

INTERVIEWER: Okay, we're going to begin an interview now with Mr. Robert F~~EH~~ER. We can start by asking to begin at the beginning, what went on in Hungary during the war, what went on before you were deported, what were the circumstances in your community.

MR. FAHR: Well, actually I will have to go back to Budapest. The year was 1944 where the Germans have occupied Budapest and occupied Hungary and started gathering people, Jewish people.

At first we were taken into a house which was called a house where people went with yellow stars, sort of a district. At that time I was -- I was not quite 14 years old. I was about 13 years old.

My father, there was the four of us, my mother, myself, my brother and my father. One day troopers arrived in that house and they gathered all the men who were older than 16 years old. That was my brother who was 17 and my father and they took them away. So, I was left with my mother. We somehow fled to a house which was supposedly protected by the Pope and this was arranged at that time with the Swedish.

interview by Andrea Althochuter 2/20/85
Hungary now in Alameda. Resistance Fighter

We stayed in that house for several months. I don't remember exactly how many months but one day the familiar ring arrived again. It was referred to as a "ring." It was a bell. People would shake a bell in the middle of a like big apartment building -- I don't know, a four or five-story building in the center and everybody had to come down again.

They indicated they would have to pack and leave. Nobody knew where we were going, but we already heard rumors about concentration camps, stuff like that.

So, we came to the apartment which we lived in -- I forgot how many people lived in that apartment but it was pretty jammed per unit. They were searching from room to room and I had a discussion with my mother. She said that I should try to escape because I was sort of an independent and gutsy young fellow.

INTERVIEWER: Who searched from room to room?

MR. FAHR: The Nazis were leading us, the people.

So, what I've done, I hid in the toilet and already gave the check. I hid in the toilet. They

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already gave the check. They tried to open it. They said, "Don't you let somebody do this to you." They were kids screaming out. So, they passed.

So, I did, once they passed, I went back to the room they already searched and was hiding there. So, I ended up alone in this whole building which was quite an experience. I was alone. I had about -- I remember about two hundred Bengals, a denomination of Hungarian currency. Two hundred Bengals was equivalent probably to \$40, five Bengals to the dollar.

I said "What am I going to do now? I'm here alone. If I go on the street -- I can't go, they'll kill me," because there was, what they say, Shtaparian, which means if they caught a Jew on the street they would just kill him. They shoot him on the spot. So, you're not allowed to be on the street. Because Jews were either taken to the concentration camp or they were in the ghetto.

INTERVIEWER: What was the house that you were brought to, you were in your community --

MR. FAHR: Yes, in Budapest.

INTERVIEWER: Taken to this one central

building?

MR. FAHR: There were these buildings, they were supposedly called them people buildings, by the Pope of Rome, who protected under special privileges which was basically a fake.

So, what I did, I went and bought myself a uniform. I didn't look Jewish. I went into a store where they were selling uniforms. I bought myself a Hungarian Nazi uniform. I dressed, put on -- they didn't have swastikas, they had like arrows, arrows, the same as swastikas.

So, my first job was to get some documents to show that I am real.

INTERVIEWER: When you went to buy it, nobody asked you?

MR. FAHR: No.

So when when I dressed up, I still remember, it is called the Western Railway Station, the western-south in Budapest. At that time, you know, I had a plan that I'm going to look for some unsophisticated country boys coming up fleeing from the Russians. I may be able to get there somebody's identification for myself. So, I stuck up with kids around my age and said, you know Heil Hitler and they said Heil Hitler and I said

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"Come here, show me your identification." I pretend.

So, they pulled it out and I looked at it. I said -- one guy was just about like mine, my age, about 13. I see the D-2 stamp. I see the D-2 number stamp is missing. He says "We're just fleeing from the Russians. We have not had a chance yet. We just arrived, haven't had a chance to go to the headquarters to register." I just made up the story, to register. I said "Well, this time you're getting away with it." I took it, put it in my pocket.

I told him which district to go to, to write it down, this and this district "and you show up there, you'll be lucky if you get away without punishment. Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler."

He went, I went away, I had my documents. The document didn't have any picture.

So, now here I am with a document and a uniform and I'm all alone. Nobody gives me advice what to do.

INTERVIEWER: 1944?

MR. FAHR: 1944. I was liberated by the Russian Army in 1945, spring of 1945. I said "Hey," you know, I could never stand the thought

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of being shoved by everybody in the ghetto. I wanted to survive on my own.

It's going to be a long story.

INTERVIEWER: Good, lots of tapes.

MR. FAHR: I don't know, I can't tell you all.

So, the first thing was I found a place where there were quite a few Jews hiding and there was no food. I mean food was like, you know, precious, more precious than gold and to go on the street you wouldn't dare because they would get killed. Finally I'm standing there with my uniform, my identification and the food was running out. Everybody was very hungry.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you living?

MR. FAHR: I was living in a place which was bound -- living in sort of a cellar in Budapest. It was a hiding place.

INTERVIEWER: With other Jews?

MR. FAHR: With other people. No, adults. I was the only young kid.

INTERVIEWER: The rest were not Jews?

MR. FAHR: All Jews, yes.

So, they said, well, one guy says "I have connections. There are some friends we have."

This was an engineer. You know, he liked me. He said "You're like a son to me." Very nice. He said "If you go to this address," which was about a mile and a half walk, "you can bring back about 20 or 30 pounds of food." I mean it was -- so, we're talking about it, planning, et cetera. The hungrier you get, the more guts you develop.

So, he said "You have the uniform, you have the identification."

"Okay, I'll go."

So, he give me the address, the directions and I went. The deal was I come back, I'm going to share it 50/50. He was, you know, a man about 55, 60 years old.

INTERVIEWER: What about the other people living there?

MR. FAHR: It was everybody for himself.

INTERVIEWER: Between you and him?

MR. FAHR: Between me and him.

So, I came back. Your heart is pumping. That's my wife Sandra here.

You know, I walked the streets. Not only was it dangerous to walk the street because you're a Jew, but at that time there were Russian planes coming frequently and shooting even -- planes

coming down and soldiers dying on the street. It was very heavy battle.

So, you didn't see -- the only people on the street were soldiers. I was lucky, nobody went, asked me. I just walked, nobody asked me for identification, nothing. I came back as a hero. I said "Here, I got it." I got the food. It was like life, giving life.

He gave me a smile, he took the food. He says "Wait now." Then he cooked the soup and gave me a bowl of soup and that's it. He didn't give me any food, kept it for himself. That was another Jew.

INTERVIEWER: Were there other Jews in the building that knew you were Jewish?

MR. FAHR: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: When did you make the transition from being in the Nazi uniform to being Jewish during the day --

MR. FAHR: When I left that building I got -- I went to the store, bought the uniform. Then I was looking for a place to hide. I found this place and this is where I met this guy, this man who had his own little setup and he made the food deal.

INTERVIEWER: Is that how it was, everybody had this own setup in this little basement, wasn't much interaction between the different people?

MR. FAHR: In this space it was, but you had a certain amount of privacy, privacy, not a space like this kitchen here.

INTERVIEWER: Where was it that you had to go for the food? Was it a regular store?

MR. FAHR: No store, some Christian friends that he had. He was a wealthy man. He probably stored a lot of things there, gave it to them.

So this was the biggest disappointment of my life. This was a tremendous letdown from a fellow Jew when I was a young kid. I knew he took advantage of me because I risked my life.

So, this was a question of survival. So, I stayed there. I hung around, I hung around and hung around and then a couple came in and they said that they have somebody in the ghetto who they want to bring out from the ghetto and if I would be willing to do that.

INTERVIEWER: These were Jews?

MR. FAHR: Yes, I said I'll do it. I was hungry. "We'll give you money. You can do it." Money meant you got food.

INTERVIEWER: Were these Jews from the underground?

MR. FAHR: Yes, not associated with this guy. So, I went and they gave me the address and I had to make a plan. I was -- so, the ghetto -- I forgot, it had two or four different exits in and out that you could go.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know what the name of this ghetto was?

MR. FAHR: No, it was the Budapest ghetto, a ghetto in Budapest. There was only one ghetto. It was a woman I was supposed to take out.

So, I went in by the guard. It was Thursday evening. I said "Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler. I said, "Can I have a smoke? A light?" Then I put the cigarette in my mouth. He gave me a light and I walked in. He didn't even ask me a question. So, I went inside this house. And people were jammed like sardines. I mean it was, let's see, equivalent like a room like this which is, let us say, 450 square feet, say 20 people, 25 people.

I said "Don't get scared you saw the uniform. Don't get scared I'm a Jew, phony, I'm looking for Mrs. So and so."

She comes. I said "I'm here to take you

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out." Just pack a suitcase, just one suitcase, nothing else."

She says "all right." I told her to make up the story in case we get -- you catch a woman, you can't identify a woman whether she's Jewish or not because only in Hungary you could identify a male because if they would check your sex organ, only the Jews were circumcized. The Hungarian gentiles were not circumcized.

So, I told her the story is this, that there was a tailor that you had work done before he was taken into the ghetto and he's a damn Jew, a damn Jew. He took your clothes into the ghetto, you know. Now you came to pick up your clothes from this Jew.

INTERVIEWER: Did you make up this story?

MR. FAHR: I made up this story, right, I told her in case we get caught.

So, I came in one ending and I learned I'm not going to go this way out, figure take the other gate where the guy had not seen me.

So, it was happening around 11:00 or 12:00 o'clock at night. Late, I remember it was late. And when I was about 50 or 60 yards, I was walking, I had always a philosophy of walking in

the middle of the street. I see the guard going from one end of the street, by the gate, up and down.

I started screaming the top of my lungs. I told him "I told you not to have any work done by any fuckin' Jews. Every second with those fuckin' Jews, fuckin' Jews."

I come to the guard, I'm saying "Heil Hitler," smiling. He didn't ask a question, I just walked out without a scratch, nothing.

So, I got her out, took her back. I need to stop now.

(Pause in proceedings.)

MR. FAHR: I know these people were very appreciative. They gave me money which in return I could buy food.

INTERVIEWER: Was this woman the wife of the friend and was she --

MR. FAHR: I don't know who she was. She was a relative.

So, the next thing was somebody needed -- that's how I survived as a kid. Somebody needed papers, original papers, Aryan papers for a family of four. So, I was walking the streets. At that time I was getting more gutsy. I started to get

confident. Hey, I'm getting away with a lot of things."

So, I walk in the streets. Once a woman says "Heil Hitler. Heil Hitler." She says "We're just fleeing from the Russians." It was getting around, now, December 19th -- it was toward the end of the year.

INTERVIEWER: This is how you're staying alive, going back, doing deals like this?

MR. FAHR: Oh, yes.

This woman says "We have been good Nazis," that's all I need to hear, wonderful Nazis "and we understand that the Jews which were taken to the concentration camps they have warehouses where they stacked all their possessions and furniture and we come because we fled from the Russians. We have nothing. We would like to get from those Jews."

I said "That's a very good idea. I'm very well connected there." In the meantime she's talking to me, I'm saying "Here's an opportunity to get all their papers." So, I said, "I tell you what, I really want to help you out." Where do you live there? Let us go to your place.

INTERVIEWER: Are you still in the basement

hiding?

MR. FAHR: On the street, yes, Oh yes, my steady place.

So, I'm going with her. She takes me and she's showing me her husband, the good Nazi in the uniform, the whole thing. He's working -- I forgot which place, and the children. I said great, in order for me -- I'm going to arrange it for you that you get the stuff from the Jews, but in order for me to arrange it I need the documentation who you are. So, I said "Do you have any birth certificates? Yes. Any food stamps? Yes. Fine."

I got the entire documents from this family. They were all original, they were worth gold. That meant life. For Jewish people life.

So, I said -- the guy comes out. "Make sure you give me a few cigarettes, they will appreciate it. Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler," and I left. I had the original papers.

So, I survived on that for another month.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds like --

MR. FAHR: The people were waiting for them. So, finally I ran out of food. I ran out of IDs, I ran out -- I got very tired because it was -- I

was constantly in, you know, between life and death. Every day for me -- it wasn't like being in a camp. It was like -- and, I forgot to say this. One day I'm walking in the street and I think I was bringing home a whole loaf of bread or whatever the story was, walking on the street and I became so confident. I'm walking right in front of the Nazi headquarters in Budapest, walking by, "Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler." The guy says "Come here." He says "Show me your identification." I showed him. I memorized my name, everything. "Here it is." Somehow, something is not kosher with this guy. I made a big mistake because I carried a picture of a girlfriend, somebody with me where she had a yellow star on. That picture fell out on the ground. He grabbed it, he looks at it. "Who's that," he asked me. He says "Show me your penis." That's final, you're a Jew or not a Jew.

I said, "If I have to show you my penis, I can tell you I'm Jewish."

He had this hand machine gun. He kicked me in the butt, you know with the butt. He says "Go upstairs, we want to question you now."

So, I went up the steps and went into this

place, had to take everything out of my pockets. He said "Everything what you have behind you," he give me some smacks. Everything I lay on the table.

They're curious because those are original documents. They were not just phonies, they were real. I said to myself "That's it. Speak Hebrew, that's the end." This was a place once you get in you don't come out.

INTERVIEWER: Like Gestapo headquarters?

MR. FAHR: Gestapo Hungarian headquarters, nobody comes out, that's it. There were partisans, there were underground people. The company I was in I said "That's it."

What they do with them, they tie their hands,, everybody behind their backs, they throw them in the Danube. In case the shot is not perfect you'll drown. One way or another. So, we knew that.

I am in the space and I'm waiting to be questioned, waiting in this hallway. I forgot how long I waited. I started to pray. I never prayed in my life. I said "God, what I wish, you know, that a bomb would fall. Let me die with them. I felt so glad to survive on my own -- naked, here

I'm going to be shot to death like an animal, like nothing." It was all for, nothing. I hardly finished my prayer, a bomb fell and a bomb fell across the street, not on this building. The bottom created a tremendous vacuum. All the windows -- the guy who was questioning me, a window fell on his head. He was bleeding. Running, chaotic.

INTERVIEWER: You were hurt?

MR. FAHR: Not even a scratch. I start running, too, but out. I'm going down, down, down the steps. I know I'm coming to the gate now. I'm thinking I get out the gate the guard will shoot me. If I stay inside they're going to kill me. So, I run and the guard is there dead. I mean he was -- I saw some horrible deaths. His whole stomach opened up like this, because from the pressure, it was like you get a chicken when you open it, gutted out. I walked out from that place without a scratch.

So, I have bits and pieces. Then I was running. I forgot, I went into a house, some houses -- I found a house which I thought I had a cousin that might live there, and I went to that house.

INTERVIEWER: This is still in Budapest?

MR. FAHR: In Budapest, everything is in Budapest. It was the most wierdest feeling. I was running and I find a building, three or four-story building. I walk into this apartment and the food is on the table still warm, all the Jews were taken away. The whole house is empty. I'm alone in the whole house.

I was so upset, so desperate, I said "I can't do it any more. It's just too much. That's it." So, I saw a line of people, Jews on the street and I just joined them to be taken to the ghetto. I couldn't take it any more.

I had a few (regaining composure; pause). I had a few raw potatoes in my pocket. And we got into the ghetto and they put me with other children. But I appeared like a gang leader. I was, you know, very sophisticated.

INTERVIEWER: Did you also look older?

MR. FAHR: Oh, yes, I was 13. I looked much older than my age.

I saw those little kids and all they were doing was sitting there. There was fire, it was winter. It was the past time, taking the lives and killing them, of everybody doing that. They

were hungry. I took all the potatoes I had and I shared it with them.

So, I stayed in the ghetto for about two or three weeks and this was now -- the Russians were very close. So, the bombs -- Budapest was bombarded very heavily. I don't remember exactly. All I know is that a woman was hit. I don't know if she was Jewish or gentile. Maybe she was a soldier -- I don't know who she was, but she was important enough.

She was hit and she had -- her arm was bleeding, was very bad shape, but she could walk. They're looking for two volunteers to take her to a hospital. She had to lean on both of us. So, there was another guy, was like me, pretty gutsy, too. So, we volunteered and we took -- you know, taking somebody to a hospital, this was -- you're talking about bombs falling. The rockets are coming down. They're shooting on the -- on the roofs it sounds like -- what do you call it -- the ice, like hail. I would walk with her and this guy.

We took her to the hospital, dropped her off. I never went back to the ghetto.

So, he told me that he has his mother in a

special place in Budapest, fantastic hiding place, we should go there. So, I said "All right, we'll go there." So, I went there. There was no food. You see, all life was food, survival, food, you know.

So then I made -- then came the revenge of my life. We're both very hungry. I said "I'll tell you what, I have an idea. I know where to get food." He said, "Where?" I said "Come with me." I went over to this engineer who had food so badly. I said "I'm back again. You want some food, I'll go 50 50".

INTERVIEWER: He's still in the same place?

MR. FAHR: He said "Fine." He gave me the letter, I went to the place. I took it, I took all of it. We went to his mother to get to the cellar. I gave all the food to the mother so we're sharing it all. And it was towards the end there was no more food. We used to carry out the kids who turned blue, died of hunger in the cellar, brought them up to the top. Everything looks like that's the end. We're liberated by the Russian army and then that's another long story.

So, this is just part of it.

INTERVIEWER: Whose house were you in in

Hungary?

MR. FAHR: It wasn't a house. It was a cellar.

INTERVIEWER: What kind?

MR. FAHR: An apartment house totally bombarded. It was flattened but underneath the cellar, so it looked like --

INTERVIEWER: Nobody was hiding?

MR. FAHR: I wasn't alone, which were partisans, underground people.

INTERVIEWER: You were hiding yourself, there wasn't someone hiding you?

MR. FAHR: No, no. I was sleeping on a bench. You know what benches that in parks we have? On one side -- this was the space I had for about a month. Either I sleep on my right side or my left side.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever go outside --

MR. FAHR: No, just when we had to carry out a dead baby upstairs.

INTERVIEWER: When you went to this man a second time to take all the food from him, what were you wearing, how were you -- was it so chaotic then it didn't matter?

MR. FAHR: It didn't matter. This is what

helped me and this other guy and the family and his mother to go through.

INTERVIEWER: What was your life like when you were in the ghetto?

MR. FAHR: It was a very lonely life because the kids that were there, I couldn't identify with them. I was sort of like, you know, a leader-type or whatever. It's very difficult to describe for me. I got into the ghetto because I couldn't take, you know, the fight any more. It was sort of, had enough -- guts again to go out and -- I was surviving by myself.

I was -- once, I don't know where it fits into this story, maybe, but another time I was walking on the streets. I think, if I can recall, this was the time I went for the food the second time and I had this backpack. It was empty, there was no food. I was just on my way to get it. I didn't have a uniform any more, but what I did I learned my lesson. I had taken of myself a picture -- I wish I had it today -- in this uniform with a thing on. I carried it with me. Because I didn't have any identification. They were all gone. They took it.

I'm walking on the street and this guy, a

Nazi, and a girlfriend, both, you know, like a machete -- it was different walking on the street. I didn't say "Heil Hitler any more." I just walked. He says "Come here. Who are you?" I said "I'm just fleeing from the country, from the Russians," made up the story. He said "Well, do you have any identification?" I said no. We couldn't be prepared in the form of anything. As I take out my briefcase to look if I had something, purposely I made the picture fall on the ground. This time he grabs it. He looks at it. I said "That was when I was -- never mind."

He says "well, --" still wasn't satisfied. He says "Come under the gate." That always meant coming under the gate you have to show your penis if you're a Jew or not. I can tell you I said "fine," but I felt my heart in my throat. Let us go.

So, it was the longest steps of my life towards the gate. And I knew I was figuring. Now if I have to pull out I'm going to jump for his eyes. "I'm going to blind him, but I'm not going -- he's not going to kill me like a dog." I went, must have walked, so sure of myself. He says "You're okay, goodbye." He let me go.

So, I got a story, but that's about it. I think that's enough for today.

I forgot to say after I got the uniform -- the first trip I took was to the central station because I heard there were some Jews in wagons, you know, taking 70-80 to a wagon and I went over and I walked into the central station asking the commandante if there are some Jews here and because I heard there are some and he said he doesn't know what I'm talking about.

After my mother came back she said "It is true," and she was there. I was trying to get my mother out.

INTERVIEWER: Did she see you?

MR. FAHR: No, but I'm saying it was right after I saw her after the war I told her what happened. I was there.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like after the Russians liberated Budapest? What happened to you? You were saying you were wheeling and dealing?

MR. FAHR: After I was liberated by the Russian army, so the first trip I took was going home, home where we used to live, right, see what I find. As I'm going on the street I can't speak

Russian. I could speak a few words of German, I speak Hungarian. So, Russians are stopping everybody. I think this was the Ukranian army. I say, I knew enough, ye-vey, ye-vey, which is I'm Jew.

So, they're collecting people to do some work. They didn't give a damn. So, they put me on a truck and I find myself two hours later in a camp with a bunch of Nazis. I'm not kidding. So, I go and I tell them Muter Germansky. I'm trying to speak German. I'm saying my mother is German. So, I'm just here a number with the Russians, you are nothing with the Germans.

So there I was again, an expert in surviving and watching the guard, he's looking that way, I sneak out to the gate. I walked out, I walked the whole night. I walked through some sugar beet fields. I picked up a sugar beet. I was eating it the whole night to survive.

So, I was almost taken to Siberia, wherever the hell they were taking me. That's right, that's right, we were just a number, nothing, nothing.

INTERVIEWER: You made it back to Budapest?

MR. FAHR: Made it back to Budapest again.

INTERVIEWER: Then what happened?

MR. FAHR: Then I stayed, I went over to this apartment building where we used to live and, naturally, there's nobody there. The place is empty.

INTERVIEWER: The building survived?

MR. FAHR: Yes, I go and visited my mother's old girlfriend and she gave me some heat to burn all my clothes because it was full of lice, the kind of lice I had on my head and my coat. I took a bath in kerosene to kill the lice. Very difficult to get rid of lice.

Then she gave me her husband's clothing, "get dressed," who passed away. The man was 65. I was 14. She said, she would find a job to work in some place and that didn't fit with me very well. So, what I did, I found some western magazines, little books and I took one of these bombed, shelled-out spaces and I opened up my store. I started peddling these books.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you find these books?

MR. FAHR: I found the books and I found an open space, a place that had been bombarded out. I started screaming "Western book." These people

were sick of war. That didn't go very well. So, my problem is I was always hungry. And in the meantime I had to go to school. I say I must finish school because there's nobody to take care of. I have to do it on my own.

INTERVIEWER: Is this already September?

MR. FAHR: No, this is now May.

INTERVIEWER: 1945?

MR. FAHR: 1945, I'm 14 years old, yes, going into the eighth grade.

So, then, there I found through a relative at a bakery with whom I could get like bordillos (ph) in Mexico, like rolls. I get up 4:30 in the morning, get to the place, pick up a whole, like 50 pounds, 60 pounds -- I forgot -- carry it on my back and I stand, I found a factory where people go to work and I was standing there and selling them the warm rolls. By the time it was 6:00 o'clock in the morning I made enough money to survive. Then I went to school. And then in the afternoon I was on the black market selling saccharine. Saccharine -- there was no sugar. I did that until my mother came home.

INTERVIEWER: What school did you go to?

MR. FAHR: Hungarian school, regular school.

It was a very short school year. It started in February and it ended in June. Yes, yes. I went to school. I still remember, and the time I had a kind of cold here, I put a newspaper and my fingers were frozen, my toes. Among my one toe was so badly frozen it had a hole in it.

INTERVIEWER: How about when I visited your uncle?

MR. FAHR: Oh, that's right. I lived with my uncle for about a month.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find your girlfriend?

MR. FAHR: No, I found her and then I went and found my uncle and I lived with him for a month.

INTERVIEWER: Had they both been in hiding during the war --

MR. FAHR: They were in the ghetto.

INTERVIEWER: Then went back to their apartment?

MR. FAHR: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like living with your uncle?

MR. FAHR: Miserable. My uncle didn't want much to do with me. His wife was sort of not a very nice person. They were talking about sending

me to Mexico. They said "Well, your parents are dead anyhow, there's nothing to talk about." They were preparing to send me to my aunt who lived in Mexico. And I was very unhappy there, so I decided to go to make it on my own.

I also became very independent as of the experience of this. So, actually, I wanted to volunteer in the Russian army to fight the Germans when I was 14. They wouldn't take me. I wanted to kill Germans desperately. I feel in a way better I never killed a German in my life. Now I don't feel like killing them. At that time I would have loved to kill them.

INTERVIEWER: How did the finding of your mother, how did that happen?

MR. FAHR: It was an unbelievable experience. One day I'm coming home and there she was. She practically walked home from Germany. Being a Jewish mother she had food. She shlepped the food all the way from Germany hoping she'll find me.

So, that was in May and about a month later I was walking on the street after I unloaded my rolls because I kept that job because that's how I survived plus I was going to school and walking

the street and suddenly I run into my brother. He just came home.

After the war in 1945, then we went to Germany, from Germany went to Israel, volunteered in the Israel army when I was 17. I fought in the War of Independence and I lived in Israel for eight years. Then I got a scholarship, went to Vienna. I studied there, to Austria, and there I came here. A very simple life. This is my fortune.

My father was offered a very high post in the Hungarian government. He was offered a post of, to become the Minister of Agriculture of Hungary.

INTERVIEWER: Is that what he had done before the war?

MR. FAHR: No, but he was a pretty bright man and a Rakosh (ph) took over, who was Jewish, a super Communist. And he had done a speech. He said the next time I'm going to speak we're going to -- My father said you go on the street in Hungary, nothing to do with Communist, survived the Nazis, nothing to do with Communist. We saw all the people who were turncoats. From black they went to red.

And went to Germany. And my father -- I got

the first job cleaning up kitchen tables in a kitchen, not to do always when I make something, not to give me charity. My father started cleaning toilets.

INTERVIEWER: In a DP camp?

MR. FAHR: In a DP camp and then came elections and my father was elected to the Jewish community. He was one of the few people, out of two hundred thousand people of four or five, he became an officer at UNRA. He was a very powerful man, did a lot of good for Jewish people. He had given out a lot of food. And we left Germany.

And then I volunteered into the Israel army, my brother and myself. I was 17, he was 21 and we fought in the War of Independence, 1948. Then my parents came to Israel and I lived in Israel at --and I was a Chalutz. I worked on Moshvim, plowing in the fields, I did it all. I was a night guard on horse.

INTERVIEWER: Which part of the country were you in?

MR. FAHR: In Bait Yitzchak, which is three or four kilometers from Natanya. They were planting some trees. I was involved in that. We had transportation company, about three trucks.

And then I was discovered and I had a beautiful voice. So, somebody discovered me and paid for my trip to go to Vienna to study music and I got a fellowship in the Conservatory of Vienna. I was the only person without a high school diploma, never attended, never finished high school and I had a fellowship from the Austrian government and it look like I would become, who knows, maybe a famous opera singer.

My father passed -- my brother and my parents came to the United States. My father died here in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. So, they wrote me desperate letters I should come and I came.

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

MR. FAHR: I came into this country in 1961.

INTERVIEWER: You were in Vienna a long time?

MR. FAHR: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How long?

MR. FAHR: Six years.

Actually eight. That's what I have here.

INTERVIEWER: You have a picture of you and your father after the war?

MR. FAHR: I have one picture here on me. I found this. Here (indicating). I'm 17. This is

in Tel Aviv.

INTERVIEWER: Here's a picture. This is of Hungary, isn't it?

MR. FAHR: That's in Germany. That's my father when he was an officer there.

INTERVIEWER: You wanted him to tell about his mother and father?

MR. FAHR: What?

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell us what you know about the concentration camps?

MR. FAHR: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Are these all pictures when you came to the United States?

MR. FAHR: Yes, this is a concert. The only reason I have this -- (laughter) I'm singing Ava Maria here.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, boy. Did you continue to work with your singing when you got --

MR. FAHR: Yes, I did, a few appearances on television and I did Mack the Knife, the Three Penny Opera. I decided to become rich instead.

Anyway, my mother was in Bergen Belson and she was a tough lady, very tough. She was carrying -- how do you call it -- the big, when they were dishing out food.

INTERVIEWER: The kettle?

MR. FAHR: The kettle, right. My father and brother were in Mathausen and Putkensen (ph), all the destruction camps in Germany.

Fahrnichtenlager. It's a very touching story that maybe should be documented. My father and my brother, they're walking on foot from Mathahsen to Grintskengson or from Grintskenson to Mathausen, I don't know which. It was like they were walking for four or five days without food.

INTERVIEWER: Forced?

MR. FAHR: Forced, March, march so they would eat the grass, cook the grass, whatever. As they're walking this road an old Jew sees a piece of onion and he grabs it. And the young SS, 16, 17 years old, pulled him out of the line and blows his brains out and this guy, this old man was walking next to my brother.

My brother got all white in the face. The SS he's coming out, too. He comes out, my brother gets out, my father jumps in front of him and he says "Kill me first," crosses his arms, says "Kill me first."

He looks at my father and he says to him, "You're a Jew, you are a good worker. That's your

son?" That's your son." Okay. So --

INTERVIEWER: Did your brother and father stay together the whole time?

MR. FAHR: Yes.

My brother who was a dental technician pulled out the gold caps of my father's mouth in order to get some bread plus that he shouldn't be killed for it.

You probably heard these stories before.

INTERVIEWER: Were they -- do you know what sort of labor they were forced to do in the camps?

MR. FAHR: They were doing on the way something for anti-tank traps, traps -- that was before they were taken to the camp. In the camp they didn't do anything. When my brother was liberated he weighed 35 kilograms. When they took him in the bath, you know, the first bath they took and my brother is sitting in the bathtub, asking my father to help him turn around because he's sitting on -- what do you call it -- where the water --

INTERVIEWER: Where it drains?

MR. FAHR: Where you have this metal thing. He says you're not sitting on that, you're

sitting on your bone. He thought he was sitting on something.

INTERVIEWER: Can you talk a little bit more about being liberated by the Russians that day? How did that come about? What were you doing?

MR. FAHR: They were checking things, you know, coming out, check things, you know, what's going on. One day we come out. I look and I see a different uniform. I see Germans with their hands up and the Russian standing there with his Tova Tikar (ph) we called it, an automatic weapon. We said "We are liberated." This was very, very dramatic, very fantastic. That was it.

INTERVIEWER: Did people start coming out?

MR. FAHR: There were people walking with yellow stars on the street and -- and it was wild. I mean horses in a drug store, inside the drug store. The Russians, the Mongols eating tooth paste and bread. It was a wine flowing, they just opened up, they just drink and drunk. And people singing on the street and people just sort of -- I was just like walking, like being in a daze, you know. I couldn't still comprehend it.

Even after I left Hungary, maybe a year, I see a person in uniform and my heart would go because I was always suppressing, I always put on this front to survive. You couldn't show any emotion.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like for you after the war? Was it very emotionally -- was it very hard to deal with what had happened to you?

MR. FAHR: I think it took me at least a year or two to really -- I would wake up in the morning, I would say "Either I'm dreaming now or the other one was a nightmare? Did it really happen? Is it real?" I would go like this.

Am I dreaming I'm a free man? I have rights, I can walk on the street. I don't have to -- I can walk on the street and I picture myself, you know. I'm free. Incredible feeling to be free.

INTERVIEWER: I was talking to someone when he saw a German, whenever he saw a German he could never talk to them. The first thing he would think they were old enough to be in the war, they probably did this and that. Do you not feel that way so much any more?

MR. FAHR: The first time -- it's very interesting. It was about three years ago I was

in a vacation place -- what was that place?

INTERVIEWER: Eagle Lake.

MR. FAHR: Eagle Lake. I had a motorcycle, a German motorcycle. A person arrived there.

INTERVIEWER: A German tourist?

MR. FAHR: A German tourist. I speak fluent German, asked him for some directions and I looked at him and I felt no anger, no resentment. I felt good. I said "Well, let me help you out" and I let him get on my motorcycle.

I put him in the back of me. I felt his body. As I'm driving the motorcycle and sizing up his age, I say -- the thoughts going through your head after so many years, I said "He couldn't have killed my grandmother because he's about my age," but still, you know, when I felt his body, even -- then I felt good. I wanted to do that. I don't want to feel any hatred.

INTERVIEWER: Is that the first time?

MR. FAHR: The first time.

INTERVIEWER: Other than three years ago, other than to then -- you lived in Milwaukee?

MR. FAHR: I hate Milwaukee with a passion, ugly, shit, yes.

INTERVIEWER: After you came here when your

father was dying did you think about going back to Israel or to Vienna after?

MR. FAHR: No, I was never happy in Vienna actually. Let me tell you something. I've never been so happy in my life than since I came to the Bay area. I'm a wandering Jew. I lived in Israel for eight years. I may go back again maybe -- I don't know. I haven't been back to Israel since 1956. It's a long time.

INTERVIEWER: Were you in the war a second time, too?

MR. FAHR: No, I wasn't. No, I feel very free here. The first time I feel really free. I didn't feel free in Israel.

INTERVIEWER: Why is that?

MR. FAHR: I felt -- I know this is not what you want to hear but I'll tell you the truth the way I felt. See, I went to Israel and I joined the army, everything I was a great guy, came out. Things were pretty tough, very tough.

This is a good Israel joke. You know how you make a small cap in Israel, you come with a big one. We lost everything there. They really cleaned us out pretty good.

Then when it was all done they said "Who told

you to come here?" So, it was -- I was very unrealistic when I went to Israel. Maybe I expected too much.

INTERVIEWER: What did you expect?

MR. FAHR: I expected -- you know, during the war we're very close. It was a beautiful experience which I wouldn't trade probably for anything. It was beautiful, but after that was everybody for himself. Israel should be something higher, better than just an ordinary country. I expected too much. I found it was just cutthroat. Everybody is for himself.

I had a truck, and another guy had to watch he's not going to cut my tires so I can go out to work. It's a dog eat dog world. I went through that. Today it's much easier. When I went to Israel it was 600,000 Jews.

INTERVIEWER: People mentioned the word "ghetto" --

MR. FAHR: Then, they would call you anyhow. They called me a Hungarian. I said "I'm a Jew. The fuckin' Hungarians called me a Jew. Now you Jews are calling me a Hungarian?" It was certain prejudice because I didn't speak Yiddish. Actually, I picked up Yiddish. I picked up

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Yiddish in Germany, I was the only one, but I wasn't, you know -- I was an assimilated Jew.

INTERVIEWER: You were not an eastern European Jew?

MR. FAHR: That's right, I didn't fit in with the Russian and with the Polish Jews. The dominating Jews at that time were the Polish Jews. I couldn't read Hebrew, you know. It was a totally different culture.

INTERVIEWER: How was it once in your opinion in the army? Did it have an assimilating influence?

MR. FAHR: On me?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, on being in Israel.

MR. FAHR: I did very well. They wanted me to become an officer. I was sick of the army. I'm not a good soldier, I think too much.

INTERVIEWER: Independent?

MR. FAHR: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Tell the story briefly.

MR. FAHR: I used to be the "Nahag" for Ezra Weissman. Nahag is driver.

INTERVIEWER: Tell the one you told me, after having survived by yourself in the ghetto, then suddenly made to stand in a row with the other

soldiers.

MR. FAHR: No --

INTERVIEWER: You cooperated?

MR. FAHR: No. They once asked me in the desert, somebody did something wrong. We're wearing the steel helmets and guns. I saw no purpose to it. I said "I came to this country to fight the Arabs, not to be punished. So I sit down." My sergeant came. He put the gun against my head. He said "I'm going to blow your brains out." I said, "Go head." He said, "You're impossible." So he transferred me to somebody else.

INTERVIEWER: Is that when when they made you the driver?

MR. FAHR: Yes, that's right. I think I'm too individualistic.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do once you got to Milwaukee?

MR. FAHR: I went to Vienna, I went to speak German again.

INTERVIEWER: You had a very hard time there because you thought everybody was a Nazi, right?

MR. FAHR: Yes. For two years I studied with a private teacher who was considered like

German -- he was not German, he was Yugoslavian. He liked my voice very much. He thought I was very talented and then I passed the entrance to the Conservatory of Vienna. They gave me a scholarship to the Austrian country. They recommended me for citizenship. And I passed the examination and looked forward to a contract and my father passed away, came to this country which became a total disaster.

I never wanted to come to the United States.

INTERVIEWER: On principle you didn't want to come?

MR. FAHR: First of all, I didn't really care, how can I say it? I was so much involved in art, you know, music. I think this was a very materialistic country. You know, Americans came to Europe to get a break in opera. No European would come to the United States. This country has very little to offer unless are at the top and go to the Met, you know.

Then I ended up in this beer town and it was terrible for me. I was very unhappy and miserable but it's a long story.

Somehow I managed to get married to this lady and I had a heart attack at the age of 32 but I

was very miserable.

I said that's enough with the arts. I'm going to become wealthy and I went into business. You might say I became extremely successful right away. I decided to start making money. I don't think I would live in Milwaukee too long, I lived in Milwaukee something like eight years, something like that.

Ten years we lived in Milwaukee, and Madison, Wisconsin. She went to school there. My wife is a psychologist. Don't hold it against her. She doesn't practice it. And then we came to California and I got into real estate here. My first job was with a Grabard commercial brokerage. You probably heard the name. After one and a half years I became the number one salesman in the commercial brokerage.

Then I opened up my own company called Berry Young. Then I got an incurable disease which is like cancer. I'm supposed to be dead. My wife, we had homeopathy. I got a miracle cure and am totally healthy. So, I'm going to buy a house on Marianna Boulevard. That's it. Happy ending.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else --

MR. FAHR: La finita.

INTERVIEWER: Are there any other anecdotes or stories we didn't ask about that you would like to tell us?

MR. FAHR: There probably are. I don't know. Yes, there are more.

INTERVIEWER: Would you like -- would you want to tell us?

MR. FAHR: You know this life is basically, if you look at it, I'm 54 years old. I probably could speak another half hour, an hour. There's not much for 54 years.

INTERVIEWER: You're just giving us the main point?

MR. FAHR: I have to make it more interesting since I'm so boring, I can also tell you I discovered I have a daughter two years ago. It has nothing to do with it.

INTERVIEWER: Anything else about the Holocaust, afterwards that you want to talk about or about the community in Budapest before the war? You didn't tell them about the anti-Semitism.

MR. FAHR: Very bad. I went to a Christian school and --

INTERVIEWER: Public school?

MR. FAHR: Public school and I was once beaten half unconscious because I was sort of the kind of a kid I couldn't run from a fight. Once a gang of Nazi kids say "Come here, you dirty Jew." I was with another two kids. They were Jewish. I said, "You have two choices, run or fight." They were smarter, they started running. I started fighting. They beat me unconscious, totally unconscious. I woke up I was -- yes, I experienced anti-Semitism in school. And a Jewish kid had to take hurried holiday (indecipherable). One of the teachers was in the reserve and had a Jewish kid and (indecipherable) one of the teachers hit me over by the head and broke my head.

They tried to make the point in gymnastics. I was 30 in a class. There was maybe five or six of us, five of us Jewish. My first biggest -- I can tell you I was, you know, I was assimilated Jew.

INTERVIEWER: Your family wasn't observant?

MR. FAHR: We went to Shabbat, to the temple, but very nationalistic. We grew up Hungarian first, Jew second, just like the German Jews or American Jews. I was very good in poetry and

stuff like that.

I remember I was 12 years old. There was a contest to see who is the best poet and I won the contest. The big prize at the end of the year you could say like hear you sing the national anthem. There you say this poem which was regarded a very patriotic poem. I was selected and the day before I was -- I decided I can't say it because I'm Jewish.

I think this affected me tremendously. This just broke my heart. So, if you could say as a conclusion, as a result I think the Nazis has helped me to become a very good Jew. You see, now I know I'm a Jew. I experienced it to it's totality but whether I wanted to be a Jew or not to be a Jew it doesn't really matter. I am a Jew.

INTERVIEWER: It's not a choice, you're saying?

MR. FAHR: I don't have a choice.

INTERVIEWER: Do you act on that now in terms of how you live your life?

MR. FAHR: Very much so, yes. I feel Jewish and I support Jewish causes. I make sure my children know what it means to be a Jew, not just

by praying but by recognizing that you have a certain obligation, a certain holding in life that you have to do and I made sure that my children know about the Holocaust so they can tell their children, so they can tell their children and it should never happen again and I don't think too much of it can happen because they went to the camp themselves.

INTERVIEWER: Was it hard at first to tell them what had happened to you?

MR. FAHR: It was hard for me to talk to anybody about it. I didn't want to tell anybody but my son. I would talk to him about -- he was brought up from the beginning. I felt it's my obligation. It wasn't -- at that time it wasn't fashionable.

INTERVIEWER: Religion?

MR. FAHR: I felt it's something that he should know because --

INTERVIEWER: Is it very hard to talk to a non-Jew about it?

MR. FAHR: I never talked to a non-Jew about it.

INTERVIEWER: Once in a while you'll drop a few dramatic -- very hard.

MR. FAHR: I tell you, I don't feel sorry for myself. I feel extremely privileged. I feel like, in a way, very fortunate that I went through this experience and I'm here to tell the story. I survived it and I think that I -- you know, when you come out from an experience like this, either you hate people, people can come out different ways.

I love people and basically it really bothered me I hated the Germans. Now I don't hate them. I'm most probably not totally neutral but I have a Porsche, a BMW, Mercedes. Sometimes I feel guilty about it. I just made a very large transaction. There was a Chinese, a very good friend of mine, a German was buying, a Chinese seller. I, the Jew, the broker, I sat down, I said "Like at what this company has." This German ace "How come you drive a Porsche? I'm buying a Corvette." I said, "That's okay. You can drive a Corvette, you shouldn't drive a Porsche because you're German. I'm Jewish, I can drive a Porsche."

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved in any problems now with families, about the education of the Holocaust, what Jewish organizations?

MR. FAHR: I just made one speech once for a Hebrew academy.

INTERVIEWER: On the Holocaust?

MR. FAHR: The Holocaust once, yes.

INTERVIEWER: In fact, it was I who called you up (Indecipherable) right?

MR. FAHR: Right. I prepared myself. Some cognac, some wine.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much for preparing yourself so well. It's a very incredible story how you lived by your wits and came out so well.

MR. FAHR: I can't complain. So, I got my college education in a different way.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you.

(The interviewers on this tape were Andrea Altschuler and Rachel Gordon. The interview took place on March 17th, 1985.)