

JOSEPH GABOR

HUNGARY/RUSSIA/ISRAEL/CANADA

WORLD WAR II

Interviewed by

Renia Perel

&

Tali Hyman

(March 3, 1991)

Original Text Transcribed from Tapes
for

THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

©THE WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF HOLOCAUST
SURVIVOR-FAMILIES & FRIENDS
1995

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

INTERVIEWEE: Joseph GABOR (G)

DATE OF RECORDING: March 3, 1991

FILE NUMBER: 010-3

TRACK NUMBER: T1-S1

INTERVIEWERS: Renia Perel (P), & Taly Hyman (H)

G: I was born in 1914 in Hungary and, uh, very early of my life age I find that what it does mean to be a Jew in Hungary. Actually, before I was born, in October, my father had been taken, ordered to the army, in July and the First [World] War started.

I'm coming from a family when I had my brother and three of my sisters and, uh, when the war is ended in 1918 we find out that the new regime which is started in Hungary it was not very rosy for the Jewish people. Admiral Miklós Horthy who took the power after the war, started his reign in Hungary with the killing of the Jewish people actually. Especially in Sheofolk, Orgevine, Diesel, those are the places when his army started to kill the Jews, blaming them [the Jews] by losing the war, blaming them everything which is went wrong in Hungary due to the First [World] War.

Their [Holty's army] way of going after the Jews was that daytime they [the army] killed and night time they robbed the houses and put them on the fire. There's a lot of Jewish people have been killed in Sheofolk and Diesel, which is a close town to Tapolca when I was leaving they [the army] took the Jewish womens and by their long hair they [army] knotted their [women's] hair to the tail of the horses and they started to beat the horses, they run and they pulled after

themselves the womens until they died. We have been with my parents four days in a cellar and the only way that we were escaped the killing was the lucky because in the house where we lived there was a policeman who was a very good so-called Christian person who said that nobody will enter this house without my permission. And that was the way how we survived. Actually my mother was kneading dough for bread when the atrocities started in the city, and we rushed down to the cellar and she put her hands on my head and on my hair had been full with dough and after the four days they had to wash my hair because everything would stick together from the dough. Very sticky but that's what happened. So under this milieu we lived in Tapolca. At the age of six I went to the Jewish school...we had a Jewish elementary school. Tapolca is a relatively important city in Zala county, it's about 10 - 12,000 people lived in that time there were about 300 Jewish family. We had a very nice Conservative synagogue and we had a Jewish elementary school. I finished with this Jewish elementary school. My father, when the war was over, actually before the war, I have to jump back a little bit. Y'know on my place where I was born, in Ohid, we, my parents actually, rented the mill and they operated the mill and when my father went to the war my mother had to give up the business and we moved to Tapolca actually with my brother and sisters and when my father came home, actually they had to start the life completely from the beginning again and since my father had a very good nice voice he went and learned to be a cantor. And when he finished the school we went to live to Mezöberény, that is in Békés county. Then I finished my (pause)...I don't

know how to say that in English actually.

P: Say it in any language.

G: No, no, it's a four year school.

P: Gymnasium?

G: Not 'gymnasium.' Gymnasium's eight years. It is eight years which I had after then. But prior to that is a four year school we call that polgári. Polgári, in Hungarian that is...

P: How old were you?

G: Ten. From ten to fourteen.

P: Intermediate.

G: Okay. Four years intermediate school [elementary or primary school] and from there I went to finish my gymnasium which is another eight years when I had my senior matriculation. [High-school graduation].

P: Senior matriculation in college?

G: Well, that's a different school system. Uh, I wanted to continue my education, but unfortunately at that time in Hungary was 'Numerus Nullus' [Latin] which is means they did not take any Jew to the university. Jew was not allowed to the university. Way back in the early 1920's in Hungary was a 'Numerus Clauses' [Latin] which made [only] 5% of the total university student population could have been Jewish. But later on they eliminated that too and this [thus] came 'Numerus Nullus.' That means no Jews was accepted at all. So, in 1933 I went, one of my sister's home...I'll put it another way. In 1932, one of my sisters married and, uh, when I finished my school in 1933 I went to their home for a summer vacation which is near Budapest. The name of the place is Pomaz. Actually from that place I started my working career

because I wanted to start to do something. I don't wanted to go back to my parents home and live there so I started to work. I went to work as a simple worker in a weaving factory. I worked from evening 6:00 until the next morning 6:00, working on the machines. I couldn't make much money out of it so I saw in the newspaper, they looked, in another town which is Ujpest...office helper. So I went there, applied for the job, I got the job, and I started to work and I was working there about six weeks when they say that they are closing the business and they had no money to pay my salary and I had no money to pay the rent, I had no money to live so I went to work immediately to a leather factory as a fur [furrier - one who makes, repairs, etc., fur garments], fur leather factory, which made furs...the name of the factory is very well known in all Europe. Panonia...that's the name. Fur factory. Then I worked as a simple worker again. And that's the way how I paid my rent and finally I got pneumonia because I was working 15 - 16 hours a day, [pause, tears], sick and I had no other choice I had to go back to my parents home. Again I read an add in the newspaper, they were looking for again an office helper in Budapest. So I applied and I got the job and actually that was the place when I was working until the Second World War started and they took me to the army.

P: How old were you when they took you to the army?

G: Well, it was '42...not army...concentration camp...I mean not camp, but forced labour. I was 28. So in this company I made a very nice career actually. They [the company] like my work very much and I started with a very, very, very limited salary which is really barely covered my daily food and the only

reason why I could survive it was because I lived with one of my sister who was married and lived in Budapest so they [his sister and brother-in-law] gave me the shelter and the food, whatever they could afford. But, the company like me very much and I progressed very nicely and actually when I reached the age of 24 they had a leather factory also, this company in Ujpest, they put me actually in the manager of the leather factory, that was a very high job because I had the right to sign cheques for everything, like the, like the, we call that in Europe Per-Procura[-tion] (power of attorney). That mean I had the right to sign the bank in the name of the company, I had the right to write cheques in the name of the company so I was a very high position and my salary at that time was so wonderful that actually many pay cheques on three families doesn't made the same salary what I made that time. So, in 1941 I married with my present wife who was at that time 17 and I was closer to 27 and thanks God, she's...we are living together and very soon we are going to celebrate our 50th anniversary. And in 1941 we married. 1942, February, my son was born and 1942, May, they [Hungarian Army] took me to the forced labour camp.

So my son was three months and a few weeks old when they took me. Actually 12 weeks old exactly and uh, I had to go Nagykáta. I shall write it down for you...its's a very famous place, Nagykáta, when very, very famous general was charge on this place, the name of the general was Muray. I wrote it down there. By the way the gentleman had been hanged after the war. This Muray had been hanged after the war. This gentleman was very famous on a way that this place, this

Nagykáta, whoever gone there, very few came back. Very, very few.

P: So it was famous for destructive purposes.

G: Ya. The place. This Muray, he was charge on it. It was a place when, for instance, this Muray told us when we were lining up in a row that you are going to the Front [i.e. to battle] before we left, you are going to the front, you don't need all these things what you took with yourself, to take with you, because you are not coming back. We are not accountable for you people. We can do whatever we want with you people. And they did. So we were there until July. And in July they sent us to Kiev. To Russia actually. We belonged, I mean our battery, our forced labour group, belonged to one of the Hungarian, the 12th division of the Hungarian army. The purpose of us would have been there to do for this division, every kind of work, whatever they desired. Now when we arrived to Kiev our first station was in Kiev, in Ukraine, and in Kiev, when we went off of the train, we had to open our bags, whatever we had there and put it everything on the earth [i.e. ground] there on the front of us and, uh, army police...

P: Which army?

G: Hungarian army police. Actually that was a army gendarmerie came and they took whatever they wanted. They choose whatever they wanted, they took away the razors, or whatever they liked, they took away.

P: The little possessions.

G: Everything...everything. And if anybody made even the slightest movement, they [i.e. the army police] beat them up

immediately. Without question asked they beat them up, some of them [the prisoners] have been beaten up so badly that they cannot move after that. And in Kiev, they [the army police?] ask if anybody has any special profession, I mean working profession, not accountant or lawyer or something like this.

P: A trade?

G: A trade. Any trade. I had a friend of mine with me who used to work in building houses and made the woodwork in the houses. You know, the roof.

P: A carpenter?

G: Not carpenter. Like a carpenter, but he's not a carpenter. A roofer. Something like this. It was not his trade, but he used to work and he said, "Come Yoshka," that was my name, "Come Yoshka, tell them that we are these roofmakers." So we said, "We are roofmakers," and we stepped ahead and they said, "Okay, come." So they choose all kind of these trade people out. They took us out from our battalion, our group and the rest of our group went further way inside Russia, not very far from Moscow actually about 200 km, something like this. The name of the place if I correctly remember is Seredina Buda. It's in the Bryansk forest. This Bryansk forest is huge forest, it's about 600 km long and it's about 70 km wide, it's almost coming from Moscow, not far from Moscow down to Kiev.

P: It's famous.

G: All the way. All the way down. So they went there and we went and stayed in Kiev. They [There] have there a carriage factory. They made carriages for the army.

P: For horse and buggy?

G: Carriages, worn by horses. That was a factory there in Kiev

and they took us there. Well, actually I can't complain. I had a good time. A year there in Kiev because we had shelter, we had food, we could wash ourselves and actually they hadn't been harsh for us, anything...nothing was really, I cannot really remember any atrocities which was mind you one of our colleagues wanted to escape and uh, he [?] killed him. Actually that caused because he wanted to escape otherwise they wouldn't do it. They didn't do any harm for us at that place.

P: So you were under the administration and observation of the Hungarian...

G: Hungarian army. The 12th division of the army. And uh, well, I said we didn't do anything wrong. That's actually not true because they did according to the law we had to have the same treatment like the regular army infantry had. That mean they had to give us cigarettes, they had to give us regularly the food, they had to give us the drink what they gave, but cigarette and drink they never gave. They didn't pay for us. They did just give us the shelter and the daily food...that's all. Nothing else. So actually the rest it was stolen.

P: So you were like slave labour.

G: Slave labour. That was slave labour. Forced slave labour.

P: Now excuse me I just, I don't want the historical background or anything, but just to, in reference to this Hungarian army, so, were they in collaboration with the Nazi regime. Otherwise what were they doing in Kiev?

G: You are right. The Hungarians cooperated with the Nazis on a way that when Hitler went to invade Poland in 1939, September, when the war actually started, then the Hungarians also went

together with the Germans in the war. So they were cooperating with the Germans on every respect.

P: They were in alliance.

G: In alliance, right. And by concerning the Jews I can tell you that if the Germans was Nazis the Hungarians was much worse. Like after the war there had be more communist than Stalin. Before the war they [the Hungarians] were more Nazis like the Nazis. They hated the Jews. Always. Very badly, very badly as I referred from the beginning that in 1918 they already started to kill the Jews, blaming everything on the Jews, whatever has happened. And all the time. Then came the 'Numerus Nullus' and so on, they were after the Jews, they didn't like the Jews and when then came the Nazi system as you will see later, they were worse like the Nazis, actually exactly in Kiev happened the following accident that was very well-know that the roads in Russia and in Ukraine it was terrible, terrible. When the rains came then the carriages went into the earth. They could not move. The horses cannot move them out. They were sinking. So it happened that one loaded army carriage came and they sank into the mud. The horses could not pull them out. So the Hungarian soldiers took us to pull out the carriage and obviously it was very, very difficult so they beat at us from the behind, "Pull forward, stronger, stronger." So badly that came suddenly a German officer and he asked the Hungarian soldier. "What are you doing here with these people? Don't you see that they cannot. They are not animals. Bring a truck and pull it out." So actually even the German officer came to defend us against this crazy 'son of a gun.' So that was the Hungarian

mentality. Obviously there have been a few exceptions. I am not saying that everybody was so bad. But, the general tendency, that was (sigh).

So I was in Kiev (sigh) there's a very interesting story. I have to say that here. Obviously quite a few persons were there and uh, we are living here, on the Penny Farthing Drive and in the garage when my wife's car parking there is another lady and a gentleman's car is parking there, it's a very interesting worthwhile to make a note of it, and it came out they are Hungarians accidentally, and we started to talk and the man said his name and I said my wife, "I know this name." He's a young fellow, he's a 39 year's young fellow. I said, "I know this name. I know this name. I don't know from where I know this name. Maybe the school, maybe from Budapest, maybe from the forced labour camp, but I know this name," and even I told the other name "Pal." That was the name of the guy. Long story short, it came out that this guy father was with me at the same place there in Kiev and even I have a picture with him together with his father who is living now in Toronto.

P: And he was in the labour camp?

G: The father. I have been in the 101 Per ten battalion in Nagykáta and he was 101 Per eleven. But we went out together and also he came out and stayed in this carriage factory. He was working there and I was working there and accidentally we have a picture together. The guy, this young guy was not born yet, but his father was not married yet at that time. So I showed the guy. "It is your father," he said. "It is not my father." so he told on the phone to his father that this guy

and he said. "Ya, ya, it's me."

P: What an interesting story!

G: So, we were in Kiev for a year. Then always say that we have to go home, that they want to exchange us and sending a change of battery and exchange of people here, but never arrived. So one day they ask us. "We are opening another carriage factory in Chernigov. Who wants to go to Chernigov?" And I said, "I'm going there. It's boring here. I'm going there. That's enough for me here. I'm going there." So I stepped ahead. I went to Chernigov. And I was two weeks in Chernigov when I hear that in Kiev they closed the factory and everybody sent...

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE 1

INTERVIEWEE: Joseph GABOR (G)

DATE OF RECORDING: March 3, 1991

FILE NUMBER: 010-3

TRACK NUMBER: T1-S2

INTERVIEWERS: Renia Perel (P), & Taly Hyman (H)

G: ...Imagine my feeling. (Pause) Can you imagine my feeling. I am there, I am here. Why did I came out from here? Why couldn't I stay there? They went home...everybody went home. So can you imagine my feeling. I am there and the rest went home.

P: Describe your feelings. Take time out.

G: I said, "I'm losing my mind." Why did I do that! Why I didn't stay there! Why? Anyway, so, I tried to not think about it at all. Now I have to say here that actually I was very lucky that I didn't come home because these people who sent home they really discharged them, everybody went home their family. But a month later they called them in again and they took them to Bor in Yugoslavia, a copper mine, and none of them came home. They died, all of the there. So actually, but at that time I didn't know that. Nobody knows that. My wife didn't know that. By the way, my wife and my parents and my family didn't know too much about me because we could not write them and they cannot write us. I mean they [his family] could write us, but we didn't get the mail. In concerning that I will say something about that. The only thing what we could do we get a red, pinkish-red postcard which is printed. "I feel okay, I am all right" and we had only the right to sign our name and the address on the other side. So what I

did, every month we had the right to send this card, but not every month we got the card. But whenever we got I send one to my wife and another one I send my parents. And uh, anyway, later. And one day, despite the fact that we did not get mail, one day, one of the army guy came to me and he had in his hand three pictures, two from my son and one of my wife. One of my wife. He said, "This letter came to you from your wife," he came to me and he said, "You got a letter. I cannot give you the letter. But I have no heart to throw out these three pictures. Your son is so beautiful. Your wife is so young. Here. Keep them." So I had the pictures. I still have them and my wife picture. But otherwise we didn't get mail. Actually the other mail what I got is I still have it was my last card from my father, my parents before they deported them.

P: How lucky we are that you still have these pictures because this would be very valuable if you'd ever consent to give a copy to put it in the book.

H: Your son was one year old at the time?

G: He was born in 1942 so he was one and a half years old. He really was a beautiful little boy. And uh, so that was, I went in Chernigov and uh...

P: This was before Chernigov?

G: That was in Kiev, right. It was in Kiev. Well, it's coming back from one word to another, jumping back and forth. I'm sorry about that.

P: That's fine. Don't be sorry for anything. Everything is being recorded and we'll edit it out.

G: So, I'm in Chernigov now and uh, I have no more choice. I

stayed in Chernigov. I accepted that they'd gone home. But still in Chernigov I still had a lot, a very good life. I was working at the machines. Like a carpenter actually. There, I cut my finger here. It's missing a piece. Still missing a piece from my finger what the machine cut it off from me here. This part. The machine. This part. It cut it off. not a big deal. And uh, one day I was taking a shower, because there was even a shower there. I was taking a shower. It was late summer. Even I had no time to dry myself. There came an order that immediately everybody were these people whose working as, I don't know how you call that in English, whatever it is, they call that labourer, labour service man. Jewish obviously, "Come together." So I just put a little cloth what I had around my feet and put my shoes on it and rushed there back to the original battalion. We had to send back because you see, in the meantime, the people who went to Seredina Buda died, they killed them and always, from another battalion who always had leftovers. They filled them up. You know what I mean? We went out 214 people. From these 214 people, as far as I know, eight of us came home. Nobody else. Now, but, the 214 always was together because they filled up from other battalions which also the people died or killed. You could not be sick there. If at once you said, "I sick, I cannot do the work." They said they are taking you to the doctor, but they took you twenty feet away or thirty yards away and bingo. Dead.

P: And they destroyed you?

G: Fired. Shot. They killed them! You cannot be sick there. And a lot of people died from the typhus [disease spread by

lice]. There was no medication there. Plus, everybody was full with lice and so on. I find it out and I say just to you, they collected us together and sent us back to old battalion.

P: That's to the Seredina Buda?

G: Well, it was not Seredina Buda at that time already because they moved from there, but I don't remember on the place exactly, but I can tell you after. That's why I brought this book with me because I mark all these places when we were wandering because from there, from start from there, we never stopped. We never stopped.

So, they send us back to the battalion and uh, as I said I had a shower. I had no time to dry even my foot. By walking about four or five miles my heel is broken. Y'know? You are getting blisters because you are wet and you are walking on it and so on. Right. It got so bad that actually I could not sit down because if I would I could not get up any more. So, one of my colleagues took away my little baggage what I had left over because I could not handle any more. So we went to our battalion and needless to say that within a few days I had been full with lice like everybody else because there was no more water, there was no more room to live, you live wherever you had, on straw, or under the sky. Wherever you have been. There was no chance to wash yourself or take care about yourself. You really lived from today-tomorrow and you didn't worry about anything else, just you are getting the food you are getting the bread or you are not getting the food your are not getting the bread. That was the only. You did not think about survival or not survival. You lived like an animal.

Believe me.

H: This was 1943?

G: It was 1943 already and uh, in the autumn of 1943 and uh, we wandered. We wandered a lot of places.

P: When you say "we" could you identify who the "we" were? The battalion, the Hungarian, or just the Jews?

G: The army as well! If you remember. I don't know exactly the date when it is happening in Stalingrad. When the big fight went on and the Russians are beating up the Germans. And the same time also, or later in Kursk, we have been there. In Kursk, the Russians are come through to the front. They broke the front. From that time it was no time to stop. I mean stopping only one place we stopped at once a few months. I will tell you that the Pripet [Pripet Marshes] quicksand. You should know about the Pripet Brest-Litovsk. I was there at the Pripet, you know what is...

H: Quicksand.

G: Quicksand [not quicksand, but marshland, waterlogged region - "swampland"]. When you cannot go on it because you are going down. But this quicksand, that the Pripet quicksand [marshes], it's a place when actually trees are growing I don't know, over how many thousands of years. Seeds started. So around the trees there is a little earth still there, but you cannot dip your wood probably ten centimetres, four inches, and it is already water there. And that was the place when the Germans and the Hungarians made up a front against the Russians, because the Russians doesn't want to rush into it and that was the place when they can stop. So that was the place where we stopped. Otherwise we could not stop until

there, the Russians decided that they are coming over that place. When they come over the Pripet [Marshes] then we couldn't stop way back until I arrived back to Hungary. But that's a long story still there. So I brought here a map with Russia and I made...I can tell you the name of the place that went there. Obviously I was in Kiev, we started in Kiev. I was in Chernigov.

P: Shall we hold for a while and then write?

G: My own battalion, my own group. We never could stop. We went from place to place like I detailed that there. I don't know much more that we went, but the longest place what we spent it was in the Pripet sands when we spent about two or three months and uh, here is happened that since we were lying on the earth and it was wet we tried to put something under us and not far from us we saw a barn. It was an open barn, but the top was made from straw, covered, made from straw.

P: A [thatched] roof?

G: A roof. But it made from straw. It has a special name. I don't know. In Hungarian it has a special name, but anyway, so we said, okay, let's take that. It was nobody's. It was empty, put it under us, from the roof, put it under us and not lay on the floor. I mean on the earth. So we started to pull these straw off and came a lieutenant, a Hungarian lieutenant and he asked, "What are you people doing?" And we said what we are doing, "We want to put something under us." He said, "Well, it's not under my responsibility. I don't care. You can take it, but you must remember one thing. We are waiting [for] horses to come. We are getting horses. And those horses have to put somewhere and if that horses have no roof

above their head they get sick and they will die. You people can survive much easier like the horses. Leave them alone." So we had no choice. We leave the straw there and we went back to our place. So in these uh, one night, one early morning actually we wake up in these place and big, big fire. The war goes on, the Russians are coming through this marshland and the army...anybody started to run as they have been in underwear. Some had no time even to take even their coat. Nothing. And Brest-Litovsk is there in the city and between this marshland is a highway which is a uh, how you call that, cover on the highway, what is the name...

H: Pavement?

P: Asphalt?

G: Asphalt. Asphalt covered. And you cannot get out from this asphalt. If you are jumping off this asphalt you are jumping into the marshland which is, you can move, then you are dying there. And we went there and the Russians came. The Russia...the airplane they called the "Rota" like the Germans had the "Messerschmitt," the Russians had the Rota [possibly the "Sturmovik" - ground attack planes] and they thrown out, they fly very low and they throw out the five kilo little bombs on our head and killed people like flies. A lot, a lot of also Hungarian soldiers, but a lot of our free people died there. A lot. Very lot. And we could not help them. There's nothing we can do. And one of my friend who was dying there and I was sitting beside him. I couldn't do anything. He was bleeding. He said, "I am weakening." I said, "Ya, you will be okay, don't worry, you will be okay, everything will be okay." "I'm weakening, weakening." So he died finally.

Nobody could help anybody.

P: And you were sitting and watching your friend die?

G: I had his head in my hand so (makes motion to show how).

P: And you were on that road when that bomb fell.

G: Ya, the Brest-Litovsk highway.

P: It was just that it didn't hit you.

G: That was a poor luck. That was poor luck. Who got who didn't get. That was poor luck. Nothing, nothing, nothing. He's not the Germans, he's not the Hungarians, he was the enemy, "so-called." They came and they throw, they saw lots of army there. It was Germans, it was Italians, it was everybody. They throw these little 5 kilos bombs. It was like rain came down. And when one finished came another one. It went two or three hours when these attack, a lot, a lot of people died.

P: So on which side did you remain with this dead friend. Or, did you have to move on and leave him.

G: No, no. I leave him. He was dead already. All of us stayed there, everybody stayed wherever they was until the attack was over. There was no use to run because there was no where to run.

H: Do you remember the friend's name.

G: Mandel. I don't know the other name, I don't remember. Mandel was his name.

P: His first name was Mandel?

G: Family name. M-A-N-D-E-L. I don't remember the first name. So it was not a picnic. Because you cannot jump off from the highway because you are jumping into the Pripet [Marsh]. I mean the quicksand. Or you stayed there. So, poor luck. Somebody like, that was the first time I had another second

chance later on. It was a miracle that I survived. That was miracle here. Whoever survived it was a miracle! I mean, it's...So, after the attack we went forwards, obviously.

P: You didn't retreat?

G: No, there's no retreat. Russia was there! There was no room to retreat because the Russians were always behind you. I can tell you that is started roughly in September '44 it is started in '44, spring, something like this. We had no, very early spring, we had no time to eat the soup, whatever, if they gave us soup because the Russians came so close all the time. We had to go all the time. The only place was this Malorita what I said before, when somehow the Russians got tired and they gave up to come after us and we were sitting there. We had a little break. And this Malorita, it's a very important place because in this Malorita it's happened that we got the order again that the Russians are coming. We have to go out. It was in 1944, March 19th. It was a very, very important day in my life because on this day we hear that the Germans came into Hungary and took the power in Hungary and started to deport the Jews from Budapest and the surroundings. And that was the day that my parents and my whole family, actually fairly into the time, I don't know when they were deported really, I don't know, but that was the date when the future had been stamped on a way that they finally ended up in Auschwitz.

So in 1944, March 19 in Malorita we got the order to retreat further. And they have been suspicious and they were right, actually, that the partisans, the Russian partisans are mined the road. Every road. Mine. You put the mines under it.

The dirt road as well as the regular road. And they put us on the front to go and if the mine is exploding then we should explode not the army.

P: To clear the mines?

G: Not clear. Just go. If actually another friend of mine who actually was killed there by a mine and we find only a tiny piece of meat [i.e. human flesh] like this and we put in a match box and we put in the earth [ground]. So they sent us through to the mines. We don't know if I'm stepping if I'm exploding or not. Who exploded, exploded. We went forward. The army followed us on a place whenever we went through.

P: How many of you were there to walk this line?

G: 200 people. 150 people. 200 people.

P: And how many do you think survived that mining field.

G: I should say probably ten or twelve exploded. Ten or twelve died there. Ya, ya, ya.

P: And what was the name of the friend that you buried in the explosion?

G: I don't know. That I don't know. I only knew that he was not belong to my original group. As I said before we always filled up with leftover other people. So I don't know. We were together, but we don't know each other any more. Even we had no time to acquaint with each other because we always moved. And some of them always missed. You didn't miss the people you didn't know. There always came another one. And you must understand one thing. All these experience make you do not feel anything. You don't feel any more. I mean doesn't matter who is coming beside me. Who cares about it! Tomorrow won't be there any more. Coming another one. Like

the French Foreign Legion if you read ever any stories about them. They gone, come another one, they don't know they have no past, no future, they don't know. Same story. I knew only this guy parents had a Konditorei in Budapest and I know the place when they had the Konditorei but, you know what is Konditorei. How you call that in English. Pastry shop.

H: What was in the matchbox that you buried?

G: We put a piece of meat [human flesh] that we found from him. The only reason that we knew, I mean, because it's happened beside us and a piece of it fell on the front of us so we pick it up, put in a matchbox and buried into the earth. That was rather I mean, for your own sake. You made it for yourself. So that Malorita was famous because in this place we learned, I learned that the Germans took over Hungary actually. And at that time the famous Adolf Eichmann, you know about that I'm sure you know about Adolf Eichmann who was hanged in Israel was taken over the Jewish deportation in Budapest. (deep sigh)

P: Excuse me. I want just for a moment to go back to this burial with the match. What did actually happen? Like you opened the bit of earth and I mean, how did you do it? Just describe the burial, for history.

G: Ya, well, we took, picked up a piece of meat [human flesh] which fell on the ground in front of us. We took a matchbox and with the hand made a little hole and put in the earth. We had no time to make a ceremony there.

H: Just for Kavod (honour)?

G: Ya, just for Kavod or for your own sake. Because you saw probably yourself a little bit there in it.

- P: No. I'm sorry. I just wanted to for posterity.
- G: I don't like to emphasize these things because they remind me of the movie when we are in Malorita actually we went through on this and from that time we did not stop until we arrived in Warsaw. We went nonstop actually - many, many times they wanted to give us a soup and they could not, even the soup, because the Russians came in was firing on us. I mean not us, particularly the Jewish, but the army so we couldn't stop. It was actually so bad at that time we had no food, no water and the only thing what I myself ate over two days, or three days, I don't remember really exactly, that the leaves of the pine tree because we went in the forest we tried to avoid the main roads. We went through the forests. I chewed the leaves on the pine trees. That gives some little saliva in the mouth. And finally I saw a little lake, something like a lake. A little water there and on the side was a horse dead in the water. It was already puffed up. The body of the horse you know.
- H: Decomposed?
- G: Ya, decomposed. And beside the horse I went there and drink from the water because we didn't see water actually. So, it was very, very bad.
- P: You drank the water?
- G: I drank the water. I didn't think about it. It was water! It was life. Never mind the horse. It was life.
- H: Can I ask now...you were with this battalion. The Hungarian army. What were you doing while you were retreating. I was wondering what would be the use to the Hungarian army to have this Jewish group...

- G: Nothing. They run as well as we run.
- H: So you weren't holding them back.
- G: No, no, no. We run. We had to go with them. They used, in Malorita they used us as a mine. And whenever a carriage stopped we had to pull out or put the bags on the carriage and clear the carriage. So, any kind of work. Whatever had to be done. They used us.
- P: So you were the labour force. Slave labour.
- G: Yes. The forced labour camp. That was the name of it. Forced labour camp. And we arrived to Warsaw and uh, at evening actually. It was very late daytime, already it was early evening. And when we arrived in Warsaw the Stalin candles started to burn. The Russians, when they came to bomb a city at night they thrown out like a candle which was burning and gave a very bright light and they saw the targets. So we called that, they called that Stalin candle.
- H: And after the candle would come the bomb.
- G: They came in the same time. The candle they throwed was lit in the airplane. They throwed it down and they throwed the bombs down. The see, they saw the targets as much as they saw. So we arrived at the city and suddenly we saw that the Stalin candles started to light and the bombers started to bomb so everybody run wherever they could. Nobody stopped us. Nobody stopped anybody. So we run. And uh, about three of us, or four of us, we ran into a highrise apartment in the cellar of the highrise apartment and obviously the people who lived in that apartment was there too.
- H: And this is n Warsaw.
- G: Warsaw. And I can tell you that I thought the Hungarians are

anti-Semites. I can tell you. If anybody anti-Semites, the Polish are anti-Semites. They should be burned alive. All of them, together with the Hungarians. Terrible. Under these conditions, they didn't know that we are Jewish, these people there, because we had our dress like the Hungarian army except we had the yellow sárga szalag (yellow ribbon - Magen David), but we took it off. And these people there said, "That's the Jews." There already there was no Jew in Poland. They'd already killed the Jewish in Poland. They already the Germans finished every Jew whatever. They still blamed the Jews and they said so many bad things about the Jews that I'm surprised today even that we could stand up and don't say nothing, and don't say nothing.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE 2

INTERVIEWEE: Joseph GABOR (G)

DATE OF RECORDING: March 3, 1991

FILE NUMBER: 010-3

TRACK NUMBER: T2-S1

INTERVIEWERS: Renia Perel (P), & Taly Hyman (H)

G: About Poland you should know there have been in Poland also partisan groups. Two kind of partisan groups. Pro-German and pro-Russian. And if by any chance one of us escaped and by mistake went to the pro-German partisans it was a death sentence. They didn't give you to the Germans. They killed you on the spot. So it was out of the question that you can escape in Poland. In Russia if you could escape to the partisans, you went, but in Poland you couldn't do it because you had the risk that you are getting into the pro-German Polish partisan group and that was the death for you sir. That next morning after this attack by the Russians we got together again, the whole group, and we went about 18 km from Warsaw to Nasielsk. In this Nasielsk they put us on a train. Until now all this way to Kursk to other cities and all over the place is went by foot. We were walking. But now they put us on the train. And they said that the twelfth division of the Hungarian army is already not there. They already in Nagyvarad. So we have to go to Nagyvarad. This Nagyvarad is presently under the Romanian rule, but it used to be under Hungarian rule before the First [World] War. So the twelfth division already there and we belong to the twelfth division, whoever the remain of these people has to go there. So they put us on a train to go there. Yes, but, there's a lot of

Germans and Italians who were running from the front. They needed the train also. So obviously they don't wanted to prefer the Jewish takeout from before. They wanted to Germans and the Italians. So what we did, whoever we bought from the Russians and the Hungarian soldiers cigarettes. Because we bought. We gave out bread for that because I was working for myself. And I said myself, "I am keeping my nerves or I am eating the bread." It is not a time to quit the cigarettes. When you make you nervous anyway plus you are nervous. So I rather give the bread to cigarettes. Many of us did that. So we had cigarettes. So we put together about 500 cigarettes and we gave it to the German person who made the order which train is leaving first. So we bribed this German. Because they don't have either cigarettes. The whole German army was in complete disarray already so everybody run. So he give order that our train can leave immediately nonstop.

H: It's already late 1944.

G: It's in 1944. June. Or late May or June. Yes, and we went out. The train went about an hour or something like this when we got again an attack by the Russians with the airplane. We weren't even out completely from the 'Naziar' station actually. Stopped again. And I was sitting there in that wagon and suddenly my coat was off and my shirt was open, I was sitting there and they throw the bombs and everything and suddenly I realized that the other train beside us is full with army supplies. So if one of the bombs is getting that train the whole thing will explode. So I jumped out from the wagon and the very second when I jumped out I felt something is hitting my shirt and I felled onto the floor, the earth,

and the machine gun, the bullet from the machine gun went through on my shirt and went into the earth. So that was my second miracle escape from the dead actually. First in Brest-Litovsk, second in that time. I kept that bullet almost until I came home, but the Russians took it away from me later. Then when the Russian attack was over and our train started to move and we went nonstop until we arrived back to Hungary to Kassa [in Czechoslovakia?]. We have been there until late October. On October 15th, in 1944, in the meantime obviously, my parents, my whole family, everybody was deported. I didn't know that. We didn't know that.

H: And you wife?

G: My wife and my son lived in Budapest and they and my mother-in-law had a maid and that maid had a sister who lived in Gödöllő and this sister was willing to hide my wife and my son. Obviously they got money for it. And they were there. Now I have to tell you here a little bit from their stories that in Budapest also the Germans and the Hungarians took the young people without the general deportation and they put the women and the young girls and they sent them to west, to Austria, in concentration camps like Dachau and Majdanek and other places. And my wife was called also. She went. They called them to the Tishok stadium, in Budapest, and uh, she was there with the rest and she left my son, or our son with my mother-in-law, with her mother. My wife is a petite little, very nice lady and at that time she was even nicer because she was younger. And one of the guards there who was an anti-Semite, anti-Jewish and pro-Nazi started to talk to my wife and my wife, I don't know how it came, but my wife told

she's married. He said, "No, you are not married you are a kid." "No, no, I have a son." "Ah, you are kidding." And my wife took out the picture and showed the guy to my son picture and the guy looked at you and he said, "Get away from me, get away from here, go home, go home." So he threw her out, he sent her out. The rest of the people gone, we never saw them again. So that was another miracle. What was the reason that guy sent out my wife from there. What was it exactly that she was sent away.

P: That she should be the last one.

G: Right. That was another miracle. So my wife went to live with my son, to Gödöllő with this lady and this lady had another son. A small child and they started to play together with my son. And I don't know how they made it, but this little guy, probably a lot bigger like my son, put a match in my son's penis. Pushed in it and it's got inflamed. So he [my son] gets sick. And my wife had no choice. She has to go to see a doctor. So she took my son, she went to a doctor in Gödöllő. And Gödöllő was very famous that the mayor, the 'Olispan' - bigger like a mayor - Government of the region there. He was the biggest anti-Semite in Hungary. He was very famous for that. And she went and she saw the doctor, and said to the doctor - she was a lady doctor - and she said, "Look, I can tell you that we are Jewish. My son is very sick. Help him. And if you want you can report us." If she would report they would have deported immediately. So she said nothing. She treated my son. He get healthy, but she did not report her. As a matter of fact, if I remember correctly even she didn't take money for the visit.

H: Who did that to your son?

G: My son, was, it was 1944, he was 2 years old.

H: Who did it to him?

G: I'm telling you. The other boy. The lady who hid them had also a boy and they played together and I guess he was older and y'know.

P: And he burned him?

G: No. Put a match into his penis. To the ureter. Y'know. And it gets inflamed. Get an infection. So anyway, where I am. In Kassa (presently Slovakia). So in Kassa we have been in October '44, 15th of October 1944. Horthy [Admiral] who was the governor [President] of Hungary, made the proclamation that Hungary is not supporting any more the Germans and getting out from the war. Therefore, no more difference between Jew and non-Jew and all these laws are eliminated and that's it. So, our battalion, the first-lieutenant was our superior there...

P: Do you remember his name?

G: I don't remember. I know he was a teacher, but I don't remember his name.

H: When was this?

G: October 15th, 1944. Came the proclamation of Horthy. That everybody equal. No more concentration camp sending, no more forced labour. Everybody equal. Horthy announced it. So the superiors said, "Okay you people are equal like any other army men, so they gave us arms [weapons] whatever they had, in case the Germans are attacking us. Let's defend ourselves. Everybody get whatever. I got a hand-grenade or two hand-grenades because not everybody had arms. Whatever it was they

gave it to us. And that was on 15th of October. 16th or 17th of October came Szálasi, the Hungarian Hitler. But immediately after he was the leader of the Hungarian Arrow [Cross] group. An arrowcross. That was like the Kakhenkreuz [the Nazis]. He said everything that was said was null and void, does not exist. We are still with Germany and we are still fighting and the labour camps are labour camps and the deportation is going on. So around 20th or 30th of October a few days later, we got an order that we have to go from Koshow [Kosov] to the west. West, that's in the direction of Austria. Well, it was not a good sign. I don't want to go back to Austria or Germany. So, three of us with another two fellows of mine, we decided that the first chance we are going to escape. Coming what's coming, we are going to escape. So we went with the battalion for another day or two. We arrived to Agtelek which is very famous. They have a very famous cave there. Huge cave and very well-know in Europe. A very big tourist attraction. So we arrived this place and the three of us decided we are not going further, we are going to escape. Whatever is happening is happening. Our commander said to us that, "Fellows, we are going to west. If anybody wants to come I am leaving there to I'm going, but the rest is up to you people. If you want to come you are coming. But I'm warning you that anybody who get caught will be killed on the spot, for they made the law that anybody who is escaping from their battalion, not only Jews, but also army persons/infantry also will be killed on the spot. So it's up to you people." So we decided that we are not going. And in Agtelek we stay behind.

P: Do you remember the other two names of those people?

G: Friedmann was one of them, he was not a dentist, but a denturist. And the other one, oh my g-d, a very good friend of mine. I'll remember it later [Louis Szanto]. Very important because this guy spoke very well Russian which is coming later and very important. The three of us, we decided to stay behind. As we wandered there we met with a peasant. He didn't know we are Jewish because we had been in army uniform and we didn't wear the yellow ribbon. So we went up on his carriage and we said, "Well, we don't want to stay with the army, we want to stay somewhere." Well, to make a long story short, the guy came out to be, he'd fought in Spain when you had the revolution in Spain between the Franco fascists and the communists. And he was fighting on the side of the communists. So he was very sympathetic to us. So he said, "Well, I don't know any place, but there is a part of this cave where you can stay and the is not far from there on the field, it was very late autumn in the field where the people didn't take out yet the potatoes, so you can get some potato from there and you can hide probably there. I'm not telling you to stay there of not, but if you want to, it's not a bad place." And he [the peasant] took us from his home in the town and he showed us the place and we went there.

H: Is this in Austria?

G: No, it's in Hungary already. We didn't go to Austria. They wanted us to go, but we didn't. So we hide there. We know this place where he was living. And we was hiding there and everyday one of us, change by changing, but it was a little small room in that cave, there was a big huge rock came down

in the middle so barely we could move there. But it was a place. A dry place. And we took ourselves dry branches of the trees and we can burn it. It doesn't make smoke. Very dry. It burns, but doesn't make smoke. Exchanging one of us always went out and took some potatoes, brought it up and we baked on the potatoes and it was already snow there, it was in the mountain and we took the snow, melted the snow and we had the water.

One day this Friedmann was on the road to go out to take the potatoes and he came back shaking, "Can't go out." Why? Because this exit of the cave faced exactly on the highway. And the Germans was retreating there. It was a main highway there. And the Germans on the exit of the cave where we were made a machine gun station. So were we supposed to go there. The Germans were sitting there with a machine gun. We couldn't go out. What are we going to do? There was a little tiny opening in the wall of this part of the cave and happening, what's happening. We don't know where that's leading us. We cannot go out on this way and okay, we are going into the cave deeper and deeper. Somehow we will find something. If not we will die there. There's no choice. We cannot go out. So we started to wander and wander in there and finally we arrive at an opening on the other side of the mountain. Okay, we're out. Finally, so we went to the town. It was raining. Dark night. Very, very dark night. We went to the town and we were knocking on the window, this old guy and we told him what's happened. he said, "Well, you cannot stay in the town." And he gave us an axe, and he explained us to go up this side of another little mountain and there you

can find some boróka pine (Juniper). It has a blue little blue fruit they are making gin from that. He said you can find that there is a very good. You can build for yourself a little shack. And not far from there is an old place where they used to make the coal which is made from wood; charcoal. And you can burn it, it doesn't make smoke, and you can live there. Food, I don't know. You will see what's happening. So we went there. We couldn't dig anything into the earth because that was a huge, big rock. So we caught some branches from this pine and we build for us a little shack and waited until the morning and then went down to this place to take some charcoal. We lit it and we had a little warm heat. But nothing to eat. Finally we realized that when we went out for snow again for drink, for water, that we saw in the earth that at night came the deers and digged out from, under the snow, you know the wild rose [i.e. Rose Hips] has this red food and they cannot eat all of them and what they left behind, that's what we ate. So we were there until the 19th of December. That was from about the 20th of October or the 21st of October until 19th of December. The 19th of December actually, my time was to go down, it was a little elevation between the place where we were and the place where the charcoal we found. It was my turn to go down to bring some charcoal. And I went down to bring the charcoal, but I had no power any more to come back on this small elevation. I just could not make it. I had no more energy to come back and my friends saw that I'm not coming, what's happening so they come out and saw I'm sitting there I cannot make it. So they came out. They help me up and somehow I have been in a kind of half a delirium I

guess because my friends told me after that, my wife's name is Ari, and they told me that I said, "Aranka I'm coming. I'm coming home." I don't remember, but they say I said that. Suddenly we hear some steps. And we had that axe and this friend of mine was sitting at the entrance of the little shack and if a German or somebody's coming he will attack to escape or whatever. We don't give up just like that. So somebody's telling us, "Are you still alive. You people are still alive?" So that was the old peasant came out from the town. And he said, "What's the news, what's happening?" And we said, "Oh, the Russians went out already." "What you mean went out?" "Well, they came in the morning they've thrown out the Germans and the front is already 10 or 20 km ahead. And he brought us a pot of sheep stew made from sheep meat and you should know I can't eat sheep. Not a lamb, not a sheep. I smell it and I cannot eat it. But a few minutes ago I couldn't make it so I had to eat something so I took a piece of it in my mouth. I couldn't swallow it. I turned to spit it out. So anyway we went down to the town and the old wife of this gentleman made up soup immediately for us and we washed ourselves and like good Jews, after all, we were Jews, we went to the Russian centre there and we are here and we are free because it was very risky to move around there because the Russians are to the people also. But we are Jews. So we went there. Jews, not Jews they caught us. It doesn't matter Jew or not Jew they caught us and they sent us back as prisoners. Way back, I don't know 100 km a camp as prisoners. Now here is happened that I was very, very upset. Obviously after three years. We were waiting for the Russians. That

the Russians are coming like also who is surviving us who is taking and making us free. And now they are sending us in a prison camp. So I said to this friend of mine and they already made up in a line us and on the end of the line already the barber cut the hairs to the people there and transferred them...

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE 1

INTERVIEWEE: Joseph GABOR (G)

DATE OF RECORDING: March 3, 1991

FILE NUMBER: 010-3

TRACK NUMBER: T2-S2

INTERVIEWERS: Renia Perel (P), & Taly Hyman (H)

G: So I talk to my friend, "Speak to them! Tell them that we are Jewish. We are not Germans. We are not fighting against them. What they want from us." He said, "Leave me alone" and he was very upset, because he was a communist actually, and he was very upset that the communists were doing this to him. So suddenly one of the Russians are came to us and he said, "Why are you fighting here?" Because I also spoke some Russian, but very, very badly and as I knew, I explained to him we are "yevrey" [Russian for a Jew - masculine gender] and we are here and you want to send us now to the prison camp again. He said, "Are you Jewish?" I said, "Yes, the three of us." "Wait." So he went back and came out with a prayer book. A Hebrew prayer book. On opening it he said, "Read it." So obviously I started to read! Then I was reading and the third was reading. He said, "Okay, go. Go out from here!" He was a Jewish guy. "Go out from here!" I said, "Okay, give us some paper [documents] that we can move freely." "No paper, Russians didn't give any paper to anybody." But I said, "They will stop us again." "No, no, tell them that you are coming from here." Anyway, so we came out. But, before we came out they took us our clothes everything, and it was already winter there and they gave us to give me pants, which was real summer pants, and a coat, no button on it, no nothing, was French all

over the place and the head had a chapeau [hat] which fell to here...

P: Covered the ears...

G: Ya. "And go." This place they also took away my bullets also what I kept as a memory when in Nasielsk I jumped out and they went through on my shirt. "Go." So we went.

P: Speaking of the clothing. Did you until this time wear your Hungarian army coat?

G: Hungarian army coat! Yes

P: Did they take it off to replace it so that you wouldn't maybe be persecuted?

G: No, no, no, no. They took it away out because it was a good coat! I don't know if you ever saw the Russian soldiers in the war. They wore all kinds of things. Some of them wore these...alarm clock in the hand. Whatever they could take away from the civilians or the household or another military person they took it and put it on themselves. It was an army which is like a Gypsies, without insulting the Gypsies. I'm sorry about that. But terrible! It was a good coat, it was a good pants, it was a good pair of shoes, you take it away.

H: And the Russian guy who gave you the prayer book to read. He was a Jewish soldier?

G: I'm sure. He was an officer. He was not a soldier. He was an officer. Otherwise he wouldn't have given me the prayer book, we were lucky that we didn't get another officer who didn't give a damn.

P: Another officer who might not have been able to understand that what you are reading is correct.

G: He wouldn't have had a prayer book in the first place. He was

a Jewish guy. But he didn't say that, but obviously he was Jewish otherwise why would he have a prayer book with him. I don't think the army kept it to identify Jews. But you never know. Probably they kept it to identify you is Jewish and who is not Jewish. No, somebody may be a Jew who cannot read Hebrew, many people, especially in ordinary...lots of people. Anyway, so, sure enough in the next town a Russian 'baryshnia' in an army uniform baryshnia, woman, stopped us. "Where are you going?" "We're going home." "Where home?" "Budapest." "Where are you coming from?" And we told them that we are coming from the neighbouring town and she said, "Into the cellar." She put us in the cellar. Stopped us. Didn't let us go.

In the cellar it was dark obviously and many other people was there. And beside me, I find some little tobaccos left over in this pocket what I got and paper, and I made a cigarette from it. And somebody who was beside me said, "Do you have more cigarettes?" I said, "I don't have, but let's share it." Here is a young voice and so I shared the cigarette. And next, we were there two days without asking anything from us. Nobody ask. Nobody said anything. No food, no drink, no nothing, nobody ask anything, no out. I mean, if you wanted to 'do something' (go to the bathroom), do it there. On the third day I ask, always I was a revolutionary. I made a scandal there. What's happening. I started to bang on the door. What's happening. Somebody came. I said, "We are here already three days, nobody asking 'why?'" So anyway, took us to another Russian officer there in the office and in some miraculous way my colleague, Friedmann still had his shirt.

They didn't take away his shirt. Still had the army shirt, it was a good shirt. And this guy saw the shirt, so he wanted to take it away, Friedmann doesn't want to give it to him, so he [the Russian officer] beat him up until he gave the shirt to him. So he gave the shirt and they [the Russians] let us to go. And I said, "But I have someone there." I didn't know the guy, young fellow, there also came with us. "Let him to go." So they let to go also this young fellow with whom I shared the cigarette. It came out that he was a Christian fellow living in Miskolc, a city in Hungary and he went to visit his fiancée and the Russians stopped them and that's the way how he got into the cellar with us. He wanted to go home and visiting the fiancée and they let him to go too. So he was very grateful to us and he invited us in Miskolc in his parent's home. So that was the first place when finally we got some food. Good food, and we slept in a bed.

H: Do you remember his name?

G: No. No. And we were there one or two days and then this friend of mine, I cannot remember his name. Lajos Szanto [?], he lived in Rusinsko...that is a part of Hungary. He wanted to go home to see what's happened there. And Friedmann, the other friend of mine, he said he's going to Budapest. And I said I'm going with this guy to see what's happened with his home. Friedmann unfortunately, get caught again on the station at Miskolc and they took him to the prison and he spent another three years in a Russian prison in Russia. it took him three years until they let him to go home again. So in the meantime I went with this friend of mine to his home. Obviously we find nobody there and we find the people very,

very anti-Semitic. They said more Jews came back like they took away, but there was no Jew actually. But they were afraid from every Jew who came home because they had to give back their belongings, whatever they'd stole from them. So I, the friend of mine stayed there because that was his home town. And I started to come myself around, down towards Budapest. But Budapest was not freed yet at that time, it was still the Germans was there. And I arrived to Mir...

P: So you walked by yourself towards Budapest?

G: Walking, by walking.

H: Was it 1945 yet?

G: 1945, around February or March. So I started to walk and I arrived in Nyiregyháza, that's another city and in Nyiregyháza I already find a little Jewish community from the homecoming remaining Jewish people and I went to the centre there and what we did there actually, we went everyday to the rubble of the existed Jewish stores which was by bombing in a rubble and whatever we find useful we took it out and we gave it to this centre, the Jewish centre, and they sold it and they kept the kitchen from it and also they gave some money for us and we rented a place where to live and that's the way how we lived there.

I was working one day in a drugstore, a pharmacy actually (Apotheke) and I find a little bottle of pure alcohol. So I put it in my pocket and I met with a Rumanian infantry man, army man, and he asked me actually that where he could get a drink or something like this as much as I understand. I said, "I have alcohol." He said, "Alcohol. Ya." He told me he was working in the butchering [working as a butcher] of the

Rumanian army. "I will bring you meat and 'kolbasa' (Russian for salami) made from meat, if you give me the alcohol." So I gave it to him there. He asked my address, I gave my address. Actually I lived in a place, in a room was rented to me by an old couple. The husband was a physician, but was very sick and the wife was very sick both were Christians, both were very sick and they had a young peasant girl there who was in her last month of pregnancy. She was working in another peasant home and she fell in love with the peasant's son and he made her pregnant, but he didn't marry her, you know how it is. And she was waiting to give birth in the home of this old couple who was sick and she took care about them. And she got a room there, I rented a room from them which is actually the window, it was very important faced on the street, it is coming important later. And I give to this Rumanian fellow this alcohol and he took my address and he said he is going to bring me food for that. Now I should mention before that when I arrived in Nyiregyháza I wrote two postcards. I sent two postcards. One postcard to the place when my wife lived with her parents, because I knew that she went to live with them when I was taken to the army and the other card I addressed to the so-called 'Jewish house' because they made Jewish housed in Budapest when they collected the Jews they took them out from the original place when they lived and put them in the Jewish house. Only Jewish people lived there. So I knew that address so I sent them a card too. I didn't know what's happened to them so I said, in any case, somebody will get the card and somebody will have the courtesy to let me know what's happened to them. But I didn't

hear from them nothing. So I give to this Rumanian guy this alcohol. He promised me the [meat]. I say to myself, "You stupid. You give the alcohol, he went away, you will never see this guy, he won't come back to you." Next day evening somebody banging on my window. Rumanian guy. Came with so much meat he brought to me, so much salami that the doctor and the wife and this peasant girl, everybody, cooked and baked. They were so happy with it. Lots of food.

That night I went to sleep and early morning somebody banging on the iron door very early at five o'clock in the morning. Not me. Nobody looking for me at 5 o'clock in the morning. So I turned on to my other side. Banging, banging, banging. Finally I couldn't sleep so I got up and opened the window to ask who is there? It is my wife and my mother-in-law stepped in the door.

P: Oh my! Ahhhh!!

G: So they got my card and instead to write me they come. So obviously you can imagine.

P: And your son and your wife?

G: No, not the son. Just the wife and my mother-in-law.

H: How long had it been since you'd seen them?

G: Three years. I had been exactly three years there.

H: And who was staying with your son if your mother-in-law...?

G: My mother-in-law's mother-in-law. Obviously it was happiness.

P: What a surprise!

G: And uh, they stayed there about a week or something like this and in the meantime my mother-in-law get sick...

P: I must make the comment or ask you. They must have thought that you always ate so much meat and you had so much salami.

G: I didn't eat anything from them. I don't eat the beef anyway. I never eat beef and that was beef. Well, probably I tasted it, but they got good food at least because they liked meat. So they got good food. My mother-in-law got sick there unfortunately. She was sick, I don't know how many days, but then this doctor helped her and finally we decided to go home to Budapest. Now, by going home to Budapest, obviously it was not so simple. We went on a wagon, not in a regular normal train. It was like they used to send cows.

P: A freight train.

G: Ya, for transporting the cows and all these things. And uh, we're getting close to Budapest. The Russians came looking for young people and they took out the young people from the train and they sent them to prison again. So my mother-in-law and my wife hide me in a way that they were sitting on me. They were sitting on me!. So that was the way how I could 'bootlegged' to Budapest. It was the 5th of April, 1945. So exactly one month less than three years I had been away. And my son, when I went in, he looked at me and said "Apuka" "my father" and he opened his arms around me. He recognized me because he saw the picture that my wife had always shown him. "That is your father." And he opened his arm and, "Apuka!", he's running for me.

So that was the happy part of it. But the sad part was that beside them I found nobody. My sisters, their husbands, their children, 18 people. My parents, my brother, my sister-in-law. Everybody killed. Deported and killed. That's the way how I came in connection with Mrs. Perel.

It was very, very strange to be back to the normal life. It

took me a year at least. I was not used to a plate or a fork or a spoon or everything. I was afraid to pick up the phone because I went back to the place where I was working before. My superiors were great. They behaved very, very beautifully. My wife got my salary until the last minute until they could do it in Hungary until the Germans came in actually and took away from them also everything. My wife got the salary and my wife supported my parents also, who came to live with me and, it took a year until I more or less came to be a relatively normal person. In the meantime my wife get pregnant and our second boy was born who, unfortunately, 6 months old when he was, he got pneumonia and until we got the penicillin because it was not available, actually it was the doctor's fault, he didn't realize he had pneumonia. And until we got the penicillin it was too late. He was six months old when he died. He was a beautiful big boy.

P: What was his name?

G: Peter. By the way, my name at that time was not Gabor. It was Grünhut. I changed my name after the war.

H: Why?

G: Why? I don't know really why. I was quite mixed up when I came back. I didn't even want to be Jewish. Actually if it wasn't for my wife I would probably convert. Never mind I came from a religious family. But I hope you never ever in your life, even if you dream, realize what it means to be persecuted since you live, you know on a way because you are Jewish! You have no other sin. You are Jew. That's all. So probably you want to get rid of that Jewishness. What for! I mean, if that is the purpose, why should my son or my

grandchildren go through this. If it is not my wife probably I would convert. But she said. "No, we are Jewish and we stay Jewish." But very important. She never was religious, but she is Jewish. She's still the same today. She is not going to the synagogue except the High Holy Days, but she lights the candles every Friday and she's Jewish. Really Jewish.

So it was very hard to adjust Joseph to the new conditions, to the normal conditions. And then came the communist system. Finally I got my job and we started to live a life, started to scratch again. From nothing. Because everything...our houses were in shambles. My wife had a piano and we find the piano in small pieces far away from the house. They robbed everything. They emptied everything. So we started life from zero, nothing. My father-in-law never came back unfortunately and my mother-in-law was a young lady, in 1945 she was 42 years old and she was all by herself. That's why we went together starting the life again.

Everything was seemingly promising. But then came the communist system. So, needless to say the communist system is not an easy system to live. I was not a party member and it was an intellectual who, my father was a religious person, a cantor and I never have been in the labour movement, I never have been a party member or something like this so I was not a very highly preferred person. And it was not easy. I went back to the university. I started finally to finish my dream I was working at day time in the leather factory and at night I studied. Everyday I started in the factory where I was a manager. I was the head of a section of the leather factory.

I started at seven o'clock in the morning, I was working until two o'clock. At two o'clock I rushed to the university, I was studying until ten at the university. I did it over five years.

My wife, in the meantime, went back to the school too, because she married at 17. I took her from the high school. So she never had a chance go further so she went back, she finished CGEP, like school, she came to be a laboratory technician. My son, grown, poor boy, who has grown between two parents, one is working and studying the other is studying. And after that she went to work also because the salary what I made was not very, very high. We had quite a difficult life to live. And uh, finally I finished the university. I got my chemical engineering diploma. I have a masters degree from it. And in 1956, thanks God came the Revolution and we left Hungary. Now I have to say that here that we went to Israel, but the truth is that I never had in my mind to go to Israel. And still, until today, I cannot explain why did I go to Israel. I know the circumstances.

We came out from Hungary and, with the other refugees, the Austrians sent us to Linz in Austria. And we were written-off to come to Canada. Because you had to give two choices. I made the choice Australia or Canada. First Canada and if Canada cannot be then Australia. I didn't give Israel...As a matter of fact, to be honest, I didn't know what was going on in Israel at all. I was not interested. I was not Zionist. I never had been in the movement. I gave to the Keren Kayement at least [Hebrew for Jewish National Fund], and bought some stamps from them, like the National Fund here, but

I never participated in any kind of Zionist movement or something like this. I always hated political parties. I still don't like them. I don't like political parties. We met in Linz a couple, my mother-in-law actually met with an old lady who was together with her son and her daughter-in-law. The son is a physician. They met and they introduced me and my wife to her son and her daughter-in-law and we started to talk. And he's a physician, he cannot go no, and he was a Zionist by the way. And beside the politicians he cannot go nowhere to practice as a physician except in Israel. Israel. he doesn't have to certificate [certify] again. So he went to Israel, but he gone because he was a Zionist. He went to Hakhsharah [Hebrew organization]. So he said, "Come to Israel!" So I said, "Okay, let's go to Israel." I found him so nice. But my wife said. "There's a war there!" I said, "Never mind, let's go to Israel." So exactly we arrived to Haifa in December 4th, 1956 when the Suez War ended. That was the day when the Americans pushed [David] Ben-Gurion to cease fire. December 4th, 1956, that day we arrived to Israel. Well, arriving to Israel, they received us beautifully. Everything was very nice. Each of us got a bed and they sent us to Benyamina, Benyamina is a 'moshav' town, agriculture, small. It has nothing to do with an engineer there. But very interestingly on the other side of the highway from Benyamina there was a Hungarian 'moshav' [Hebrew for cooperative farm]. I didn't know it was Hungarian. And they came to us from the moshav to greet us in December. They brought us tomato and green peppers. It was amazing for us! Green pepper in December in Hungary would not and tomatoes. It really was

very, very nice. They were extremely nice to us. And one of the gentlemen there who came to see me, it was one of, the maid, from the concentration I mean from the labour camp. From my battalion.

P: One of the three?

G: Not one of the three, but one of the per ten battalion.

P: What was his name. Do you remember?

G: Katz. Miklos Katz. And obviously it was a big happiness and so on. But, after the happiness came the thing [problem] that there was no work. What to do. For the first time in my life I was in a situation that I wanted to work, but nobody wanted me. Nobody wanted my wife, nobody wanted me. There was no work.

H: As a chemical engineer or on the land?

G: Nothing! There was no work! By sympathy the movie owner let me to clean the movie [theatre]. During the show they [people] eat these sunflower seeds and the outsides [shells] are on the floor. So every time when they finished in one day I collected about two bags of these things. I got a pound for it which was good money. Then I went to the moshav to help to bang [bag?] the tomatoes, the green tomatoes, but they are always spraying their...

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE 2

INTERVIEWEE: Joseph GABOR (G)

DATE OF RECORDING: March 3, 1991

FILE NUMBER: 010-3

TRACK NUMBER: T3-S1

INTERVIEWERS: Renia Perel (P), & Taly Hyman (H)

G: Then I went to work with this gentleman who owned the movie [theatre], he was a very rich person, to collect on the field the straw. Can you imagine, that in the Israelian [Israeli] heat, in the summertime, to work of the field? Anyway, I did it as long as there was work. I wanted to work in a plywood factory, but you cannot get work because you have to be unionized for that. And if you are unionized you have to wait until you line is coming because other people are waiting for the job there already. So it as a hopeless case. We were very, very lucky that my mother-in-law, who was a wonderful lady, really, there is no word for how wonderful she was. She went to work, there is a wine factory in Benyamina, the 'Alias' wine factory. She went there and cooked to these people there. She run the kitchen. She cooked them and they paid for the food. And at least we had the food because we could eat the leftovers. And my wife went to Tel Aviv to look for a job and finally, very, very, very miraculously, actually my wife met with a Hungarian person who was working for the Histadrut [Israeli trade union], and, that's a Hungarian fellow and he said to my wife, "Go to Sarafend [huge army camp near Tel Aviv] to the hospital [Asaf-Harofe] there. There is a Hungarian chemist there who is running the lab and tell him that you are looking for a job. Probably he can help you.

That was a wonderful person. Later he became a friend of ours. When my wife went there he said, "Yes, I have a pregnant lady here. She's going to give birth. Come to work for nothing now and when she goes, then you can take her place." So she [wife] was working, I don't know how many months, without any salary, but when she [pregnant lady] went to give birth, she [wife] got her place temporarily. And I still didn't have work. So I worked here and there. Occasional work. There was in Pardes Hannah, a little cosmetic factory. The foremen went somewhere abroad to visit their families so they gave me the job for the time being, but then that finished too and I was standing there without anything. I was so depressed that finally my wife said to this gentleman, this Hungarian Histadrut man, [trade union]. "We have to do something with my husband, because he's going to kill himself." So he said, "Why he is not going to learn the language, to an Ulpan [name of Hebrew courses in Israel] he's an academic. He has to go because there's an ulpan language course, for university [people], you see. That was the problem. The Jews are very nice people, but not always. They didn't tell us that me, as a university degree'd person, they knew I have a degree because it's written there, that I can go and learn the language because there's a special ulpan for the person who finished university. They didn't tell me 'Sochnut' [Immigration Absorption in Israel] they didn't tell me that I have a right to ask [for] a loan, to buy a place somewhere to live and pay it back when I'm working. They didn't say that! Not at all. Finally I went to Haifa, to the Hitachdut Ole' Hungarian, that's a group which was taking care

of the Hungarians and there they told me, that, "You are entitled to these things. Why aren't they giving them to you?"

H: After how long?

G: A year. And I went actually to the Sochnut before and I said, "Give me a place where to live in Haifa, where there is industry where I can find a job sooner or later somewhere." They said, "Okay, buy for yourself." I said, "I have no money!" I came from nothing. He said, "Then ask from your relatives in Israel." I said, "I have no relatives except Ben Gurion, who is a Jew." Then he said, "You can sell your jewellery." I said, "You are crazy. I have no jewellery. What you want from me?" "Then stay where you are." That was the answer.

P: Pardon me, would you say that this was a bureaucratic kind of behaviour?

G: Well, ya. Obviously. That was a bureaucratic, but bureaucrats existed in Israel. Generally they hated the newcomers and they still probably hate them. Because they say when 'we' came we got nothing. When we came it was chaotic. You've now come to our country. You waited until we developed it for you. Between you and me. Anyway, but the country itself cannot be blamed for that. The country is beautiful and I love the country. Anyway, so these gentlemen finally pushed me to the ulpan in Ramat Gan. I went the ulpan in Ramat Gan and he told me. "Why don't you go to the Kupat Cholim [Hebrew for health services] and tell them that you are a chemist. Probably they'll have a job for you." So I was at the ulpan, I studied the Hebrew, I went to the Kupat cholim

and they said, "Yes, go the Afula we need a chemist there. I mean a lab technician, not a chemist, but a lab technician." So obviously I was happy! So I left the ulpan I already spoke a little Hebrew. I went to Afula and took the job and after they tried me out for a month. They said, "Okay we are happy with you." "We are accepting." I said, "Okay, fine, but I have a question. My wife is a lab technician and she needs a job too." Because she is working like Sarafend, Sarafend, beside Tel Aviv and they said, "Okay, we can give your wife also a job. In the outside of Tel Aviv beginning only a half a day, but later on the whole day."

So, we got the jobs. In Afula and since that we had no more problems in Israel. It was beautiful and we had a good salary and not only that, but they really appreciated my work. And my wife's work because they promoted me a year later, retroactive, from the very beginning, promoted me as a section head. They increased my salary and in 1964 I asked for my transfer from Afula to Rehovot and to the Kaplan Hospital and my wife got in Kiryat Melachi Laboratory and she was thachrai, in charge for the whole laboratory. And we really got good salaries and a they really respected, they really loved us. And the only reason we came out from [left] Israel was because my son met, since we lived in Afula with a lady, a girl from Rumanian origin, they fell in love with each other, in 1960 they married and her parents lived in Montreal. So they came to Montreal. And since our son was our only son we came after him.

And so it came out that it was good that we went to Israel. It came out the reason why we went to Israel. Because I could

not explain myself until now why did I go to Israel. Because when we came to Israel, our Israeli experience they accepted here without question. All my colleagues who finished the university together with me, they came in 1956 to Canada, Montreal also. They went through hell because they couldn't get a job because they [authorities] said, "You don't have Canadian experience." So they went through hell. And one of my colleagues [female] who finished the university with me on the same day and was working in the Royal Victoria Hospital as a lab technician, in 1965, that's nine years later, had the same salary like when we came to Montreal in 1965 and my wife started in a private medical laboratory had the same salary like she had. And my wife doesn't have a university degree, master's degree. And a month later my wife got a fifty dollar, big fifty dollar [that's in 1965] increase in monthly salary because they appreciated her work. So, Canada was very good for us. Montreal was very, very good. I worked in a Jewish hospital.

I started in a private lab to work, but I worked there only for two months as a lab technician because I got a job at the McGill University as a research assistant. I was working there six months then I got an offer, a job, as a chief chemist at a pharmaceutical company in Montreal. And in the meantime I applied to the Jewish General Hospital because I wanted to go back to the hospital as a chemist. I liked the medical field. And uh, I got a promise, but they didn't have an opening. So I was already a chief chemist at this lab, this pharmaceutical company when I hear that the Jews need a chemist. So I applied, I phoned the director and he knew me

from the private lab where I was working and the hospital hired me and actually I went to work in the hospital for a less salary like I had in the pharmaceutical company because I wanted to go back to the hospital. And I was working there way beyond my retirement age. I had to retire because at that time there was a law in Quebec, which doesn't exist any more, that at 65 you have to retire. Obligatory. But they hired me on the same day as a consultant, but I was an assistant director at that time already and they kept my assistant director title and my salary, everything was there. For another eight years I still worked as a so-called 'consultant' in the lab. So I retired actually when I was 74 from the hospital they wanted to push me out, but because my wife took an early retirement. There came a law in Quebec that somebody who is over 60 can get an early retirement without losing any of their pension. So she took that and I retired and she retired on January 1, 1988. And on March 15, 1988 we came to Vancouver.

H: What brought you to Vancouver?

G: Because my son and my grandchildren and my daughter-in-law living here since 1970. So we came after [followed] them to Montreal and then to Vancouver. (laughs)

And now here we are living and with the help of G-d, I don't know how long more, but so far we are happy, except for this snow fall we had yesterday.

P: It looks like you look very young and very beautiful.

G: Shut it off that microphone, she's giving me compliments! (everyone laughs).

P: I just wanted to ask you. How many grandchildren do you have

and what are their names.

G: I have two and their names are Nancy who will be 23 in March and Bruce who will be 21 also in March. Two beautiful grandchildren.

P: Are they following in their grandfather's footsteps?

G: I think they are following their own footsteps like every new generation. I don't think I followed my father's footsteps. Never mind. I loved him. It was a different relation[ship] at that time between parents and children. Today the new generation is more independent. Mind you, when I was 23 I was already in a high position. I started to work at the age of 19. And I was 24 when I was in a very high position already and I had a salary which is five families could live from it. It's a different world. But they are beautiful. The whole family is very, very nice. Unfortunately we just lost my daughter-in-law's father. Exactly a week ago today.

P: I'm sorry to hear that.

G: Ya.

P: And what is the name of you son?

G: Andrash. Andrew in English.

P: And he also uses Gabor?

G: Gabor. Of course!

P: Could you spell for us the name "Grünhut."

G: "G-R..." Anyway there is another "Grünhut" in Vancouver.

P: Your wife's name is Aranka, and the maiden name is Alt. Your grandchildren's names are Nancy and Bruce. And the daughter-in-law's Name is Aimee.

G: Well, you have my history now. It's 2 or 3 hours. It was quite a long time.

P: I want to thank you on behalf of Taly and myself for this wonderful interview and uh, we are most grateful to you for the things that you had to say. Because this is a historical record not just for ourselves, but for posterity. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW