jews feel more of a mission there than a non-mission. And I feel the same thing about the staff. I am sorry to say that one of the concerns I have, and not only I, but many others, is that many of the staff, the Jewish staff, is leaving the museum, and many of them already have left.

Q: Why is that?

A: Well, that's a good question, I don't – I don't know what the answer is, but I have a feeling that the answer is very complex. One aspect of that answer is that the museum, in some respects become a bureau – bi – be – is becoming a bureaucracy, just like any other bureaucracy and it kills initiative. And there are some – there were some very bright people there, with ideas and initiatives, who were stifled and who were frustrated and who find – found a dead end situation there, and left. They

were not just a bunch of young people who left, whom I knew and sympathized with, and who would have loved to stay in a museum if they have seen for themselves some – some way up and some way to develop. But some senior man – senior people, senior historians, who had a reputation, and whose reputation enhanced the reputation of the museum, such as the research center. I was very sorry to see **Baron**(ph) **Vaughn**(ph) first of all leaving. I was very sorry to see when **Sylvia Milton** left. And my fear is that, with these kind of people leaving the museum, the research institute is not going to be able to attract the type of reputable scientists, such as **Browning** and others. It is not just a matter of money, I think it's a matter of reputation, and I think the – the institute started out as a world class – world class institution, and I am not positive that it still maintains that status today, and I think it should. And if it doesn't now, it should certainly strive to do it again. That is an awful lot that institution needs to do, and had the potential to doing it. I think the museum management should definitely strive to – to nurture that institution, and my impression is that it is not doing that.

Q: What would you like to see them do?

A: What I like to see them do is to first of all encourage and hire world class historians to work there. As I said, some of them already left, and I'm not positive that too many of them wants – wants to work there under the circumstances. I think

some enticement, grants, sut – etcetera, probably will bring some of them back. But I think that there is a – a limitation there. There are other institutions who are competing for these same people, and I think if – if the research institute is not going to compete successfully in the next few years, they may lose that kind of brainpower, and I think that would be a great loss.

Q: You had mentioned that you had many other ideas for other exhibits. Can you just name a few?

A: Yes, well I – I believe that some of the exhibits, some of various ghetto exhibits – I think **Kovno** is – is a good – good – I'm sure it will be a good exhibit, but there are other ghettos and life in – in ghettos which were very different from **Kovno** and which is portrayed in the main exhibits, which should be shown. For example, in – in west **Europe**, the ghettos were very different. I think that there should be exhibits about the Hungarian Jews, and this is not because I am a Hungarian Jew, but because the Hungarian Jewish story is very different from the story of the Polish Jews or the Lithuanian Jews, and it – in my estimation it's underrepresented in the – in the main exhibit, anyway. So it should – it should find someplace else. The French Jews same thing, and – and the west European Jews, in a general sense, are also underrepresented, and they should be given at least temporary space.

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Q: Are there any powerful experiences, or memorable experiences you've had while you've been working at the museum?

A: Yes. These memorable experiences had been very asso – very much associated with teachers training there. I was fortunate to be invited a couple of times to speak to them, in a **Belfer** conference. I was very sorry to see **Marshall Sabol**(ph) leave, who recognized very early on the potential of the survivor contributions to teachers' education. After **Marshall** left, he took some time in doing, and I must say to myse – to – must say that I was the one who forced the issue also there, until the a – the education department recognized the contribution with the educ – which the survivors could make to education. But I had some memorable instances this year, when I participated in a **Belfer** conference, not as a speaker, but as just sitting around and listening to others, and having teachers come to me with questions and wanting me to show them the main exhibit and comment on them. And one – and telling me – and I have go-gotten letters from them, several, not just this year, but other years, is that their me – most meaningful experience was to meet survivors. That many things they could learn from books and from exhibits, but the person to person touch was – was most meaningful for them, and which they hope to transmit to their students. And I really believe that. That was certainly most memorable for me there.

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Q: Are there any particular parts of the museum with which you identify with? Anything special there?

A: Of course, I – I under – I identify with everything. It would be saying, you know, if you have many children, who do you love more? But despite of that, there are certain things obviously, which – which were closer – or which are closer to me than other pieces are. For example, the portrait of **Raoul Wallenberg**. Obviously, the man who saved my life, directly and indirectly and who saved my immediate family's life, makes a difference to me. But – but everything is meaningful. And of course th-the-the large pictures which – which show the Hungarian Jews on the ramp of **Auschwitz** in the selection process, the two little boys whose bewildered faces remind me of my own, and whose uniform they wear, I had as six years old. I have a picture of it, and I provided that to the museum to show that this was a uniform which little Hungarian boys, whether they were Jewish or not, wore. And so I am always very moved by their faces, and think of me, that I could be one of them. They of course, not survived and I did. And that is a very emotional thing, but for me – and a lot of people always wonder, how could I be a survivor and – and go through that – that exhibit so many times, isn't that stressful? The answer is, absolutely. It's a gut-wrenching experience, and I – I feel that I owe that to – to the

dead, and I owe that to myself and I owe that to the people whom I try to educate, of what it was, not just to look from the outside in, but what it was to be in, in hell.

Q: Be-Because of the very difficult experiences you had during the war, was there ever a time when you resisted remembering what you experienced?

A: I – I do not remember consciously resisting. After the war, particularly after the communists took over in **Hungary**, this was a taboo subject. We did not focus at this, we had day – daily problems and concerns. The memory, as fresh as it is 53 years later, was somehow buried for many, many decades, without losing its **vividity**, its – its vividness, its – its – its relevance. And it stayed there. I mean, it obviously this kind of things don't go away forever, but I never resisted it consciously, I si – I simply just went somewhere else. I – I did – and I – I must say also that my life is not defined by the Holocaust. Maybe in the later, last few years it's focusing – the Holocaust is more of a focus. But as you heard it from my post-Holocaust experiences and my – my professional life, I was not – the fofo – the Holocaust did not deter me in what I was doing. I was among the probably few who ended up not in a helping profession. You would be a-amazed how many of the survivors ended up in a helping profession, or ha – how many ended up in becoming a – more lawyers and doctors, and how few are engineers. But I was among the ones who became the hard scientist and I felt that my real calling and

profession was engineering and science, although I am trying to catch up now, and I am very much like – I would like to learn as much as I can about the Holocaust. I still do not regard myself as, you know, as a survivor only. But I f – want to use my survivor status to speak, and my – my privileged voice to speak and to teach as long as I can.

Q: Do you think you'd be a different person today if you hadn't gone through the wartime experience that you did?

A: I am sure I would be. I think the wartime experiences has – had taught me a great deal. Many things which I probably wouldn't be. Persistence. Not be cowed by – by intimidations. Sometimes recognize when a crucial decision have to be made, and I learned that heroes are not born, but made. Not un – I'm not com – saying that I'm a hero, but at least I have seen heroes who became heroes, who were plain folk, and – and I brushed with death very many times. So many times that sometimes I worry that I run out of luck eventually.

Q: Do you feel Hungarian or American or Jewish?

A: I have to tell you the – I have to tell you a little story about this. You know **Einstein** was asked the same question. The – does he feel American, German or Jewish, and he says – do you know what his answer was? His answer was, well, as long as my theory of relativity holds up, the Germans will say I'm German, the

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Americans will say I – I am American, and of course the Jews will say I'm Jewish. But if my theory turns out to be incorrect, the Americans will say I'm German and the Germans will say I'm Jewish. So the same way with me, it's – I feel that the components are there. I am a part – I have 22 years of me with Hungarian. I have 40 years of me with American and I have 63 years of me with Jewish, and they somehow counteract and interact. I – I think it is – is sort of a very simp-simplified question when one asks, who, what is, in what component. I – I must say, I love Hungarian literature, and I like Hungarian art and music. I love American literature, but I love a lot of – lot of other things. And my hobbies, for example are more universalist than either Hungarian, American or Jewish. But I lo – but there are components of all three, which I love, and then there are things which are associated with neither. For example, I – I love photography, which is neither Jewish – although there were many Jewish photographers. Neither Jewish nor Hungarian were – there were a lot of good Hungarian photographers. Nor American, where again, same – same thing happens. My interest and philosophy of life, I hope transcends somehow, this compartmentalization.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add that you haven't said, before we finish?

A: Yeah, I l – I like to go back to the museum, and I like to go back to a – a concern I – I had and raised and shall raise in the future, and that is about teachers'

education. I believe that the vast majority of the teachers and certainly the students, who will be teaching Holocaust studies and who will be learning Holocaust studies would be Christian. I had had very uneasy few hours, few days in the museum about anti-Semitism. And this is specifically in the **Belfer** conference this year, where I was – where I am – was looking at the struggle of non-Jewish teachers, trying to teach non-Jewish teachers about the central – centrality of anti-Semitism and church anti-Semitism in the Holocaust. And the difficulties which these teachers had with the acceptance of this idea. And I was very concerned because I feel that if these teachers would simply ignore this, you know, wa – one of the – one of the teachers said well, what happens if e – we teach it different? And he says, well, you have a moral obligation to teach it this way. Well, that's nice. I always believe in moral obligations, but I heard of very spec – spe-specific and fairly practical objections. For example one black teacher got up – very few black teachers participated in this, said hey, I came from **Tennessee** from the Bible Belt. I cannot teach the Baptists that their belt – their – their New Testament is wrong. I can't teach that, you know, I mean if the Jews are right, then they are wrong. How do I do this? And I was really concerned and I am – I think that this is a great central concern and should be of the education department to – to teach the Holocaust and the centrality of the a – of – of the anti-Semitism in such a way that

the teachers can accept it. I'm not talking sugarcoating. I am talking truth, or I am talking about acceptable ways, so they can teach it. If you teach it without acceptable ways, then it won't be taught. And if it is not taught, then the great point of the Holocaust, the great cause of the Holocaust is going to be lost. It's not enough to teach what happened, they must teach why it happened. And they cannot shirk from the fact that it largely happened because of the centuries of art – of anti-Semitism. But how do you package it, how do you do this so that the teachers can teach it and can accept it themselves? I talked to teachers afterwards, they really are struggling. I mean, they – they hear their own priests, they have their own beliefs, and then they hear this, and they don't know how to resolve it. I think this needs to be really considered and reconsidered in the museum, and that's not a small amount of work either. That's my parting shot for this.

Q: Well, thank you very much for doing the interview.

A: Thank you for – for letting me do it. I-I really hope that I have pointed out some – some thoughts here.

Q: You certainly have. This concludes the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **George Pick**.

End of Tape Four, Side B

Conclusion of Interview

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