

Transcript of Lou Rossinger Testimony
Slate # 1349-0012 (2 parts)

Interviewer:

Please tell us your name, and where and when you were born.

Lou Rossinger:

My name is Louis Laslow Rossinger, I was born August 31st 1928 in Hungary, Szakoly, Hungary.

Interviewer:

Tell us a little bit about Szakoly. What life was like for you there.

Lou Rossinger:

Szakoly was sort of a remote area. Uh, it was quite a distance from a larger city and uh it was more like country than anything else. Uh we had, uh Catholic and Protestant schools there, didn't have any other schools. The only uh religious school close by was approximately 5 miles from Szakoly so I had to go to uh a Christian school which is Protestant or Catholic. First grade I believe it was the uh Protestant school, 2nd grade when the uh the 2nd World War actually began uh...the anti-semitism started growing and uh I have had a rough time in the second grade.

Interviewer:

Give us an example or two of the kind of experience you had with the anti-semitism.

Lou Rossinger:

In uh the first experience I encounter?..

Interviewer:

Yeah, in 2nd grade.

Lou Rossinger:

Yes, the bullies...the uh...they had sort of a gang bullies. 2 or three big boys and rest of them little boys who started calling me dirty Jew and, and sooner or later it got to the point where started beating me up. And my Father pulled me out. Went to a Catholic School. Had a reputation of a tough school and the teacher was a tough teacher and he didn't put up with that and I finished up elementary school in the Catholic School.

Interviewer:

In the Catholic school. Tell me about your, your father and mother. What did they do for a living?

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

Lou Rossinger:

Oh my Father was a breeder, horse breeder and uh stock breeder. He knew all about horses. And uh, by trade he was a butcher and uh he was in business with a very good friend of his who survived the Holocaust, unfortunately my Father didn't. He uh died in Mathausen 2 days before the liberation.

Interviewer:

OK, and how bout your Mother?

Lou Rossinger:

My Mother was a very beautiful woman. She was a county beauty, she was a designer, fashion designer, a tremendous gourmet, superb pastry maker. I, I remember the "dobush" (sp?) that she used to make. Which is the Vienesse/Hungarian pastry and uh I long for it all the time.

Interviewer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Lou Rossinger:

Yes. I had one brother who was next to me, I was the oldest. His name was Joseph, who was very close to me...was a year younger I was always hoping that he survived and I'm still looking for him, still haven't given up. I had uh the next sister after him was Ava, who was...the last time I knew of her being alive was 10 years old. And uh the....the youngest one who's name was Lily who was a beautiful little girl...4 years old.

Interviewer:

You told us that you finished elementary school in the Catholic School..

Lou Rossinger:

Yes.

Interviewer:

What happened...uh what...do you remember the year that you finished Lou ...What was elementary school age? How many grades did you have?

Lou Rossinger:

I think it was 1940

Interviewer:

In 1940? What happened from the time the war started? How did you become aware of what was going on in Europe? Did it affect your life?

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

Lou Rossinger:

After the war started?

Interviewer:

Right.

Lou Rossinger:

Well, I was in the capital. I was fortunate enough. I don't know maybe it was written that I was there... I went up uh alone on the train and I was 13, just Bar Mitzvah, went to Budapest to uh study.

Interviewer:

This was...so at 13 you left home?

Lou Rossinger:

...At 13 & 1/2 going close to 14.

Interviewer:

Ok, and at that point had your family been affected by the events of the war? or about anti-semitism in the place where you lived...

Lou Rossinger: (they are talking at the same time)

Absolutely Oh, yes.

Interviewer:

Can you tell us, can you tell us something about how life changed at home as a result of the Nazis?

Lou Rossinger:

Oh, things have gotten very bad. They have taken away every religious uh possibility from the Jewish people. The Hungarian Nazi's started coming into power they were throwing rocks at people, if you went to a Synagogue or a temple you were attacked on the way and you were attacked on the way back up. They break out the Synagogue's windows and uh sometimes interrupting the services that I remember. Uh...you couldn't keep Kosher because they wouldn't let uh...the uh...they uh...proper method to proceed in the Kosher Laws, so therefore they had to hide and I remember my Father and his friend used to go in the middle of the night with the Rabbi to uh do the Kosher processing.

Interviewer:

Was your Father's ocu...work...his way of making a living...was it affected during this time?

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

Lou Rossinger:

Absolutely. It didn't take long to uh ..to be very poor because they choked off everything. They started confiscating things and little by little you got to the point where you were so poor that you don't know where the food would co.. would be coming from. And that's why they decided that I'm old enough to be on my own so they send me to...uh to Budapest. And uh I've never seen my people after that.

Interviewer:

When you left home at 13...you left and you never saw them again.

Lou Rossinger:

Yes...

Interviewer:

(I see) Tell us about your trip into Budapest and uh what happened to you.

Lou Rossinger:

I remember the train..they didn't have any seats available, so...I had a uh and old suitcase and I's sitting in the middle of the aisle going all the way there and noticed in the train meant there were some Hungarian Nazis and uh, uh unfortunate for this fellow with....an orthodox fellow who had the uh the long hair on the side...they got a hold of him and pulled him out of the car and I don't know what they did with him. And uh, I guess they didn't know I was Jewish and so I just went right on...and uh got to Budapest. And I lived with...I had an Aunt in Budapest and I lived with her for a couple of months, until....her husband got killed and I don't remember what the reason was and she couldn't afford the place she was living so I had to find a place for myself while going to school. And that's when things started uh to be more intense...prosecution of the Jewish people. But they didn't do anything in open in Budapest...not an open...not as much as it was in the smaller towns, which as you know were the first ones to be deported from. They didn't do anything in Budapest until 1944. Uh the mass deportation and the herding of people on the main arteries...uh guided by Hungarian derelicts...I call them derelicts because they probably couldn't get a job! And uh well they had some pretty sharp people after while joining it, I don't know for what reason but they joined on...I guess the disease was contagious so they...they got to be numbers of people there. And the Ges...it was the henchmen of the gestapo and they were wores than the gestapo and you know how the gestapo was.

Interviewer:

Were you in contact with your family from the time you left home.

Lou Rossinger:

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

I had letters from my parents. Uh not many..numerous letters...and all of a sudden the letters stop coming and I really wasn't aware, to answer your question, the seriousness, because I didn't read the paper I was too young to read papers & I was too busy to get to...I worked and I also went to school and about 2 or 3 months after...and this is...we're talking 1943. 2 months after I didn't have any letters suddenly I got a card...from...the only word I remember...from my father...."Ohm Waldzy (?)" uh Germany, it's either Bavaria or Germany and a...I found out later that they made him write this letter to people who were in capitals or larger cities to cover up what was going on...that they were treating him royally. This is the mastermind of the gestapo.

Interviewer:

Did you have any word from him after that card?

Lou Rossinger:

No that's it. That was the last word. I saved that card until...for long period and eh...everything is gone.

Interviewer:

Were you aware of the deportations? Did you have any idea where your parents might have gone?

Lou Rossinger:

No. No, no it was so suppressed that uh...they uh...they did not let the Hungarian media say anything about it. I don't remember anything. The uh rhetoric was going on and they blamed the Jews for their downfalls as you know all the way down from Hitler to...to the smallest derelict you know who took up the disease of Nazi-ism. And I call it disease.

Interviewer:

So in 1943 you found yourself alone...you realized..

Lou Rossinger:

Oh, absolutely. I didn't have any money, no clothes. I don't know...didn't know where the food was coming from and uh people felt sorry...you know occasionally you know they pitched in uh...and then I used to pick up little extra job picking up bicycles and uh they had uh a rental agency that uh rented bicycles and uh motor bikes to uh people who were on vacation on Lake Baralton which is a resort area in Hungary and I they came back and they checked in their bikes and if I picked it up I made an extra "forint" which is like a dollar. So uh...you know..

Interviewer:

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

Where did you sleep and uh how did you...did you buy your food from these small jobs that you had?

Lou Rossinger:

Eh...uh...yes whenever I had it. Uhm...

Interviewer:

Describe to us what a day was like for you in Budapest.

Lou Rossinger:

Uhm...this was going on uh...I had a friend who went to elementary school with me and uh his father...he was from the same town and I went to elementary school we were in the same grade...his father went to elementary school with my father so we became friends because he knew...he was a decent person, his father was a decent person and he looked me up...and he wanted to know if he could help which is a god-send to me and he was a apprentice butcher and he would steal a kidney or a piece of meat and he would bring it to me and both of us we made a fire outside of somewhere and we roasted the meat and we brought some bread and I ate and he ate with me. Occassionally he would carry me somewhere and uh he would cover for me...he got me things that I needed...some of the things that I needed to get by for a period of time...I would say uh 2 months and then he made a mistake. He got me a room with someone and old old lady who was an ardent Nazi and he didn't know about this until he find out & he told me...he says "Get out of there soon, leave everything there," whatever little I had "and get out of there." And uh, I got...I didn't even go back over there and I started wandering...on the street. I was a street kid. And uh occassionally I would get in touch with him...I sneak in to him or uh let him know where I am and he would, you know...help me sustain.

Interviewer:

Did you ever live in his home?

Lou Rossinger:

He was living with someone too. I think his...his boss..I think he was living with his boss and uh his boss even he...even...I think he confiscated a couple extra dollars for me which I don't think was a sin..you know from the uh...the checkout register he...I think, that's the only thing I that I could think of...he got it and he told me about it...he says "God won't strike me dead for this."

Interviewer:

Where did you generally sleep after you left the apartment of this woman?

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

Lou Rossinger:

I...got a room with someone after I left and it was another lady...nother old lady who was..uh...uh...I don't remember exactly what she did but it was a remote area and nobody knew me so I felt comfortable for a couple of weeks or maybe a month and uh, my friend told me he'll take care of the whatever it cost to be there. And sooner or later I found an agency uh that people who saw, who're more knowledgeable about what's going on, left the country, sometimes Switzerland and other times possibly to go overseas. I don't know where they went, but they left a lot of money for this agency. It's a Hungarian, Hungarian/Jewish help relief agency that got a hold of me...or I let somebody know that I needed help. And uh, I got some clothing, they gave me some clothing and they uh...uh gave me sustanance...gave me help to get by but they told me to be very careful. This agency was operating...aparently they contributed to either the Gestapo, wealthy uhh inheritances or wealthy money, bank... uh...whatever...jewelry or whatever they gave them to try to appease them to try to save some lives and this agency...probably if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be here now. But I uh, my running around the city became very dangerous and I got caught. I was going..uh going to the...to the railroad station they caught me at the railroad station.

Interviewer:

Who caught you?

Lou Rossinger:

The Hungarian Gestapo, the Gestapo of the Hungarian uh Nazis.

Interviewer:

And what happened to you after you were caught?

Lou Rossinger:

Well, you know they have a concentration point...these people...they started bleeding the...the population...the Jewish population over there and uh they took me..it was outside of uh Budapest and they took me to a point where it was a lot of other people uh had the same thing they pulled off...they were trying to escape and they uh...somebody, the reason I...I told em I wasn't Jewish. I tried to get by and somebody in the uh Hungarian Nazi Gestapo say "Yes you are. I know who you are." I don't know whether he did or not. Maybe he's just decided it at random you know took a chance, he couldn't lose anything. But he said he knew me. When they loaded people up and they were going to take people...at that time they were still loading them on truck, trucks, because after that they started driving them like cattle. Ah...They were going to put us in a remote area where they pushed some railroad cars to uh ready to deport me. In the confusion of

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getting off the uh...they made a mistake, they were too close to other loading areas and I escaped for the first time. I was very, very tough and I was very frisky and I just blended in with the people loading over there and I made out like I was one of them and started loading...help em load and I got away at that time.

Interviewer:

Where did you run? Where did you go then?

Lou Rossinger:

Went back to my friend.

Interviewer:

You went back to Budapest?

Lou Rossinger:

Yes.

Interviewer:

I see...

Lou Rossinger:

Went back to my friend uh and he...wasn't exactly reluctant, he was afraid because he knew what was going on, but he still helped. He still helped. And he, he had friends and I stayed one place a couple nights, I stayed another place a couple of nights when things started getting bad I moved on. Sometimes didn't even have a decent place to stay.

Interviewer:

Lou, this friend seems very important to you. Tell us his name and whether you...

Lou Rossinger:

His name is Laslow Kokra'k. Spelled K-o-k-r-a- with an apostrophe on the a-k. Kokra'k and uh I repaid him right at the Hungarian revolution by bringing his sister who escaped to Austria from Hungary during the revolution 1956 against the Russians. He wrote me a letter and he told me that anything that I could do for his sister he would appreciate it and I got the ball rolling with the JayCees and uh we sponsored them...her to come to the United States and we got her a job in Winston Salem NC in one of the Haynes Mills and uh kind of got her paid...I felt good paying him back for what he did.

Interviewer:

After your return to Budapest how, how long did you spend?

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

Lou Rossinger:

Uh, the agency that I... that...the relief agency that helped me, this is occasional sustenance because I couldn't go there every day. And it was sort of an underground agency, but I think they paid off...paid off the Gestapo, the Hungarian because you know they felt like they can always kill us or kill them...they'll get the money and then... Fortunately a lot of people got saved by this agency and uh incidently, I think I saw Wallenberg. I think Wallenberg had to do with this agency. He had a track record of bringing a lot of money and being in touch with diplomat, diplomats all over and perhaps from out of they continent or perhaps from his country and uh Hungarian people who had the money to give to save people. I think he saved some children by uh marking a complete train of Red Cross, uh young...young kids. They were younger then I was, I was 14. Unfortunate for him he, he didn't survive. The Russians, you know, got him but I think I know I saw him and I, I feel good. I know that he and perhaps maybe saved my life.

Interviewer:

How did he affect your life?

Lou Rossinger:

Wallenberg? When I saw the stor...I see it over and over again whenever it is shown. He is a beautiful person, he's an angel, I think. Angel in disguise, versus demons in disguise of a human body.

Interviewer:

Did you use some of the facilities that he set up in Budapest? Is that how...

Lou Rossinger:

Yes, I was suggested...that they had made an agreement with the Gestapo that they will send laborers to every one of their offices and uh headquarters to do whatever they ask you to do. And I wa...I decided that that was the thing...for some reason I felt like it was the safe thing to do...being right along with em and not being hunted down like an animal and they assigned me to Hotel Royale to the kitchen to wash dishes and peel potatoes, you know, the usual KP work you know clean up work and then after they saw that I was a young boy and I couldn't hurt them they trusted me a little bit and so they put me in a truck that uh, with another old fellow who was older than I was, to load truck to get sustenance for themselves you know from the market like vegetables and beef and we loaded the truck and unloaded it at the basement of the kitchen. But I could never go anywhere other than the kitchen or the basement.

Interviewer:

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

How long did you work at the Hotel Royale?

Lou Rossinger:

Until it got tough for the Germans, the Russians were approaching. The Russians circled, started circling Budapest and the Gestapo overnight pulled up but they left a unit across the Danube that uh it was a representation...sort of a representation a few Gestapo members and not many guards maybe 2 or 3 guards. It was a satellite uh hotel to the Hotel Royale which was a very famous hotel uh... Eichmann, incidentally, was headquartered in the hotel and uh, I am not saying that I saw him 100 percent, but I think I saw Eichmann. I didn't know who he was. He had an entourage of uh, of uh spit and shine officers around him constantly surrounding him and he came down to the kitchen one time and there were approximately 20, 20 officers...high ranking officers with him and they kept us at bay. They got us out of the kitchen when uh, when he came down. He was inspecting.

Interviewer:

What were the conditions in Budapest at this point for the, uh then non Jewish citizens in the city?

Lou Rossinger:

Uh, it was normal for the non-Jewish citizens. It was...they...felt the pinch because of rationing and everything. But it seemed like to me that everything was normal. They could go on a weekend...they could go swimming. They could do anything that they did before.

Interviewer:

Were you aware that Jewish people were being moved from the city in large numbers?

Lou Rossinger:

I uh of course I was aware after you know started running, because I think I had to be ahead of them all the time and uh I didn't have radio. I didn't read any newspaper. I wouldn't dare to buy newspaper because a lot of Jewish people got caught buying newspaper. They uh suddenly realized that they could uh pick out several ahh, the Hungarian Nazis were very bad. Very disgustingly bad...in doing the dirty work for the...and by now you know that I don't have any good feelings for some of these people.

Interviewer:

At this point did you understand what was happening to the people who were taken away from their homes from Budapest?

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

Lou Rossinger:

Not really, not really. However one German officer was pretty drunk or I would say he was too drunk to drive but he was driving the truck anyway because they were sweating the Russians approaching and I saw the emergency food that went from the kitchen to the defenders of uh Budapest. And I knew when we heard bombing and we heard the artillery explosions and we knew that they were getting close. And all of a sudden he says "You don't worry, you're not going to make this alive." And when he said that and he says and then he was telling another I overheard them...of course I understand German and that's one of the reasons that I'm alive too...uh that uh he says "I wonder where they gonna take them. They probably go to Auswitz." You know...straight.

Interviewer:

Did you, did you stay in this job until the end of the war or did you have to leave?

Lou Rossinger:

I stayed...no uh well you know they, they encircled Budapest in uh it was getting winter time, it was late fall ad uh...they started pulling up stakes and we knew it was getting close didn't know how close but we knew and we had hopes and all of a sudden I generated a lot of energy in thought and...and body to go without food and don't worry about food...just survive and uh thinking of revenge. Uh...This...there were five us in the satellite place where the gestapo left a few people a skeleton crew so to speak. Uh communications crew I think, that's wh...I think they got caught and they became prisoners of war or the Russians shot em. They didn't take to many SS prisoners. Euh...we, we were aware of it. Uh very much so and at this place they had Jewish women cooking. Apparently the agency sent them over there, like they send me to this other hotel and including in the women there was a pregnant lady and uh uh I felt really sorry for her because she was in really bad shape, she wasn't able to stand too much and the other ladies were mid age uh and uh about 2 or 3 days after we were there all of a sudden they got orders to pull up stakes and one of the SS came down sys "OK we need 2 men to load the truck and we want volunteers we going to leave the rest of you here but we need 2 men and nobody answered. There were 5.4 or 5 of us there. All of a sudden this friend of mine and I who was 19 and I was...I was you know was getting close to 15 say we'll go. We knew we looked at the ladies and we knew that were going to save them and we didn't know our fate. Apparently they had plans for us. But uh, we loaded their trucks. On the way out from Budapest they...robbed...threw grenades in front of the stores, open up the doors, we loaded up some cordials and liquor and whatever they decided to what store they decided to go to. And that convoy, they got into a convoy going out from Budapest and uh the convoy was cut in two. I mean it was stopped.

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They run into a Russian trap and we were in a convoy and uh we were in the back, it was snowing & it was cold, it was getting winter time...and I believe the reason we could kept...keep warm was because one of the quart...my friend opened up one of the cordial bottles and we were drinking some of the cordials, but we were afraid to get drunk, we didn't want to get drunk although I think it would have been good you numb you feelings. Uh because we knew theres something going on and all of a sudden there was some holes in the canvas of the trucks and my buddy says "You see those holes they wouldn't there before." and all of a sudden we heard a machine gun and then a few seconds later hand grenade and as the convoy went in about...I think the convoy was about a mile, 2 miles long coming out...and they were late because the Russians got em...they went into a horseshoe trap and the Russians closed the trap and they opened up with everything that they had and that was Hell. So I can say I was in hell. And my buddy says to me when it started...bullets flying all over...he says "This is it." uh he says "This is the way we jump." We jumped, we were on an embankment. They built a highway from Vienna to Budapest it was sort of a like an expressway but it wasn't like and expressway like we know and we jumped and it was approximately 15-20 foot...feet down and we rolled down...into water and apparently the uh...the fire was coming was coming from the other side of the embankment so for a while we were safe...ice was broken and I was pinned down...we wouldn't move you know I was pinned down, my feet were in water, in freezing water and uh when it...it started snowing and when the fire quit we didn't hear too many shots and my buddy says "I hear a cow...up the road...mooing." he says "We can go into the barn at least we'll be warm." and every time we moved he says "Lets go." and we were creeping, not crawling but creeping then if you raised up...they had...apparently...I don't know whether they saw us or they...they thought we were Germans and it was approximately I would say a thousand yards or more to a ditch...sort of 2 rows of trees divided one property from the other and there was another cover that...we were creeping all this way up to the farmhouse or the barn and to make a long story short we got in one house that the roof was blown off and at least the wind wasn't so bad and then my buddy says "Well lets go into the barn." And, little did we know, we went into the barn and there were about a dozen SS soldiers in the barn taking cover. The barn was in the ground. Hole was dug into the ground, its a winter barn and they put straw on the top so it was warm because the cows warmed it up and we went in there and all of a sudden and we just couldn't believe it and there were SS people and I says "Oh my God!" in Hungarian and he says "Don't say anything...just, just don't say anything." On the way up there I was so cold because my feet were in water that I pulled off a dead soldier's boots...uh, the boots were about twice as big or 3 times as big as my foot but..but I tore out some lining from the German soldier's coat and wrapped around my foot and put the boots on. I pulled his pants on too because my pants were uh wet and it was an interesting situation because that

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branded me to be a German soldier when the Russians came up. Russians finally came up to the barn and uh...uh they were going to throw grenades because they knew that there were some soldiers hiding there and this soldier...I didn't understand him, but my friend understood Slavic language and uh he says "He's going to throw hand grenade." said "lets get out of here before we can...we don't have anything to hide." and uh we didn't know whether the SS is gonna shoot us while we go out and we didn't know whether they gonna shoot us! Says "Well we can't take too many chances." So we just decided to come out. We come out and there was a big partisan. Russian soldier. He had a concertina on his right hand side, hand grenades hanging from it and he was half drunk. He says "Ahh..." he says "Germansky!" means German! And he was cussing me and everything. I says "No! No." and uh my buddy says, he says "Ya, ya vrey." In the Russian language. It means I am a Jew. And he says "Oh I don't believe it." and started scratching his head and uh while this was going on there was a Jewish Officer behind him, a tank commander. A big tank was right behind him they come up... its armored infantry probably and ah he cocked his submachine gun, he was going to kill us. He says "I'll enjoy killing you, I love to kill Germans." And the Jewish Officer pulled out his gun and the pistol was about that big and he put it to his head and he said "You pull yours and I'll put mine." after he heard my friend saying in Russian that we are Jewish people we are your friend. And they guy says "Oh well, I'll let you have your Jewish friends." You know. And then we have to prove to the Jewish Officer that we were who we were. He says to me "Make a blessing...in Hebrew for me! Prove to me you are a Jew." and uh I did and he says "Now make Kiddish for me." He says "I don't remember anymore it's been so long." And uh we made blessing to the wine and he put his arm around us and he pull out his canteen which had hot coffee in it...I think it had some rum in it...and he says "Drink some more..drink some more." and I drink a little bit, of course you know it felt good...my buddy drink and he says "I'm gonna have you...have farmer women fix you some breakfast." It was middle of the night. This, this whole thing went through from early dark in the evening all night. So it's a night of of horror and uh that was one of my guardian angels. And he had them fix us some food which we didn't have for a while and he gave us a paper to identify us. He says "If anyone stops you tell em my name is so and so and I liberated you and to order you passing on because I want to walk this way because the front line is moving back and forth." You know Western Hungary, that was...it was a frontline...we were right in the middle of a front and he told me to walk south to cross...because there's no bridges left to cross and theres a war going on inside the capital. He says "you want to go around the capital." and we walked 50 miles down and then continued on. But while we walked, uh about 10 miles down the road we couldn't walk any more. We went into a house and the lady was afraid to let us in. Says...If they find out that you are...she didn't know, we didn't tell her that we were Jewish people...she says "they will hurt us." and

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uh...she gave us some soup, hot soup and I passed out on the bed...aah she had me sit...she says "You look terrible." because we were walking in snow 10 miles and she gave us some soup and kind of revived me but I passed out. I just went to sleep, because I didn't sleep at that time for I think one or 2, three nights. and we went on and we got into a point where they caught stragglers from the Hungarian Army and the German Army and the SS of course and uh...they didn't care who we was...I showed them my uh paper he says "I don't believe it...ahh throw it away." and we were there...they kept us for 2 days, on bread and water.

Interviewer:

Where did they take you?

Lou Rossinger:

Well, it was a concentration point where they were going to...get us up as prisoners of war. Uhh...They didn't take me anywhere, but it was a trap for people walking. It was a main artery for people avoiding...going around from Budapest, you know. Uh...we knew...now that other people, some of them were soldiers, so of them were Germans and they were sorted out and uh fortunately uh I heard a...a lady making a remark in Yiddish and uh I told her and I could communicate with her and she was a Russian ahh she was...I don't know if she was an officer or not but she was a clerk and I said to her...I told her...I says " I don't know what they doing over here but I am not...I found out these people are soldiers and...and I am...I'm not a soldier." She says "Who are you?" and I told her who I was and she told the Col. and he asks her how old I was. He didn't care either...and because I was under 15 they let me go. Not because they should have, but because I was too young.

Interviewer:

Where did you go from there?

Lou Rossinger:

I...this is a story by itself. I began a long trip on foot, which would have been 200 kilometers approximately 300 miles to uh...to my home where I was born. And the ling going backwards and forwards the Germans caught up with me again, they caught us...and we couldn't give them identification or anything and uh they saw...they found...unfortunately I forgot the piece of paper....they found the piece of paper on me that told the story. And uh...to make a long story short, they were speeding everything and everybody up to Austria...they couldn't get back to Germany because the Russians were really getting like flies all over, over there and uh in a few days, these are the latecomers, they took me to Mathausen. I didn't know, but my father was killed there. Which was near Lintz across from Stchyer (SP?) uh big defense plant and uh these were laborer camps for people

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who were strong enough to work in defense plants and uh...young man and uh...it was a...chaos over there when they got in and I was very sharp and one possibility and I was gone. And I got my chance to get away...I was there for....a short three months...

Interviewer:

Describe Mathausen to us.

Lou Rossinger:

You know, I didn't see to much of Mathausen. I...after we got there we...there were a lot of dead people and we knew what was going on. And uh...people said, told us that the the uh guards are ready to move and all the young people are requested to try to see if we can uh take over the camp. I got there in ah time take over the camp. And uh...they got three of us. The guards were getting very thin, it wasn't like it used to be. And these people, we were on a detail work, I remember...cleaning up and carrying uh dead people, you know. And uh. A guard was watching us and he was eating bacon, raw bacon with bread. I guess because he didn't have anything else to eat and he had a long knife and he had...he had a pistol on, but he had his rifle down and he apparently got too lax and he was...they all were drinking and uhm...we had decided and we had a signal...We had decided that we were going to uh try to get him and make a break for it and the other people were ready to make a break. This was in a side area of Mathausen and the gate...the reason the gate was open is because they were pulling out. And uh...one of the boys somehow got behind this guard and uh killed him. But before he killed him he managed to work my thumb with a knife...I didn't have any...I still don't have much feeling in it. But uh he killed him and we got out. Got back again. And I got on a track and I was liberated this time by the 42nd Armor division. The American 42nd Armor division coming up through Austria and uh started another trek back. And uh, I met a very interesting major who guided me. I was sort of a mascot and he says I know that you want to find your family so he says I'm gonna get you well enough to uh...to uh...because we started getting pretty weak.

Interviewer:

Did you meet uh these soldiers on the road as you were leaving...

Lou Rossinger:

Yes, yes yeah, they...they liberated the camp 42nd armor. The major and IHitler Eugen (?SP) camp, near Brown near where Hitler was born... ehh I think its a resort area a kammosherfling (?SP) a very beautiful lake there and then they put us there to rest and get well and they had American Hospital there right next to us so they...kinda got us where we could...we were strong enough you

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

know to be on our own. And I, I uh hitch hiked back sort of to the uh to the Hungarian Border. We didn't know what was going on. But we got back to Hungary and uh it took me 4 weeks to get back to the...to uh Szakoly, the Hungarian town that I was born in.

Interviewer:

What did you find when you go there?

Lou Rossinger:

Nothing. Nobody. Ah if you can imagine Gone with the wind. Everything...what the Germans didn't take the Russians got and they uh...the town...under...sort of like under seige. I went to the place where we were living and uh...uh the neighbor, of course you know, they came and they say they were glad to see me and all of a sudden I see my Mother's belongings worn by some of the people. I went next door, the sewing machine and things that we owned it was in their house and it was a disgusting, nauseating situation. And these people who were neighbors of ours and understanding that they want to be considered friends they let me stay there for a few days until I, I was ready and they were telling me that I got to be careful how I walk or where I walk because there are still Hungarian Nazis who were leaders in uh doing the Gestapo dirty work and they sc, kinda scared me and I didn't have any reason to stay there because I didn't see anybody that I knew alive.

Interviewer:

Do you know how many Jewish people lived in this town?

Lou Rossinger:

In this town....aproximately....50. Approximately 50. Later on I find out that a few came back. Not more than 5. A few came back. Because I got in touch with someone who knew about the situation.

Interviewer:

Were you able to find out what happened to your Mother and your sisters and brothers?

Lou Rossinger:

Oh I uh, I been searching for them, you know, I'm still I am and I haven't been able to...the only thing I know that her group went to Auchwitz and with the 2 young girls she wouldn't separate from she went to Auchwitz and immediately, she wouldn't separate from the girls, immediately they sent her to the gas chambers. My Father was in the same camp that I was in and I didn't know about it. And uh, this business partner of his was with him and those few days that I was there I

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

got word that he wants to see me, he's got information about my Father. I went to see him and he wasn't there and his nephew gave me the message. And uh, nephew didn't want to tell me he told him not to say anything, he told him "Bring him here." I understand that uh he killed a man who abused his family...

Interviewer:

This is your father's friend?

Lou Rossinger:

My Father's friend. When he came, he survived and uh because of it he was in the jail and I went to jail to talk to him and he didn't want to see me. He told his nephew, he says "I don't want to break down, because I know how much his Daddy was thinking of him..." hoping that I would get to the United States to my uncle over here if I survived. And he was hoping and he was strongly feeling that I make it from the family and he told me...I asked him, I ask...i asked his nephew to go back and ask him how he died and he told me that uh he was hit in the head with a riffle butt 2 days before liberation. So approximately the time that I was there or maybe a little later.

Interviewer:

What did you do after you returned home and found everything gone? What did you do then?

Lou Rossinger:

Oh I, I came back, uh the next town... I had a cousin that survived uh in next town of Balkanyah which is approximately 5 miles from there and I stayed with him because he had a huge place he...nobody, you know his grandfather and his mother and father lived there and nobody came back so he had a huge place so I found out that he was alive and uh I went to him and he was glad to see me and I stayed with him for several weeks until uh I decided to come back to Budapest and from Budapest I went back to Austria and uh crossed the uh to the American side you know where I was liberated. And I still had the paper (excuse me) uh that American Officer gave me and I told them I was liberated here and I have business to come over there and they let me across and didn't have any problem. And I was in a DP camp in Austria ah...for over a year ah...until...I wrote a letter to my uncle I remembered his address in West Virginia and I remembered his address, memorized his address because I took a picture, mental picture of the envelopes that he used to send us pre-addressed. I gues..it was stamped. And uh, I wrote him a letter, told him that I was alive and I was the only one from the family and he loved my mother because he was...she was his pet before they came over here. And he started the ball rolling. He got uh...he found out a friend of his son was stationed nearby and send some money with him to me and he look

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

me up. American soldier, he looked me up and told me that my Uncle was trying to do everything that he can to help me and uh few weeks later, I think he got...My uncle got in touch with the embassey staff in Vienna, it was a military attache sort of embassey and in turn they send me messages that uh...A message first that my uncle is in touch with them, to stand by, that I will be going back to United States on a troop carrier. Three days later I was on a truck to...to uh Munich. They processed me in Munich and sailed from Bremmen Haven July the 15th 1946....to a different world.

*****SECOND TAPE BEGINS OVERLAP HERE

Interviewer:

Can you take a few minutes now to tell us how you have de...how you have gone on with your life? You are a young, a young child during all of this and you were alone and now you found yourself in a new place. Tell us how you...carried on with your life.

Lou Rossinger:

You know, when you go through...Mother nature gave me something and I thinkd God gave me several guardian angels all the way through this, because I've been through all sorts of things and's no way anybody could survive it and people don't believe it. I don't talk about it. Is no sense to talk about it unless you have an intelligent person to absorb what you say. It was a bitter beginning because I didn't trust anybody. I still don't trust a lot of people. Uh...I was living with my uncle who sent me to...not speaking English much, you know but words, few wordssend me to school to polish up my language which was nice of him. And uh, I went to Berea College, Berea Kentucky...and the school was a self sufficient school. You could not...you didn't have to have money to..to uh go to school there, you could work your way through. So the first year all they did is taught me English, build up my vocabulary. They put me in the 8th grade and the 9th grade and uh, uh finally about a year and a half after I was there I took the GED test and I passed into the college. But all this time uh, still on my own because I found out that my Uncle's family wasn't exactly uh crazy about me. They were afraid that I was going to take something away from them so uh, I told them that I want to be alone and then the school help me be alone because he didn't have to you had your...you had your lodging, food and books taken care of because you worked. You can be a whole day student, you can be a half day student and people who had a little extra money they were a half day students and I was a whole day...I mean a whole day student and I was a half day student. Work half day and go to school half day.

Interviewer:

And so thats how you...

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

Lou Rossinger:

It makes a tough person out of you. Ah unfortunately the bitter...I have, I can't forget or can't forgive them. Never. And uh, I had a very interesting psychology teacher...who helped me a lot and I used to think in Hungarian and translate it in my mind into English and I was stuck for words sometimes and she asked me if I was uh thinking in my native tongue...and I says yes. She says "try to build up you vocabulary and uh think in English." And I did and thank God I did pretty good.

Interviewer:

Are there any other comments that you'd like to make before we end to, to leave to people in the future?

Lou Rossinger:

Unfortunately it is a constant fight. I found people all the way from Europe to the United States who has to hate. Anti-semitism is a disease. It's a mental disease and uh I have encountered people who didn't know I was Jewish and they were telling me that they don't believe the Holocaust happened. And I was just...just a short reply "Well friend, I think y...y...you better change your mind because you are meeting one right now. You're talking to one." They don't know what to say. And they laugh, sort of a I don't believe you and walk away from you. But...I think it should be taught. I think it should become History and I don't think they should sweep it under the carpet like they do in Germany, like they do in Hungary, like they do in the small countries there now. And I'm afraid that uh the uh situation in Russia...I'm afraid for anti-semitism reviving in all the countries simply because they have to blame somebody. They have to have a scapegoat and its an easy thing to blame it on the Jews. But uh, Isreal...I was going to Isreal. I was in a Kibutz with several children. I didn't tell you that...while I was in Austria in the DP camp. And uh, we were all going to Isreal in 46 and when my Uncle got into the picture it was a different story. He told me...he says "Get an education. Come over here and then if you still want to go to Isreal, you...you should." And uh, I didn't but my son is there. I didn't go there. He's a dual citizen. I've a son, Michael, the oldest son...uh who is a very happy Isreali Citixen. He is now serving with the United, the UN, the United NAtions people in the Isreali Military as a Liaison Officer. He's fluent in Hebrew and Fluent in English and other time when he's not in Service, which he pulled already he's...he is working for Lloyds of London...one of the greatest insurance companies in the world. He's a computer annalyst.

Interviewer:

That's wonderful. One last question I'd like to ask and that is how did you come to South Carolina? And what are you doing today?

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

Lou Rossinger:

It's a long story. Uhm I lived in Atlanta and uh, I met my wife who was from here and I think that's one of the big reasons I'm here. Uh I am semi-retired. I uh used to uh be a factory rep. I had a showroom in Atlanta Merchandise Mart, I used to be factory rep for ladies fashion accessories and uh, I kind of slowed down to maybe 2 or 3 days a week and uh I still wheel and deal in...in fashion accessories 2 days out of the...I'm a self-employed person.

Interviewer:

Lou when you were young at home was your family uh, Jewishly observant?

Lou Rossinger:

Yes, yes, until they couldn't. They had to sustain...and I think the Jewish Rabbis will tell you that when you don't have anything else to eat it's alright to eat the "Traefa" (sp?)

Interviewer:

How do you find your faith has been affected by your experience?

Lou Rossinger:

How do I find...? I'm sorry...

Interviewer:

Your faith. Your, your Jewish life today. How has...

Lou Rossinger:

Oh I had, I think a lot and I am putting my memoirs down, and I don't know one of these days I'll, I'll finish my book. But...I am angry at God.and Uh you might find this terrible, I believe in God because I prayed when I was penned down in that area where I was talking to you about. We didn't know...we didn't think we going to make it alive. We felt like if we leave one side they gonna either shoot us or the other side is going to shoot us. And I prayed and I said "Oh God help me!" Because everybody prays when they know they gonna die, most everybody if they have a chance. I will fast 2 days. I'm shamed to tell you that I di...

Interviewer:

You made a promise, you made a promise to God that you would fast?

Lou Rossinger:

I had done one day, I didn't do 2 days. And uh, they tell me that it is alright. You can do it anytime between now and the end of your life.

Rossinger Interview Cont'd

Interviewer:

Lou, thank you so much for sharing your story with us.

Lou Rossinger:

My pleasure. I want people to know.