

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT FEHER

COPY

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Marc Blumberg

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Telescribe of Oregon, Inc.

1 (August 15, 1990. Barbara Harris &
2 Marc Blumberg, Interviewers.)

3 Q. (BY MS. HARRIS) WE BEGAN A FEW WEEKS AGO AND
4 WHEN WE LEFT OUR YOUNG HERO, HE WAS AT A TRAIN STATION
5 IN BUDAPEST, SECURING SOME FALSE DOCUMENTS SO THAT HE
6 COULD -- YOU COULD SURVIVE THE REST OF THE WAR.

7 ROBERT, CAN YOU TELL ME JUST TO BACKTRACK A
8 LITTLE BIT, WHY YOU DECIDED TO -- DECIDED ON THIS
9 ELABORATE MASQUERADE AS A MEMBER OF THE YOUNG
10 HITLER -- THE HITLER YOUTH, RATHER THAN JUST TRYING TO
11 GO INTO HIDING SOMEWHERE?

12 A. (Pause.) I think I contributed this to --
13 probably you could say my rebellious nature. And
14 also, you know, I never wore a yellow star. I don't
15 know if I mentioned it before or not. I refused to
16 wear the yellow star. I saw no other -- in my own
17 mind, probably, I saw -- as I think back, I just saw
18 no -- no other alternative for myself, which means
19 that I had to survive somehow and this uniform or the
20 band, arm band, the cap on the head and the
21 identification that I acquired has given me a chance
22 to -- to beat the system. (Pause.) Yeah. To beat
23 the system, I think. Not to let them get away with
24 it. (Pause.)

25 I also remember as I'm thinking about that that

1 even in school when I was a very young kid and the
2 teacher said everybody went right, I had to went left.
3 That's the way I was. Or that's the way I am maybe
4 today even. So I don't know if I answered your
5 question or not.

6 Q. WHICH TRAIN STATION DID YOU GO TO IN BUDAPEST
7 AND WHAT WAS THE DATE?

8 A. I don't remember the date. I remember it was
9 the Nyugati, which is the west train station. It must
10 have been sometimes in September. Must have been
11 around September of 1944. I'm not sure of the date.
12 It was autumn, 1944.

13 Q. WHAT WAS THE NATURE, EXACTLY, WHAT WAS IN THE
14 DOCUMENTS, THE IDENTIFICATION?

15 A. The identification just showed that you are a
16 Nyilos, which means like Hitler youth. "Nyilos" means
17 cross arrow. It was an Aryan paper showing that you
18 are not Jewish and you -- give you certain privileges.
19 Anybody who had a uniform and was a Nyilos was
20 somebody, you know. So I could walk the streets. I
21 was free.

22 I don't recall the name. I remember I memorized
23 the name. I forgot my name. I memorized my name. I
24 memorized my birth date of birth, where I came from.
25 I could even -- I was very good, musical ears, because

1 in Hungary, like probably most other places, people
2 have different dialects. Hungarian, and I could put
3 on the country dialect, the country origin I came.
4 Sakish (ph) Crakow, which is a crowning City of
5 Hungary, approximately 60 kilometers from Budapest,
6 where I was born. And those people had a heavy
7 dialect when they spoke and I could speak the dialect.
8 My family used to make fun of I could really talk like
9 a peasant.

10 So I had my act together very much in
11 anticipation that I will be questioned maybe or there
12 was what they call the gotsi on the street, where you
13 have to show identification and they may ask you some
14 questions. If you look suspicious. I had my act
15 together and was prepared.

16 So the next thing is I have my identification, I
17 have my so-called uniform and I'm trying to recall
18 what I did next. (Pause.)

19 I think the next thing I did, I was -- I needed
20 to eat. Was very hungry. And it was foremost on my
21 mind to eat, to get food. And I don't know if I
22 mentioned, but I was left with some money. A little
23 bit of money. Few hundred pengos. I remember we had
24 200 cigarettes. I never smoked in my life but I
25 started smoking those cigarettes, because I notice as

1 I smoke a cigarette I'm not so hungry. So and I was,
2 you know, a young kid. Very -- you're more hungry
3 than adult when you're growing.

4 So I ran into some Jewish people who were hiding
5 and I don't remember which street or where or how, but
6 I remember definitely that I ran into them and they
7 told me of their problem or that they had one of
8 the -- somebody's mother, I think, was in the ghetto.
9 See, at that time the Jews were already in the ghetto.
10 They take to ghetto or concentration camp. And would
11 I take this woman out of the ghetto.

12 You have to remember that the ghetto was
13 surrounded by the certain gates that were open. The
14 rest was closed, where there were guards. And they
15 said to me that they will -- if I do that and I bring
16 this woman out, I forgot the deal I made, would I get
17 a loaf of bread or would I get equivalent. I mean, a
18 great price. A great price. Which everything was
19 converted into food. I mean, to be or not to be.

20 So I don't think -- I remember I didn't take on
21 the assignment right away, because I knew it was very
22 dangerous, but as time went on my hunger was stronger
23 than my reluctance to risk my life. So I said, "Okay.
24 I'll do it." Must have been a day or two later. And
25 so they gave me the address in the ghetto. And I

1 remember it very distinctly. It was about Tuesday
2 evening. It was dark. There are lights, street
3 lights, and there was a man, Hungarian policeman or --
4 I don't remember, or a soldier. I think it was either
5 a policemen or a Nyilos. A guard. In any event, it
6 was a guard who was guarding the gate, which was not
7 really a gate, it was a street. And the guard would
8 walk from one end to the streets and no one would pass
9 by until you, you know, identify yourself, whatever.

10 So I went over to the guard. I said, "eljen
11 szalsi," which means "Heil Hitler," "eljen szalsi."
12 And I asked him for a light, to give me a light. I
13 looked older than my age. And he gave me a light.
14 And I said, you know, "Thank you, eljen szalsi." I
15 just walked into the ghetto. He wouldn't even ask me
16 anything. Probably too much with spy. But I want him
17 to know I didn't have a plan how to do it. It was all
18 spontaneous. And oh, here it is. This is not a bad
19 idea and I just went for it.

20 And I started to walk. I remember to try to find
21 the place. And I can't recall because I know for --
22 that I have a very bad sense of direction, but somehow
23 I found the place.

24 I remember as a policy, I would always walk
25 middle of the street. Never walk on the sidewalk,

1 because you never know what's behind, underneath
2 something. And so I got into this so-called apartment
3 and people were lined like sardines. It was
4 unbelievable. Top of each other. I mean, they were
5 maybe four or five square foot per person. And they
6 see this guy coming in with the uniform, everybody
7 say, "eljen szalsi." And I said, "Don't worry, I'm
8 one of you. I am Jewish. I'm here to see Mrs.
9 So-and-so. I don't remember her name." And I
10 remember so many hands reaching out, "I'll give you
11 more. I'll give you more." Everybody wanted to take
12 them. I said, "I can't do it. I made a promise."
13 They offered me all kinds of things to take them out.
14 Could take one person. Because by that time I made
15 up -- I had a story in my mind how I'm going to do
16 this. I could take only one. I couldn't take two.

17 Anyhow, I made a deal, I made a deal with these
18 people to bring -- so I told the woman. I say, "You
19 just pack your clothes." I took total charge. "Take
20 your clothes, put it in a suitcase and we'll go out
21 from here." Said, "Make sure that you don't have any
22 identification on you." Because I knew that much,
23 that if a woman was get caught, like I got caught
24 because of circumstances, woman in circumstance, so
25 I'm her son, you know, that's the story. "I'm your

1 son. You are my mother. And the Jews were taken into
2 the ghetto and you, which I told you a million times
3 not to give work for the Jews, but you did and it's
4 damn Jewish tailor, the son-of-a-bitch, he took your
5 clothes into the ghetto and we went into the ghetto to
6 get your clothes back. So that's the reason we're
7 here."

8 So I told her that I entered on one street where
9 they saw me coming in alone, so we'll have to enter
10 another street where they didn't see me come. So I
11 had my so-called mother, she was a woman probably in
12 her late thirties or early forties. I remember how
13 she looked. I remember -- I don't remember her name.
14 She was a short woman. Dishwater blonde hair and
15 pretty scared. She was scared, I think. And I had to
16 give her courage. Don't worry, you know, I was acting
17 like every day. No big deal for me. Probably trying
18 to calm her down. Couldn't afford for me to be
19 scared.

20 So we're walking. I said, "Just don't say
21 anything. Let me do my thing." And I'll never forget
22 it. We are getting close. And I see the guard
23 walking across the street like this, back and forth,
24 back and forth. (Demonstrating.) I started talking
25 to her. "Don't say anything." And every second word

1 came out of my mouth is "Dirty fucking Jew, this
2 fucking Jew, I told you not to work -- let Jews work
3 for you." And I started talking louder and louder
4 and was screaming top of my lungs. And every word
5 just "Jew, Jew, dirty Jew, I told you," you know. And
6 we come to the car, he looks and he just smiles and I
7 walk out and nobody, so help me God, nobody even ask
8 me anything. I walked out like nothing.

9 Then when it was over and we were sitting, like,
10 I felt like a ton of bricks or something fell off my
11 chest, you know. But so took her to the place and I
12 got my reward and the thanks and I was, you know,
13 treated like a hero. And I lasted maybe a week on
14 that. I am talking about the food, whatever I got.

15 So then I remember that I was sleeping like
16 homeless people here in different places. In cellars,
17 wherever I could find a place. Was always alone. I
18 didn't have anyone to talk to. (Pause.) And I ran
19 into somebody else. And he said to me that we need
20 some papers, Aryan papers. There were papers on the
21 street that you could -- it's like living in an
22 underworld. Papers. But they're phony. Said they
23 want real Aryan papers. I said, "No problem, I'll get
24 it." So said a family, you know, so many people,
25 three, four, five people, I've forgotten. And if I

1 can get that, I get I don't know how many loaves of
2 bread. I mean this was like a fortune, right? I mean
3 food. Food. And this is my life revolves. Eating,
4 you know, like a stray dog. So I said, "I'll get it."

5 I remember I did a lot of traveling. Went on a
6 street car. Now, on the street car I didn't know how
7 I'm going to get. As I'm traveling on the street car
8 a woman taps me on the shoulder. She is with a accent
9 from the country. And she says to me "elvtars," it's
10 like comrade, you know, comrade. She said, "We are
11 good Nazi, just like I am a good Nazi." She says,
12 we're good Nazis and we're fleeing from the Russians
13 and we are here in Budapest. And I understand that
14 you can get furniture from the warehouse of the Jewish
15 homes that have been cleaned out by the government and
16 they keep it in a warehouse so we are good Nazis,
17 could you help us to get some of this furniture?" I
18 said, "No problem. Fine. Great."

19 My head starts spinning. I said, "Aha." There
20 must be a way for me to get her papers. I says, "I'll
21 help you out." So she took me to her house. And I
22 said -- looked at the house, I said, "What kind of
23 furniture do you need? The whole list." Said, "I
24 have some friends. I have some friends who can help
25 you out," I said, "but, you know, I can't just get

1 this." I said, "You have to -- I need your -- all
2 your identification, because without it how can I --
3 you know, they will think it's for me. I'm trying to
4 do black market. No, I'm just trying to help you out,
5 as a comrade, you know." Said, "No, problem." She
6 was alone. Her husband worked in a munitions factory
7 or something. She was, you know, more a blue collar
8 kind of Nazi.

9 So she gave me all her papers. I couldn't
10 believe. She gave me the papers. She trusted me.
11 The papers, her papers, her -- I said, "I need the
12 whole family."

13 (Laughter.)

14 So, you know how much furniture, I need a whole
15 bunch. So she gave me her papers, her husband's, her
16 children. I have them. I mean it's like somebody
17 gives you a million dollars. It's more than that.
18 This is life. You know? This is life. It's going to
19 save so many lives. I'm going to have something to
20 eat. I mean, it's great.

21 So I said, "Thank you very much." I said, "I'll
22 do my best." And I said, "You know, the guy who will
23 bring this, I still remember this story, who brings it
24 out is a heavy smoker. So he'll bring the furniture,
25 please give him a backup cigarette." She said,

1 "Fine." I said, "eljen szalsi, Heil Hitler." She
2 says, "Heil Hitler," I go.

3 I says I've got it. So naturally I'm running to
4 the Jewish family like a hero. I said I've got
5 original papers. Can you believe this? Look at it,
6 everybody is excited. Said, "No good." I said, "What
7 do you mean no good? This is impossible to get."
8 Says, "You forgot to take the -- those papers,"
9 forgot -- it's like stamps. When you are a Jew, first
10 of all you can't walk the streets; second of all, you
11 don't get Food Stamps, you don't get stamps to shop.
12 Anything was -- everything was stamps, you know, durka
13 (ph). So as an Aryan you had stamps. And to identify
14 yourself you need those stamps. Oh, I said, "Oh, no."
15 Said, "I can't go back there. There is no way."

16 So two days, three days, four days go by. I
17 don't know. I was very hungry. I mean I have not
18 eaten a day or two and the soup. I need those papers.
19 I mean I need those papers. I need those papers and
20 this fucking hunger is going to kill me. And if I do
21 it they can kill me. I have to do it.

22 This is probably toughest thing I ever done in my
23 life. I went back. I went back. And this woman, I
24 knock on the door and she sees me. And she says "O,
25 istenem," Oh, my God! I told my husband." She

1 almost -- he almost beat me up, that I give all the
2 papers to stranger. And I looked at her and I said,
3 "You mean to tell me you don't trust me?" And I said,
4 had the papers here. I said, "Here it is, I want
5 nothing to do with you. Only reason I came, because
6 they told me they will give you the furniture but for
7 identification purposes I need those things to, you
8 know, for the shopping thing. Otherwise, it's not
9 right."

10 She says, "Please, please, take it." I said,
11 "No," I said, "No." I was a real con artist. And she
12 gave me her stuff. Everything what I needed. And I
13 couldn't believe it. I walked out alive and no
14 suspicion and I walked back and I gave it to the Jews
15 and they gave me my reward. And then I lasted for a
16 while.

17 I need a break.

18 MR. BLUMBERG: Have to let the tape run
19 about five seconds to get a track on it
20 electronically --

21 (Blank screen)

22 Q. (BY MS. HARRIS) ROBERT, WHILE YOU WERE LIVING
23 ON THE STREET LIKE THAT, WERE YOU AFRAID THAT YOU
24 MIGHT BE RECOGNIZED BY SOME GENTILE WHO KNEW YOU
25 BEFORE THE WAR?

6
1 A. All the time. All the time. While you're
2 afraid that you will be just recognized that you are a
3 Jew, you will be afraid of -- I mean, you knew your
4 consequences that they catch you. They can shoot you
5 on the spot. Don't need any trial or anything.

6 You're much aware, very much aware of that.

7 And actually, I don't know if it is the cause,
8 but I always had this very poker face kind of thing.
9 No show any emotions. And actually, I did, because
10 sometimes when I got into trouble with questions, and
11 my heart was up in my throat banging and I would just
12 look, you know, very casual. But I did develop, after
13 the war, was diagnosed to have an irregular heart
14 which I never had before. Irregular heart beat. So
15 maybe it was connected to this. I don't know. Which
16 I have as of today also.

17 I remember a very weird story that happened to
18 me, talking about being recognized. I must have been,
19 oh, not eating for several days and was in a street
20 car. Traveling in Budapest. Probably without the
21 purpose. Just, you know, to move from place to place.
22 Always on the move. Always. And there is this guy
23 looking at me. He's in his thirties. He looks at me.
24 I look at him. And I was sort of standing and holding
25 onto this, whatever they have in street cars, you

1 know, hold it, sit down. And he sits across from me.

2 He says, "I see hunger in your eyes. Eyes are
3 shining." And he said, "You are Jewish, aren't you?"
4 And I looked at him and I said, "And you're a
5 homosexual, aren't you?" Because if you're a
6 homosexual, you get also killed. So he said, "Yeah."
7 Said, "I'm Jewish then." So I mean, you got something
8 over me, I got something over you. He said, "How
9 would you like to eat?" I said, "I'd love to eat."
10 So went to meet a friend of mine. "Want to take you
11 out."

12 Took me to a place, restaurant, wasn't much. You
13 know, gave me soup or something. And said, you know,
14 you know, "I have a relative in Ongwin (ph) in the
15 country. And we take you with us. We're not going to
16 harm you." I was a tough kid. I said, "No." "No
17 monkey business." Said, "We'll take you see food,
18 more food than you ever see in your life." I said,
19 "Fine. I'm going."

20 So we went. I think we went by train, maybe a
21 couple-hour ride from Budapest, to these peasants'
22 house. And I remember like it was yesterday. We went
23 into the peasants' house and the peasants had all the
24 food in the world. I never seen so much sausages
25 coming down from the smoke chimney and homemade bread

1 and I'm in paradise. And I can eat to my heart
2 content. And it was a good, good peasant.

3 They were talking to each other and I remember
4 that one of them showed -- just started to discuss the
5 other guy's chest, how exited. And they never bother
6 with even touch me, nothing. And they're very nice to
7 me. I was in the country for two days or three days,
8 and he packed me up with food and we came back to
9 Budapest and they let me go.

10 This was the nicest who ever been nice to me
11 during the war, these two homosexuals. And they
12 didn't ask me for anything. They just -- they were
13 just nice. Couldn't believe it.

14 So this was my one experience where I -- that
15 somebody caught me on the street and said, hey -- you
16 know, off -- I mean I must have been -- my eyes must
17 have been shining from hunger. Because he was
18 sensitive. He caught it.

19 Then I think what happened next? (Pause.) Oh, I
20 forgot. I forgot. The first thing I did after I got
21 my uniform, my identification card, is that I was
22 asking around and I found out, because that was just
23 maybe a day or two, maybe a day after my mother was
24 taken away and I was trying to save my mother. And I
25 went out to another railway station. I don't remember

1 which one, but it wasn't the one that I was before.
2 Maybe it was the eastern Bahnhof, the eastern train
3 station. And because I heard the Jews were in the
4 wagons. You know, like cattle that were taken. And
5 God is my witness I don't know where I took the guts.
6 I went into the headquarters where they were. There
7 was -- he wasn't a Nyilos, it was a Csendor. It was a
8 different -- I don't know how to say it in English.
9 They have these feathers on their hats. They were
10 usually in the country. They were acting like a
11 policeman in the country. Like a sheriff. But not
12 really a sheriff.

13 I said that I understand that you are holding
14 some Jews in these trains going to somewhere, to
15 Germany. And they looked, said, "We don't know what
16 you're talking about." And so I didn't, you know,
17 make -- "Sure, I just asked." "There is no such
18 thing."

19 Interesting enough, I was there and I told it to
20 my mother after I met her, after the war. She said,
21 "Yes, I was there and it was at the place that I was
22 that they took me away." I was trying to save my
23 mother, so obviously I was, I failed. Just came to my
24 mind. But that was the first thing I did after. And
25 then came the thing with the food.

1 Now, I went back to that house where originally
2 they took my mother. It's not a house, it's an
3 apartment building. I also developed a habit many
4 times to go into different apartment buildings and
5 find food. You know, where people have been taken
6 away and see, find food on the table and I eat it and
7 I run out.

8 I went into this place, went into the apartment
9 very cautiously and I found a man there. And he was
10 Jewish. The building was three stories. I remember
11 he was on the second story in a little apartment. He
12 was hiding there. And he was an engineer. (Pause.)
13 And he said I can stay with him, you know. I say,
14 "Okay, I stay." Because I got concerned because I was
15 recognized once on the street. I got concerned. I
16 lost some of my hutzpa. Some of my -- (Indicating.)
17 You know. I'm afraid I could be caught I could be
18 killed.

19 So he said to me, "Share a little soup with me."
20 I share whatever he had with him. But I became
21 chicken when I was with him. I became more, because
22 he was afraid. He wouldn't even -- he was very much
23 afraid. And I told him, he said to me, "You know,
24 Robert," said "I have friends out there and if you
25 would go," it was right across Budapest, "and if you

1 would go and bring me a sack, a sack of food," it may
2 sound boring to you, but this was my whole life. This
3 was the whole process, surviving. "That if you would
4 go across Budapest, I'll give you a rook sack,
5 backpack. You can take with you. And you bring it
6 back, I'll split with you 50/50." I says, you can
7 schlepp, you know, 25 kilograms. This would be like,
8 hey, that's like a month. I mean we could live on it
9 on a month.

10 And the same old story. You know, I knew the
11 risk was very high. Very high. But the hunger kept
12 mounting and mounting and mounting. And one day I
13 said, "I'll go. I'll do it." And he gave me the
14 directions. And -- (Pause.) I found the place and
15 they gave me the food. I mean they gave me food.
16 They gave me slabs, you know, of bacon and sausage and
17 bread and canned goods. I mean I packed this thing up
18 full. And I'm coming back and I brought it back.

19 It was like probably you're talking about -- it
20 seemed like forever, but probably two or three hour
21 walk going both directions. So maybe five hours, six
22 hours, something. It seemed like an eternity,
23 because, you know, there were soldiers on the street.
24 Nobody stopped me.

25 I came back and this man told me that, because he

1 knew that my parents were taken the concentration
2 camp, that he will become like my father. He acted
3 like he'll take care of me and I was, you know, very
4 vulnerable. I mean I wanted to trust him. And I gave
5 him everything. I mean on the way home I wouldn't
6 even take anything out, because, you know, it was --
7 we made a deal. This was, you know, like stealing
8 from your own family. You can't do that.

9 So when I gave him the stuff, the food, I waited
10 for him to give me half. Didn't give me anything.
11 And I was heartbroken. I was too proud to ask him.
12 He gave me soup. A lousy soup.

13 It's like you find somebody a million dollars and
14 they give you a \$5 finder's fee, you know. I thought
15 it was -- this man really screwed me over. And he was
16 a Jew. It was just hurting too -- so much. I was so
17 angry. I could have killed am I was so angry, and I
18 didn't show it. Because I figure I'm going to get
19 back at him.

20 It's probably out of contents, because by that
21 time when I did that, I have another story and if I
22 said the story where I was supposed to be executed?
23 No, I didn't tell this story.

24 At that time I didn't have any more of my Nazi
25 uniform. I just walked the street. (Pause.) I said

1 to him -- he said then the food was gone. A month
2 went by or three weeks. He would give me a little
3 soup but he didn't give me any of the food.

4 Two weeks, three weeks, I don't remember. It was
5 a long time. I mean three weeks is a long time. And
6 he said to me would I bring another sack. I said, "No
7 problem. I'll do it." Played dumb. He gave me a
8 note again. I went to that place. And I filled it up
9 and I never came back to share it.

10 And I met during this trip a guy, another Jewish
11 guy about my age. Maybe a year older. He was also
12 sort of a vagabond. And became friends. This
13 happened on my journey coming back. And he told me
14 that he has a mother who can cook and we can share it
15 with him and his mother and I went and share it and we
16 found a place where we were hiding. His mother there.
17 And Jews and partisans, underground hiding, and I
18 brought in the food. But this other contents, that's
19 how I survived the rest of the war, we were staying in
20 this cellar. And she would cook for us and take care
21 of us and rationed the stuff for us. And she was very
22 nice. Very nice. And that's how I survived the last
23 three weeks or a month, lasted for all of us. A lot
24 of food.

25 But I have to go back. What happened to me, how

1 I -- bits and pieces. (Pause.) I think it was
2 sometimes in my cocky days, earlier cocky days where I
3 thought I get away with anything. I had this uniform.
4 I was walking. And I got away obviously bringing the
5 woman out of the ghetto. I was walking on the street
6 and I said -- walked by, right front of the Nyilos
7 headquarters of Budapest. Like the Gestapo
8 headquarters of Budapest. I'm walking right front,
9 saying "eljen szalsi." He says, "Come here." So
10 what? I go there. "Show me your identification." I
11 show him my identification. And as I'm showing it, a
12 picture falls out of my pocket. And on the picture a
13 girlfriend of mine, whom -- when I was 13 years old,
14 she had a little yellow star on, falls on the ground.
15 And he grabs it. And he sees the yellow star. Says,
16 "Are you a Jew? Show me your penis." "If I have to
17 show it to you then I am Jewish." Because, you know,
18 circumcised. In Hungary only the Jews are
19 circumcised. In Germany, no. In Hungary, no, only
20 the Jews.

21 So this guy was a tall guy, to me looked like a
22 giant, but he was very at all. And he had this
23 automatic gun on his belly, across like this. And he
24 kicked me. He said, "Let's go upstairs." So kicked
25 me hard. In the back, pushed me to walk front of him,

1 where the interrogation room. It was the place where
2 they would interrogate the partisans, the people from
3 the underground. And was known that nobody came out
4 alive from there, because when they were done with you
5 they would tie your hands behind your back and they
6 shoot people in the Danube. You know, they miss it,
7 they make sure that you can't swim. With me I didn't
8 have to try because I'm a lousy swimmer, anyhow. So I
9 knew this is the end. I knew it. I mean -- (Pause.)

10 This guy told me, says, "You know, I want you to
11 take out every single piece of anything you have in
12 your pockets." Wanted to know how I got -- saw the
13 original documents, you know. And the tiniest thing,
14 even if it's a toothpick, whatever I find in your
15 pocket, so many smacks you will get. So I don't have
16 to tell you, I cleaned out the pockets and put
17 everything on the table. And this is sort of like
18 what do you call it, a foyer, something that you wait
19 outside. It was a big, big room inside and they were
20 sitting, this Hungarian Nazi inside to question
21 people. This was sort of the guy who did the
22 pre-questioning and then you get in and that's where
23 the drilling takes place.

24 And I saw all the people around me. They were
25 communist parties, you know. How do you say those

1 people, condemned, condemned people. They don't have
2 a chance.

3 And this was sometimes I think, I think in
4 January of 1945. I was liberated by the Russian Army
5 in February. So at that time the Russian Rathaus,
6 like the spit fires, the Russian planes coming and
7 shooting on the rooftops, like dropping stone. You
8 could hear it. And the American liberators were
9 coming. The bombs were fell all over the place. The
10 Russian Army was very close to Budapest. But this guy
11 was still working. Eliminated Jews. (Pause.)

12 I think this event, what has happened to me that
13 time -- (Pause.) I started to pray, like I never
14 prayed in my life. I said, "You know, God, I was
15 trying to fight for my life." You know, I didn't want
16 to be slaughtered like sheep just for my
17 individuality, to die with dignity. So I want you to
18 drop a bomb now so I can die with honor. I don't want
19 be taken away and -- (Pause.)

20 And I finish my prayer and a bomb fell and as of
21 today, you know, when I have doubts that there is a
22 God, I say, well, maybe the bomb would have fallen
23 whether you pray or not. But it was so weird. It was
24 incredible.

25 And a bomb fell and it didn't fall on the

1 building, it fell a building across the street or very
2 close by. Because it creates a vacuum and all the
3 windows, I mean this building shook and the windows
4 fall on this guy's head who was questioning me. Was
5 sitting by the window. I was like here and he was
6 maybe, oh, 30 feet away. And everybody went like a
7 bunch of mice, running. I mean and the big heroes.
8 They could capture a kid, but they were running, like
9 mice, like rat.

10 And I took the opportunity and I grabbed the
11 stuff from his desk like here and I put it in my
12 pocket and I start going out.

13 As I'm going out, it was a courtyard where I
14 came. It was like here and there is a courtyard
15 around like this. And there were steps going down and
16 then you come down here and then you go out. And
17 that's where the gate is. (Demonstrating.)

18 As I'm starting going here, I see a man coming up
19 from the steps this way. And the man is the one who
20 captured me. And I say, what would I do if I stop?
21 They'll kill me. Sort of hesitating and suddenly
22 there is somebody here. And says, I still remember,
23 Hozar, come here. That was his name. "Hozar, come
24 here." So Hozar is with his back to me and I walk
25 behind Hozar. This was many seconds. I walk behind

1 him, I'm running down the steps. And I say, I run on
2 the street I will meet the guard and the guard is
3 going to kill me if I start escape. And I say, if I
4 stay here I'm going to get killed. Don't sit down
5 philosophically, but it goes to your head like that
6 (Demonstrating.)

7 So I run to the street and the guard is there
8 with his belly wide open, because he is dead. And I
9 walked out without a scratch. And this was the last
10 time I wore my uniform. This was over. My career as
11 a Nyilos was over.

12 So I had this incredible faith in God that
13 nothing will happen. I couldn't -- I -- it wasn't a
14 religious faith, like you -- you know, we were not the
15 religious family. It was just faith from the inside,
16 you know. 'Cause the thing things I did were crazy.
17 I mean, they were not logical. And you just know from
18 the inside. I would walk the streets and the
19 airplanes would come and the soldiers would hide and I
20 walk the street. No bullet will hit me. Because God
21 is taking care of me. It was an incredible thing.

22 So after this experience, I think was where I
23 went back to that house. Wait a minute. (Pause.) I
24 keep trying to put it in sequence and I'm having a
25 problem. Something else happened. (Pause.)

1 Yeah, after this. After this. Right. Right.

2 After this experience I was devastated. I was walking
3 the streets. And rightful I was very paranoid. I
4 couldn't take it any more. I couldn't stand the
5 loneliness, I couldn't stand not to be able to talk to
6 somebody, to trust somebody.

7 I remember I went in, was trying to look up one
8 of my very distant cousins and I went into the house
9 that she lived, not the house, the apartment building.
10 I use the term "house," the apartment building. And I
11 found food which was still warm from the Jews that
12 were taken away. And I couldn't even eat. I grabbed
13 something, I put it in my pocket.

14 I remember I was walking the streets. I remember
15 suddenly I got hungry and I sat down on steps and I'm
16 sitting in -- found a bottle of jam and a piece of
17 bread and I open the jam and I just, I don't know,
18 fork, with my hands, whatever. And I'm eating,
19 eating, and I look to my right and there is a man dead
20 right next to me laying. And all full of blood. And
21 I didn't get up. I just looked at him and I kept on
22 eating.

23 And I had some potatoes, raw potatoes in my
24 pocket. I remember that. And I saw a bunch of people
25 lined up on the streets, Jewish people. I said,

1 "Where are you going?" "We are going to the ghetto."
2 I said, "I'll go with you." And I couldn't stand it
3 any more. I couldn't stand it any more.

4 And I joined them and I was taken to the ghetto.
5 (Pause.) That's right. That's right. I stayed in
6 the ghetto. I remember the ghetto. I got lice. I
7 was sitting around with other kids, no parents. And I
8 shared with them my potatoes. We put it in a fire and
9 I was like a big boy. I was 14 years old or 13.
10 Little kids. And put the potatoes in the fire and
11 then we shared it together. And that's where I met
12 this guy, this friend of mine who was a real
13 character. He was about a year older and he was wild.
14 I mean I was a wild -- wild kid and he was very wild.
15 A rebel, also.

16 Once I was in the ghetto, I really didn't like
17 it. Not for me. So how am I going to get out from
18 the ghetto? By the way, I did get out of the ghetto,
19 with him.

20 So this was during the times where the
21 Russians -- must have been Christmastime, something
22 like that. Very close. And lot of bombs falling.
23 People getting injured, killed. And one day somebody
24 who was not Jewish in the ghetto, I don't know if she
25 was a nurse or some person, was a gentile, got hurt.

1 She was bleeding on the arm and they are looking for
2 volunteers to take her to the hospital, you know. So
3 he and I volunteered. "We'll take her to the
4 hospital."

5 We took her to the hospital and through the
6 hospital we escaped. And that's -- I escape with him
7 and that's how -- somehow, I can't remember exactly,
8 but that's how I got that food from this guy. I think
9 I went back to him, and got the thing and picked up
10 the food and then with him, went to find his mother
11 and that's how I survived the rest of the war on that
12 rook sack of food.

13 I know I was in a ghetto for about three weeks.

14 Q. CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE GHETTO?

15 A. Beg your pardon?

16 Q. CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE GHETTO?

17 A. Well, the ghetto, people like in a room like
18 this, say a regular room is about 12x12. This is
19 more. Say a bedroom, 12x12, 12x15 -- I don't want to
20 exaggerate, but -- (Pause.) Maybe 10, 12, 15 people.
21 I mean there was not enough room to lay down
22 sometimes. You know, just sitting, sleep. And you're
23 allowed to go on the street. Everyone was -- it was
24 congested. It was filthy. No sanitation. Very
25 little sanitation. (Pause.)

1 The atmosphere of hopelessness. Atmosphere of
2 giving up. You know, just -- (Pause.) And I was
3 so -- I was so hungry for love, you know. Finally I
4 went in, wanted someone to take care of me. Suddenly,
5 I dropped everything. Wasn't a hero any more. I was
6 a child. Wanted a mother, father, somebody to take
7 care of you. Nobody gave a fuck. Really, didn't
8 care. You were just one of -- (Indicating.)

9 Yeah, I remember though, now that you talk about
10 that, what I remember is the place where I stayed the
11 last three weeks of the war in Budapest, where I was
12 with the communists and the partisans and the people,
13 underground people. We lived in a cellar. And I
14 remember I was sleeping on a bench which was about
15 that -- how wide is a bench? I don't know. Eighteen
16 inches, something like that. (Demonstrating.)

17 I remember I could not lean on my back, had a
18 tough time balancing. Had to sleep on my right side,
19 on my left side. That was the space I had. And many
20 times we would take out -- I did that, too -- the
21 babies who turned blue from hunger. They died. And
22 then we take them out from the cellar into the open
23 to be buried.

24 Lot of the houses around us have been bombarded
25 to flat. I think it was in the fourth or fifth

1 district of Budapest that we stayed. It was a sense
2 of security and a sense of death. It's all side the
3 ghetto, you know. And one day some Nazi showed up and
4 was just -- at that time already -- the fight was
5 going on Budapest street-to-street and almost
6 room-to-room. Big fight. And they showed up outside.
7 But there were only two or three people and we were
8 quite a few here. I don't remember how many, but
9 maybe 40, 50 people, you know. And they didn't dare
10 to come in, you know. They went away to get
11 additional help, to get rid of us.

12 Suddenly, I look out, maybe an hour later, and I
13 see my first Russian soldier. I see him capturing the
14 Germans around. You know, the hands up.
15 (Demonstrating.)

16 Ah, what a sight. It was the most beautiful
17 sight in my life. I couldn't believe it. We're
18 liberated. We're liberated. That's how we are
19 liberated. They couldn't have come any faster than
20 that. It was perfect timing.

21 Q. HOW DID YOU CELEBRATE?

22 A. Didn't celebrate. We just walked the streets
23 like -- by that time -- they called it a Ukranian
24 sickness. Basically diarrhea. And people died from
25 it. There was nothing. You know, you kept on going

1 to the bathroom and eventually got so weak you die.

2 Saw the Russian soldiers with the wine sort of
3 laying on the ground and the barrel of wine flowing
4 and getting drunk.

5 No, it was not for days, for months. It was like
6 I would pinch myself and say, was this a nightmare,
7 was it a dream or is this a dream? I couldn't believe
8 it. You know, sometimes I couldn't believe what's
9 happening to me. It's real. It's real. It was so
10 overwhelming. And when I got liberated, I couldn't
11 believe it also. It was just -- it took me a long
12 time to comprehend that I'm -- I'm a free -- wasn't
13 even free, because the Russians -- (Pause.) I
14 couldn't speak Russian. Few words I learned.
15 Tedesco, Tedesci. No, Tedesci is Italian. Germanski.
16 Germanski. "Germanski" is Russian. And I'm walking
17 the streets, going back to my old place where, you
18 know, I used to live. And I see these Russian soldier
19 and I, in my naivety, I want to join the Russian Army
20 to kill Germans.

21 So I want them to know I say Yev-ray (ph),
22 "Yev-ray" means Jew in Russian. Yev-ray. And I said
23 "Motag (ph) Germanski." So he thought my mother is
24 German. He said, "Come here."

25 So he put me in a truck and he put me in with all

1 the Nyilos. The Russians would take their number.
2 You're nothing. So I get into this camp and I say,
3 "Hey, this is no good. They're going to go to
4 Siberia, and with these fucking Nazis, I'm here?" It
5 blew my mind. I was going out of my mind. I escaped.
6 I walk back to Budapest. I remember I walk through
7 fields where I picked up, what do you call it, not
8 sugar cane, the other one they make sugar from.

9 Q. BEETS, SUGAR BEETS?

10 A. Sugar beets. Pick from the ground and ate it on
11 the way home. So I escaped from the Russians, too.

12 (Blank space on tape)

13 MR. BLUMBERG: In five seconds we'll be
14 recording.

15 Q. (BY MS. HARRIS) YOU SAID THAT YOU ALWAYS LIVED
16 LIFE ON THE EDGE.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. YOU SAID YOU BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT DURING THE
19 BREAK.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. CAN YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHETHER YOU
22 REALIZED THAT AT THE TIME THAT YOU WERE DOING THAT AND
23 WHERE THAT CAME FROM? WHAT IN YOUR BACKGROUND MADE
24 YOU SUCH A RISK-TAKER?

25 A. What I am saying, I'm 59 years old and I just

1 realize it now, after going through this process, that
2 I always lived on the edge and I never understood why.
3 And I think that -- you know, I always tell everybody,
4 you know, people talk about the Holocaust, a lot of
5 people are bitter about it. And I felt that I am one
6 of the few people who are unaffected, you know. I
7 thought I was unaffected. And of course I love
8 people. I'm not an anti-social person. And I even
9 manage not to hate the Germans any more. I don't hate
10 anybody. But I never was conscious of the fact that
11 the abnormal, which is living on the edge, became the
12 normal of my life, ever since the Holocaust.

13 I mean if I tell you things I've done after the
14 Holocaust were -- you know, even in this country, were
15 incredible. Taking very high risks. Very high risks.
16 Made a lot of money. Lost a lot of money. I never --
17 it's not that I didn't -- didn't do it illegal. I did
18 legally. But I sort of probably became like an
19 addiction, needing the excitement. You know, the
20 adrenalin gets going. So I never stopped. So I
21 didn't learn how to relax, like other people. Being
22 always on the edge.

23 Only place I could ever relax was -- always, and
24 also, one of my way of relaxation is to move. Either
25 to drive a car or to walk. I have big problems

(1 sitting still. And I have a tremendous apprehension
2 against authority. Such as uniform or somebody tells
3 me that's the way it is. I go crazy. I mean, you
4 can't do this to me. I just -- (Shakes head.) I have
5 no -- no respect for authority. It's not that -- I
6 have respect for the individual, the human being, but
7 I cannot -- I'm a very adverse to anything that is
8 structured, that is structured.

13 9 I'm sure that the Holocaust has a lot to do with
10 that. I mean, my experience. Now, maybe I was a
11 rebel. Always a rebel. Maybe it's true. But I don't
12 think that -- (Pause.) That I would have turned out
13 the way I am if I would have had a normal life,
14 meaning -- I remember when I asked my father, well,
15 you know, my brother was barmitzvahed. "Why can't I
16 be barmitzvah?" "Hitler is your barmitzvah."
17 Indicating that we have a Hitler so you cannot be
18 barmitzvahed. So I never was barmitzvahed. (Pause.)

(19 And I ask myself -- I think life is a very unique
20 experience. And I ask myself, now this I mean by
21 autumn of my life, would I have wanted it any
22 different? Do I have any regrets? Do I wish that
23 I -- I wouldn't have gone through these things? And
24 in a way, I don't wish that at all. I'm very thankful
25 that I went through it. Because I feel that even if I

1 drop dead tomorrow, I live many lives and I seen
2 people, I experienced human beings and seen them, and
3 I call it "in their total nakedness," where, you know,
4 when your life at stake or your survival at stake,
5 people show different faces. The real human being,
6 the phoniness is gone. And I feel that my life has
7 been very rich because of that. May not be so
8 pleasant, but it has some depth to it. Some --
9 some -- some substance.

10 I think my ultimate survival is not as important
11 that I'm alive today. I think the ultimate survival
12 is the survival of the spirit and -- and I came to
13 this country with, you know, nothing, 25 bucks in my
14 pocket. I made few million dollars. I have a son
15 who's going to Harvard Law School and I told him he'll
16 go to Harvard Law School as a little kid. I told him
17 you have to see it, you have to envision it.

18 I find life, real life -- I mean, there are all
19 kinds of life, but this life very exciting. Very
20 exciting. Very worthwhile. And when I think of the
21 risks I am taking to accomplish something, and I think
22 back of those risks, there is -- it's nothing. It's
23 not really -- nobody is going to kill me, right? So
24 what? I mean that's taking a risk. Somebody could
25 shoot you to death. So what else? If you lose your

1 money, what else? You know? And I never forgot that.
2 I always put things in proper perspective, you know.
3 So -- (Pause.)

4 This is very helpful for me to go through this.
5 I know it's difficult. But it's very helpful.
6 Because I think, regardless how much insight you
7 develop, you are afraid, or I was afraid to look at my
8 own life. And by going through this process, I think
9 I'm developing to be able to look at -- I mean, in
10 order for me to look at my own life, I have to almost
11 look at this like an outsider, looking from the
12 outside. And I think this is what this interview is
13 helping me to accomplish.

14 I don't know if I made any sense.

15 Q. YES. YES, YOU DO. YOU MAKE A GREAT DEAL OF
16 SENSE.

17 LET ME ASK YOU SOMETHING: SINCE YOU DON'T HAVE
18 ANY REGRETS, AND IF YOU WERE WISHING, YOU WOULDN'T
19 WISH FOR THE HOLOCAUST TO NEVER HAVE HAPPENED TO
20 YOU --

21 A. Uh-huh.

22 Q. BUT AT THE TIME, YOU MUST HAVE HAD GREAT
23 ANXIETY. MAYBE NOT FOR YOURSELF. YOU MUST HAVE FELT
24 IN CONTROL IN THAT RESPECT. BUT FOR YOUR PARENTS.
25 WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR PARENTS AND THEIR

1 SITUATION AND YOUR BROTHER AND WHAT KIND OF NEWS DID
2 YOU HAVE OF WHAT WAS PERHAPS HAPPENING TO THEM?

3 A. It was devastating. I thought I was an orphan.
4 I thought I'll never see them again. (Pause.)

5 Actually, after the war, my aunt and my uncle,
6 who had no children, I stayed with them for a while.
7 Not long. A while. And they're talking about sending
8 me to Mexico. Mexico City, because my brother's
9 sister lived there. And so they basically talked to
10 me like an orphan, that my parents will never come
11 back. And I'm very fortunate that they came back.
12 I'm very fortunate.

13 Q. HOW LONG DID YOU WAIT FOR THEM?

14 A. Well, I think first one who came back was my
15 mother and it must have been in either June or July of
16 1945. Yeah, because by that time I finish school. I
17 finish school on my own. Supported myself through the
18 black market in Budapest after the war. I lived by
19 my -- with one of my mother's friends.

20 I remember I used to go get up early in the
21 morning and do the black market and go to school.
22 After school go to the black market again. That's how
23 I ate for myself.

24 Q. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, "DO THE BLACK MARKET"?
25 WHAT DID YOU DO?

1 A. I bought saccharin, sold it to the peasants.
2 Shortage. There was no sugar. I'd do anything. I
3 even cut out the linoleum of the schools, you know,
4 podium, the linoleum. And I go and sell it as shoe
5 sole to the peasants so I could get food. Whatever it
6 took.

7 I was selling -- I found some western books.
8 Westerns, you know, books that I was -- created a
9 little corner for myself on the street. I was selling
10 those. And I found a place where I could buy -- not
11 like bagels, like semmeln. How do you say that,
12 rolls. Hot rolls. I did that for a few months. Got
13 up 5:00 o'clock in the morning and then I sell it to
14 factory workers as they're going to work on the corner
15 there, then I went to school. So whatever it took.

16 I got a pair of shoes on consignment. Went in
17 the market, sold it, made a profit.

18 Q. WHO HAD MONEY TO BUY?

19 A. Everybody. Money was printed. Inflation was
20 incredible. What costs today, you know, a hundred
21 pengos, tomorrow costs a hundred fifty.

22 I remember my mother came home and we had a
23 neighbor in the building we lived, and she had a pair
24 of shoes in her hands and I said, "Ha, you got a pair
25 of shoes." Said, "Yeah." Said, "How much you want

1 for shoes?" She said, "200,000 pengos." So I says,
2 "Okay. I'll show it to my mother. If she say it's
3 okay, I'll buy it."

4 Didn't even see my mother. Just took the shoes,
5 I ran down market, started pedaling. You know, pair
6 of shoes for 400,000. Four hundred thousand. I sold
7 the shoes, I went back to the woman. I says, "My
8 mother thinks it's good. Good pair of shoes." Gave
9 her the money. Gave the money to my mother.

10 You could become an entrepreneur at a young age.

11 Q. TELL ME ABOUT THE DAY YOUR MOTHER CAME HOME.

12 A. It was incredible. It was incredible. (Pause.)

13 We -- I -- it was about 5:00 o'clock in the
14 afternoon and I was ready to leave my apartment and
15 walking on the corridor, doors where the elevator is.
16 And my mother came across. She walked home from
17 Germany. (Pause.) She walked home. And she brought
18 home food for me. (Pause.) And she hugged me.
19 (Pause.)

20 I thought that the whole world turned into
21 heaven. It was the most beautiful experience you can
22 have. (Pause.)

23 She cried. She never thought I make it. She
24 thought I got killed. Because she knew where she left
25 me. She was so worried. She said she was more

1 worried about me than my father and my brother were
2 taken, because she left me alone as a kid in the
3 lion's throat. It was great joy. Great joy.
4 Incredible joy.

5 Actually, my father and brother, my brother I met
6 him on the street when I was coming back, setting
7 my -- because then I became a routine. By the time my
8 father and mother -- father and brother came home, I
9 made enough money that I supported the family of four,
10 after-school activities. I supported the family after
11 the war by myself. On the black market and selling
12 those semmelns.

13 Sometimes I get emotional the words don't come.
14 This, like this, not a bagel. (Indicating.) What do
15 you call it?

16 Q. A ROLL.

17 A. Rolls. Right. Right. Hot rolls. They were
18 hot, warm.

19 I think that's it.

20 Q. ARE YOU OKAY?

21 A. Yeah. Yeah.

22 Q. ALL RIGHT.

15 23 MR. BLUMBERG: Let it roll for five seconds
24 and shut it off.

25 MS. HARRIS: About two hours.

(1

(End of Videotape 1)

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(End of August 15, 1990 interview)

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1 (September 5, 1990. Barbara Harris, Interviewer)

2 MS. HARRIS: I'm Barbara Harris. I'm
3 interviewing Robert J. Feher, for the Holocaust Oral
4 History Project.

5 Q. ROBERT, YOU WERE TELLING ME A COUPLE STORIES
6 ABOUT YOUR YEAR'S SURVIVAL AFTER YOUR PARENTS WERE
7 TAKEN AWAY, THAT YOU WANTED -- WE WANTED TO PUT ON THE
8 TAPE.

9 WOULD YOU LIKE TO TELL THOSE NOW?

10 A. One episode I remember, that this is at a time
11 that I already had my so-called Nyilos uniform.
12 Hungarian Hitler Youth, equivalent uniform.

13 I was walking on the street and I was approached
14 by a couple of kids my age, two or three kids. And
15 they were real Nyilos. Real Hungarian kids. And they
16 asked me I want to join them to play some cards. And
17 I -- I didn't want to hesitate because I felt I might
18 be detected. And I said, "All right. I'll go with
19 you." And we went into this camp where there are lots
20 of them. I don't know how many. Lots of them.

21 I remember we were in a very large room, sitting
22 around a table and there were benches and we started
23 playing cards. We played 21. And I had a few pengos,
24 which is Hungarian denomination of money. In those
25 days one pengó -- five pengos were equivalent to a

1 dollar. That was in 1940s or so. By the way, "pengo"
2 is spelled "p," as in pea, e-n-g-o.

3 I never had so much luck in my life. It was
4 frightening because I really didn't want to win. I
5 just wanted to get out of there. But I kept on
6 winning.

7 I remember in my head, I was praying, God, what
8 are you doing with me? This is ridiculous. I'm
9 winning and winning. And I think I won something like
10 300 pengos, which was a lot of money. And I sensed
11 that there were a certain amount of resentment, you
12 know. And no, I wasn't cheating.

13 So I felt I could be in trouble. And wondering
14 how the hell am I going to get out of there. Get away
15 from this. And I just excuse myself, I say, "I have
16 to go to the bathroom." Something like that. "I'll
17 be right back." And I went to the bathroom and found
18 a way out through the bathroom and I disappeared.

19 I remember afterwards, I don't know if I was
20 running or walking or what in the street, and I sat
21 down and even to me the story was so incredible at the
22 time, that I was in this place, that I was playing
23 with real -- real Nyilos. I'm playing with real
24 Nyilos. And I was in their camp and I was in their
25 camp and I walk out alive and with all this money?

1 And I started laughing and I almost cried and my heart
2 was banging. I couldn't comprehend it. I couldn't
3 comprehend it.

4 So I -- this is one story I remember.

5 Q. BEFORE YOU GO ON, LET ME ASK YOU A REAL QUICK
6 QUESTION. AFTERWARDS, YOU DIDN'T HAVE MUCH TROUBLE
7 GETTING FOOD AND THINGS IF YOU HAD --

8 A. No. It lasted me for several weeks.

9 Q. UH-HUH.

10 A. I mean it was like -- you know, a gift from
11 heaven or something.

12 (Laughter.)

13 A. But I comprehended it. I mean, this money came
14 from them, you know. They supported my survival.

15 Since the last interview I remembered how I met
16 my brother. And at that time, I was -- every morning
17 about 5:00 or 6:00, 5:00 o'clock, I think, I went to
18 this manufacturer, bakery, which were making semmelns,
19 hot rolls. And I had a big -- I don't know how you
20 call that, something that you carry these things in
21 and you put it on your back, back. (Demonstrating.)

22 I was -- I had a certain spot which was a big
23 factory and I would stand outside maybe 6:00 o'clock
24 in the morning, all with this warm semmelns, buns.
25 Buns. And then I would sell it to the factory

1 workers. And I made very good money that way in the
2 morning and then I was probably done by 7:00 o'clock
3 or so. Quarter to 7:00. And then I was walking back
4 home.

5 I was walking on the street and was fairly close
6 to home. I think it must have been in the month of
7 June or July of 1945, after the war. And suddenly, on
8 the street as I'm walking, I see my brother walking
9 towards me this direction. (Demonstrating.)

10 It was like -- like a miracle. You know, someone
11 who came from -- from another world, from -- I
12 shouldn't say from the dead. It was just -- I
13 remember I opened my arms. And I said, my brother, my
14 brother. You are alive! You know? It was
15 unbelievable.

16 I mean, "Where is Father?" Says, "Father, he's
17 at home, he's okay." And he -- he looked at me sort
18 of and then says, "You know, I'm sorry I have to rush.
19 I have to go, because I have a job now. My old job
20 back and I'm going back to work." And he went out,
21 you know. Which now that I think back was kind of
22 strange. He continued. And so then I went home.

23 I had a very emotional reunion with my father.
24 He was sick. He had typhus. But then he got well.
25 He had very high temperature. But he got well. So

1 this was how the family got together.

2 Q. YOU WERE ALL LIVING -- YOU AND YOUR MOTHER HAD
3 GONE BACK TO --

4 A. Yeah. To apartment, yeah. And that's where we
5 lived.

6 Q. WERE YOUR --

7 A. We lived there until we left Hungary, which was
8 in December of 1945 with the goal of going to Israel.
9 We left Hungary illegally and ended up in a tee-pee
10 camp in Bamberg, Germany. And I think it was in
11 December of 1945. Yeah, it was.

12 Q. YOUR BROTHER HAD JUST COME HOME THAT DAY, THAT
13 MORNING?

14 A. I don't know -- it must have been, yeah. That
15 morning, yeah.

16 Q. TELL ME, WERE YOU AND YOUR BROTHER -- TELL ME A
17 LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR BROTHER. HIS NAME IS GEORGE.

18 A. George, yeah.

19 Q. AND HE'S OLDER THAN YOU ARE.

20 A. Four years and one day.

21 Q. AND WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP DID YOU HAVE WITH
22 YOUR BROTHER BEFORE THE WAR?

23 A. Well, you know, I was a little kid. He was a
24 very big age difference. Four years difference. And
25 I always looked up to him. He was the big brother,

1 you know. When I was six, he was ten.

2 When he was taken away, he was 17 and I was 16 --
3 no. He was 18 and I was 14. So it was always -- it's
4 kind of a very opposite kind of people. Very
5 opposite. Looks and personality. I'm more of an
6 extrovert. He's pretty much an introvert. (Pause.)

7 I remember was a saying in the family,
8 "Ecano-Juri (ph)," which means "Yes, George." Always
9 after "yes" came "George," because he could have
10 things and I couldn't. And then I want to go where he
11 was and I couldn't go because I was too young. And so
12 I think that my relationship with my brother has been
13 always quite frustrating. Wasn't -- (Pause.) What
14 you call -- for periods of time sometime it was real
15 close. Like after the war, we're in Germany, we were
16 close for a couple of years. And then in Israel for a
17 while we were close, we worked together. But most of
18 the time, no.

19 Q. HAD BEING -- TELL ME WHERE YOUR BROTHER WAS AND
20 HAD BEING IN THE CONCENTRATION CAMP CHANGED HIM?

21 A. My brother was in Mauthausen and Gunskirchen.

22 Q. IN AUSTRIA?

23 A. With my father. Yes.

24 Q. CAN YOU TELL ME --

25 A. When he was taken from Budapest.

1 Q. CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM,
2 WHAT THEY TOLD YOU ABOUT THEIR STORY?

3 A. Well, he -- I mean, I remembered stories. Many
4 stories that he told me. One story I remember was
5 that they were marching from -- I may not tell the
6 stories in sequence, but it comes to my mind, that
7 they were marching from Mauthausen to Gunskirchen on
8 foot. I don't know the distance, but I think it's
9 five, six days, walking without food. And they say,
10 you know, they would take the grass where they could
11 find and they would eat, whatever. And sleeping
12 outside in the rain.

13 I don't know what it was, which day it was, but
14 it was first, second, third or fourth day of this
15 march, this death march, a lot of people died. An
16 elderly Jew, they were marching in a row of five. And
17 sometimes they were hanging onto each other and while
18 they're walking they're trying to sleep in their walk.

19 An elderly Jew picked up an onion. He found an
20 onion on the roadside. And he picked up the onion and
21 SS, young SS, I don't know, 16, 17-year-old kid shot
22 him to death right on the spot.

23 Here this older Jew was walking in front of my
24 brother and my brother got all pale in the face and he
25 called him out, wanted to kill him too, shoot him.

1 And my father jumped out and he jumped front of my
2 brother and he crossed his arms like this.

3 (Demonstrating.) And said, "Kill me first. Because
4 this is my son."

5 The young SS said, "Oh, you old Jew, you have
6 been a good worker. I'll let him live." Because my
7 father spoke fluent German. So that's -- that's how
8 he saved his life.

9 I remember he told me that my father had him
10 extract his gold crowns from his mouth and exchange it
11 for bread.

12 Q. THIS WAS YOUR BROTHER WHO DID THE EXTRACTION.

13 A. Yes. Because my brother was a dental
14 technician. Wasn't a dentist, but -- (Pause.) And
15 what else?

16 My father was a very, very unusual person. It's
17 very sad, but my brother told me that he has kept a
18 diary all during this time, which got lost after the
19 liberation. And my father was -- my father was a
20 medium and he would talk in his -- where he didn't
21 know what he was saying. It was just talk. And he
22 predicted, my brother said, three or four months
23 before the liberation, the day and the hour that they
24 were going to be liberated.

25 My father would speak in his trance, quoting from

1 the Bible. And I know my father couldn't speak
2 Hebrew. He would quote from the Bible in Hebrew and
3 but that I know for sure that he did predict the day,
4 May 5th at 5:00 o'clock. I still remember that they
5 were going to be liberated. And that's when they were
6 liberated.

7 I also remember that they told me the story where
8 they were so, so skinny that when they have taken
9 their first bath they got both and they got a room and
10 the bathtub. And my brother got into the bathtub and
11 he ask my father to turn him around because he was
12 sitting on -- he thought that he was sitting on the --
13 where you have where the water go drains out, there is
14 this, what do you call that word, plug?

15 Q. Uh-huh.

16 A. My father said no, you're sitting on your
17 behind, but you're sitting on your bones. And he
18 thought he was sitting -- I think they weighed like 35
19 kilograms. He weighed 35 kilograms. And I think my
20 father weighed like 42 kilograms. That's right. Some
21 ridiculous figure. Very, very skin and bones.

22 And oh, my father told me, they were telling me
23 the stories how they saw people like on -- dying on
24 mountains of sugar or whatever they found. People ate
25 so much that they died. A lot of people died right

1 after the liberation. He said that one black soldier
2 says, his mind was huge. But my father was short.
3 Five-five, five-six. Short and gutsy. And he said,
4 you know, it took him -- yeah, he took him after the
5 day of liberation, he took him into this village and
6 they had a list, they're looking for Nazis. And this
7 guy pulled out this Nazi, wanted to show my father,
8 and he cracked his head open and killed him, to please
9 my father, you know, right front of him.

10 Another, he told me that people were picking
11 up -- oh, that my -- their first bread they got, they
12 were like zebras, they looked like zebras going
13 through the field and almost coming on a bike and a
14 loaf of bread and my brother jumped at her and they
15 took the bread away and they ate it. Stuff like that.
16 What else? (Pause.)

17 Q. DO YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF WORK THEY DID IN CAMP?

18 A. No. No. I don't know. But I know in
19 Mauthausen they did work. I don't think they did any
20 work at Gunskirchen. It was what they called a
21 Vernichtungslager.

22 Q. WHICH IS?

23 A. Destruction camp.

24 Q. UH-HUH.

25 A. I don't remember what kind of work. But they

1 did do some work. Because otherwise how could they
2 said to my father you're a good worker. You have to
3 do some work.

4 Q. WHAT DID YOUR BROTHER LOOK LIKE WHEN YOU SAW HIM
5 ON THE STREET? WAS HE STILL AS THIN?

6 A. He was thin. I don't remember his face so much.
7 I don't remember his face so much.

8 I just remember that he kept on going. So I'm
9 sure he was affected by the war. Just maybe couldn't
10 relate. I don't know.

11 Q. AND YOUR MOTHER, SHE CAME BACK FROM
12 BERGEN-BELSEN.

13 A. Bergen-Belsen, yeah.

14 Q. DID SHE TELL YOU WHAT HER LIFE WAS LIKE THERE?

15 A. My mother always talked about -- my mother was
16 one of those people who carried -- they had these huge
17 containers that they carried. Carried the soup. And
18 she was one of them who carried, one holding one end
19 and another one another end. And I think for that she
20 got an extra soup or something.

21 She talked mostly about that and she talked about
22 my first cousin, Vlada, who was in the same camp with
23 her. And she would give him a little extra soup
24 sometimes. And he was ready to die. And somehow she
25 mothered him.

1 Vlada was, I think, five -- five years older than
2 I.

3 She talked about cannibalism. There was
4 cannibalism, I think, in Bergen-Belsen. And I don't
5 remember any -- she was talking more about how she got
6 home, because she was practically walking from Germany
7 to Hungary, home.

8 When I see ishka, sometimes on trains, but they
9 did a lot of walking. I don't know how many weeks it
10 took her to get home. And she talked a lot about that
11 trip.

12 Q. DID PEOPLE HELP HER?

13 A. She was coming with a group of other women, you
14 know. She took, you know, a lot of these people got
15 into the villages and the towns and grabbed whatever
16 they could. The Germans run away, and they grabbed
17 things and my mother said no, she didn't take
18 anything. Only food.

19 So actually, my mother came home with food. Some
20 leftover food. I forgot it was cheese, whatever.

21 Q. TELL ME ABOUT THE CANNIBALISM, WHAT SHE SAID
22 ABOUT THAT.

23 A. She said -- she said there was cannibalism in
24 Bergen-Belsen. I haven't heard it from anybody else.
25 I don't know. Have you?

1 Q. DID SHE SAY BY MEN OR WOMEN?

2 A. No. She just said there was cannibalism in
3 Bergen-Belsen. That people would eat human flesh.
4 Yeah. But she didn't talk much about Bergen-Belsen.
5 She know also she was liberated by the Russian Army.
6 And my brother and father were liberated by the
7 American Army. I think by Patton, actually. And
8 they're not very happy with Patton, because he was
9 drinking with the Nazi officers. (Pause.)

10 I also think that what they were told, a lot of
11 the Germans when they were liberated, some of the
12 soldiers saw this and they started crying. As they
13 were capturing the guards, they had to go out them GMC
14 6x6 trucks. As they go out they were giving the Jews
15 weapons and they were shooting the Nazis as they're
16 going out the trucks, killing them. And they barely
17 could hold the weapon. Just pull the trigger and
18 killing.

19 It was -- must have been quite a -- and they
20 always talked about after the war the sugar. They
21 call them sugar mountains. From the trains, those
22 people just started eating, eating and they died like
23 ants, stuffing themselves with excessive amount of
24 sugar. Their body couldn't absorb it, take it.

25 They claim that more people died after the

1 liberation from overeating, by comparison, than every
2 day people normally died. I don't know if you heard
3 this or not.

4 Q. NO.

5 A. So --

6 Q. WHAT WAS FAMILY LIFE LIKE IN THOSE -- FROM JULY
7 'TIL DECEMBER, THIS DAILY LIFE AT HOME?

8 A. I don't remember much. I remember I did my
9 things on the market, on the black market, buying
10 things, selling things. Bring home the money. And I
11 don't remember -- oh, I remember that my father was
12 invited to -- I think it was Rakosi was the prime
13 minister of Hungary at this time. And he was a
14 communist. He was actually a Jew who was exchanged
15 for the Hungarian flags after the, I think, the First
16 World War by the Russians, capture some Hungarian
17 flags and exchange it for the flags. Because he was
18 in prison for being a communist and he was in Russia
19 and the Russians installed him back as the First
20 Premiere of Hungary.

21 My father was offered a job in the forming
22 Hungarian government as a -- I think it's a minister
23 of -- what the hell is it? (Pause.) Minister of
24 Economics.

25 He started listening to the speeches. My father

1 wasn't a communist. And the climate, seeing, started
2 seeing the people who actually joined the party, and
3 the new power, were like turncoats. A lot of people
4 which were -- wore black before now became red.

5 I remember my father called the family together
6 one night and we went to a big parade -- not parade.
7 It was a big gathering in one of these gigantic
8 coliseums, you know. And as a child, I remember it
9 was gigantic. Probably wasn't that big. But there
10 were several thousand people there. I know four or
11 five thousand people.

12 Rakosi said, "Next time you speak -- I speak
13 we'll be on the streets." And we came home and my
14 father said, "Next time you are on the street we're
15 going to leave Hungary." And then we got in contact
16 with the -- I don't know if it was the Irgun or the
17 Hagana. Some Jewish organization which was smuggling
18 people out from Hungary by train to go to Israel.

19 They interviewed all of us and then they told us
20 what time to meet and where. Bring the bare
21 essentials. And we got on the train and next thing we
22 knew we were in Bamberg, Germany. And that was in
23 December of 1945.

24 Q. WERE ABLE TO TAKE -- DID YOU FIND MANY OF YOUR
25 BELONGINGS STILL LEFT --

1 A. Yeah. But we couldn't take much. I still
2 remember that we dropped some of our very -- all the
3 family albums and everything, with somebody, and I
4 never -- they were supposed to save it for us and we
5 never got it back.

6 So this is how we arrive in Germany, which in a
7 DP camp, which represented freedom from all that.
8 Leaving everything behind.

9 Q. DID THE CAMP HAVE A NAME?

10 A. The DP camp had -- it was in Bamberg,
11 B-a-m-b-e-r-g, Bamberg, Germany. Ulenen-Kaserne.
12 Ulenen, U-l-e-n-e-n, Kaserne. I think this was a
13 military compound before. Kaserne is a military
14 compound. Ha, I remember the name.

15 Q. AND HOW DID YOU LIVE IN THE CAMP? HOW LONG WERE
16 YOU THERE? TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR LIFE IN
17 THAT CAMP.

18 A. Well, I think we lived in the camp from 1945
19 until 1947, I think. Almost '48. I think '47. And
20 then from there, my father got a big promotion and we
21 went to live in Hof and Sooss (ph). There we live
22 close to a year, something like that. 1948, and then
23 I volunteered to go to Israel in the Israeli Army.
24 And that was in September of 1948.

25 In the camp, what I remember is that we arrived

1 and it was evening. And we haven't -- we have been
2 traveling for a while. I don't know. Few days. And
3 this is the first time got a warm meal. And it was
4 very much appreciated. And I saw this woman. We saw
5 an American uniform, first time in my life and it was
6 a woman UNRRA. UNRRA. United Nation Rehabilitation
7 Repatriation Administration.

8 She was walking around and we were in this very
9 large hall where we all ate in big tables. And after
10 the meal what we ate, then I found somewhere a
11 shmatte, a rag. And I started wiping off the tables.
12 You know, wiping off. People give that. And wiping
13 up the tables. And this woman came up, she must have
14 been very impressed that I was the only one took the
15 initiative to do something. And I wasn't even 15 yet.
16 That's right. I turned 15 in February 6th of 19 --
17 no, I was 15. Yeah. I was 15 years old. I was 15.

18 I don't know if it was to a translator or she ask
19 me why am I doing it. And I think I told her, because
20 I want to -- I don't like to receive alimony, you
21 know, for nothing. I want to somehow reciprocate for
22 the food that was given to me. Sort of saying I want
23 to work. I want to earn.

24 So she -- she said, "Okay. I'll get you a job."
25 And next thing I knew, I was the first one in the

1 family who got a job, which was to -- because
2 everybody had cards, you know, to get -- to get food,
3 for your meals. And I was standing by the kitchen and
4 I was handing to take the cards from people so they
5 get their meal.

6 I remember the Polish Jews made fun of us always
7 because we couldn't speak Yiddish. And, you know, you
8 don't speak Yiddish, you're not a Jew. And I
9 couldn't. We were kind of (inaudible).

10 My mother spoke fluent Yiddish, because she came
11 from Munkacz. I couldn't. But I have musical ears
12 and within three weeks I started to talk Yiddish.
13 Because that's all I heard. Yiddish, Yiddish,
14 Yiddish. In the kitchen, with the help, etc.

15 I don't know how long I held this job. But I
16 held it for a while. A few months probably. And then
17 my father also start -- actually, my father started
18 cleaning the toilets. And my brother, my brother
19 spoke some English and got a job, I think, in an
20 office to do something. And compensation I think was
21 all paid in food. You know, you got extra chocolate
22 or cigarettes or whatever you got.

23 Then my father, there was elections, I remember,
24 and my father was elected to the Jewish Committee.
25 And from there, he was -- became very popular and the

1 Americans have given him an American uniform and they
2 have appointed him as director for the UNRRA, to be in
3 charge of 5,000 people in Hof and Sooss, another city.
4 And my father, he was the only one -- there were, I
5 don't know how many hundred thousand Jews, maybe two
6 or three had this position. He was only one who
7 couldn't speak English, so he had his translator, he
8 could speak German, so he always functioned with a
9 translator. But I remember, he was very important
10 man. He had his own chauffeur. They give him a Jeep.
11 A chauffeur. They gave him a villa to live in in Hof,
12 and we live very, very well for about ten months.
13 That was like, you know, heaven.

14 We could buy in the PX like American soldiers.
15 All the privileges of an American officer. So this
16 was a big deal.

17 I'm skipping too fast. Went from Bamberg to Hof.
18 But Bamberg was pretty much depressing. And actually
19 we had it better than most people after he was
20 elected. First we lived in barracks. The barracks
21 were basically divided by paper. You know, everything
22 paper walls, paper doors. So there wasn't any
23 privacy. I mean, when the paper, only thing did that
24 you would not see each other, but you could hear
25 everything.

1 Then when he was appointed as a Jewish committee
2 then we got a room. That was the big deal. We got a
3 room, probably -- I don't know, you would say probably
4 12x12, 12x15, maybe a hundred forty, a hundred
5 fifty -- a hundred, 200 square feet. But our own
6 room. It had a regular door and it was a room and
7 four of us. So the room had basically four beds. I
8 remember it has a slight area where we had a hot
9 plate. And that's it. And then we shared a toilet.
10 Everybody sharing. So but that was very exclusive, I
11 want you to know. Very exclusive.

12 So, what was something unique that I did there?
13 Anything? I sang with a gypsy orchestra, Erich
14 orchestra. Did some singing. I did some physical
15 work, like unloading trucks which gave me potatoes. I
16 think I have still some pictures. I did that. I
17 bummed around a lot, going into city. I was at the
18 Oh-ya (ph). My parents wanted me to continue my
19 education and go to Handels-Schule. "Handels-Schule"
20 means business school.

21 I think there was a program like if you had 8th
22 grade education then you would go to this school. I
23 think it was a three-year program. And you didn't
24 require any college degree.

25 By that time I spoke some German. Not great, but

1 might say kitchen language that I picked up. And
2 German was fairly easy for me, because we did learn
3 some German in school. And Germany sort of the second
4 language in Hungary. And my father spoke German. So
5 I -- you know, my grandmother spoke German better
6 than -- actually than Hungarian. My grandmother came
7 from a part of Hungary where there were a lot of
8 people from Germany.

9 So -- so I went to the school and you have to
10 understand, this was right after the war and there
11 were German kids and I was the only Jew. I'm the only
12 Jew. And so I was sort of a novelty. They look, you
13 know. I looked at them trying to feel -- I felt very
14 strange. Very awkward. And I looked at everybody
15 like a Nazi. Especially adults.

16 So this teacher comes in, everybody gets up, you
17 know. I stay sitting. See, I'm not going to get up
18 for a German. I have no respect. I refuse. They
19 wouldn't tell me they're probably afraid, you know,
20 just -- anyhow, I couldn't fit in. I dropped out
21 probably after two weeks. Very short time I went to
22 school. I was just -- I couldn't fit in.

23 So in Bamberg was, yeah, after I sang with this
24 gypsy band, for some -- I don't remember what the
25 occasion was, it was some -- they were celebrating

1 something. And somebody heard me and it was a German
2 woman who was a professional singer. She sang in the
3 Rundfunk, which means the radio, was performing. And
4 she took me to Nuremberg by train, we went by train to
5 her teacher. And I sort of auditioned. I never
6 did -- did some scales and I did sing, you know, the
7 scale, like that. And they say, oh, I'm supposed to
8 have an incredible voice, and I said, great.

9 And they say, yeah, they say that the vibrato of
10 my voice, she said, is similar to Caruso. So I
11 thought, you know, wonderful. So I came home with the
12 big news. I said,, "I'm going to become a singer."
13 And the family looked at me. They said, "Singer?
14 Singer? Singer, sminger. What's that? You need a
15 profession. You need something that you can rely on
16 something. You need a trade, you know."

17 So my father had some connections and he said,
18 you're going to become a weaver. Because I had no
19 dexterity. I still don't have any. Never had any
20 dexterity. Wasn't good with my hands. But this is a
21 machine, you know, and you just learn how to weave.
22 So there is always something that you can so-called --
23 I never practiced a trade in my life. But to please
24 my father, I remember I was very -- I had a big fight
25 with him. I didn't want to do it. But he was the

1 idle of my life. And my father says, "You do it," so
2 I says, "Okay, I'll do it."

3 I was already trying to figure out, how can I
4 have my own factory. (Pause.) I went and I did it.
5 I don't know how many months. I think six months.
6 This was a struggle for me. Had to go every day to
7 this damn factory and they were teaching me how to
8 weave.

9 I looked at the women more than the -- well, some
10 good looking women. And that time I was becoming a
11 young man, was 16. And very strong interest in the
12 opposite sex. No interest in weaving.

13 So yeah, come to think of it, this also happen in
14 Bamberg is where I run away. I run away from -- oh,
15 my -- I fell in love with this girl who's want to
16 trust me. She is I think 13-and-a-half or 14. And I
17 remember she was from Romania. And she -- I fell in
18 love. I was in love. So she wanted -- I wanted to go
19 with her to a kibbutz in Israel. Not because I had
20 interest in kibbutz. She's going to go to a can I
21 booze, I'm going to go to a kibbutz.

22 And I confronted my father. Say, "I'm going to a
23 kibbutz." I'm in love. Going to join her. She was
24 show me kibbutz. She is a show-mi-gotsi-ier (ph). I
25 don't remember her name. I see her picture right

1 front of me. She was tall, a little bit on the zastig
2 side.

3 And so she left and I knew where she went. It
4 was quite a ride. I don't know. Probably a day.
5 About 24-hour ride. Clogin-ford (ph)? I'm not sure.
6 Maybe it was Clogin-ford. I don't remember.

7 But I remember had a big fight with my father.
8 He smack me on the face. He hit me. And I got very
9 insulted. And I said, "I'm leaving." And I just
10 backed up. I think he wasn't home. I took money. I
11 had money. I bought myself ticket and I went.
12 Clothes, everything, I went.

13 I arrived there, it was wintertime. It was snow.
14 I remember snow. And I remember that everything was
15 very organized. Very structured. Almost
16 militaristic. You know, kibbutz, they were singing
17 the same songs. Very group, group atmosphere. Which
18 I didn't care for.

19 So I came dinnertime and they started enforcing
20 things like you had to do this, you couldn't start
21 eating until they said be'tayavon, everybody sit
22 around, they say be'tayavon and everybody started
23 eating.

24 Anyhow, I fell in and out of love very quickly.
25 I may have liked her, but I couldn't identify with

1 this kind of lifestyle. Said, I'm not going to live
2 like this. I started missing my parents. I think I
3 only wait three days. Took the next train and went
4 back home.

5 So it was my big venture out of home from --
6 yeah, what else did I do?

7 Q. WHAT DID YOUR FATHER DO TO YOU WHEN YOU GOT
8 BACK?

9 A. (Pause.) My father gave me a lot of credit for
10 surviving the way I did. And that I even, you know,
11 had this determination to finish school all by myself.
12 I finish school. And the reason I finish, you know,
13 I'm sure that my parents would want me to finish. At
14 least I didn't -- and I always was a mediocre student
15 because I never studied and this year I was top of my
16 class. And I went to school with holes in my shoes.
17 And I had to go to the black market in the morning and
18 then went to school. After school I went to the black
19 market and I was studying. Because I wanted to be
20 somebody. I wanted, you know. I did all by myself.

21 I think I gained a lot of respect because my
22 family, I was sort of always the black sheep. And
23 they gave me -- my father gave me a lot of credit.
24 Especially those days, I made -- you know, someone
25 made enough money on the black market in selling these

1 buns had the connection, that I could support a family
2 of four. Supporting means one didn't get any rent.
3 Just enough to eat, you know, which was a big deal.
4 Those days was a very big deal. So my father was --
5 (Pause.)

6 Also he was shocked because although they didn't
7 realize, you see when they were taken, they left me
8 with my mother. And they assumed that I stayed in
9 Budapest. They had no idea that my mother was taken
10 and that I would be left alone. So in essence, my
11 mother suffered more because she knew she left me
12 alone. They didn't know it. So they assumed that we
13 are okay.

14 So they always thought someone to come home to
15 was my mother and myself. So I developed after that a
16 very good relationship with my father. And a good
17 relationship with my brother.

18 When I was 16 and he was 20, then we started
19 having a good relationship. We did things together
20 and started a business together later on in Israel.

21 I'm getting off track. Maybe I should take a
22 break unless you have a good question.

23 Q. TAKE A BREAK.

24 A. Whatever you want to ask.

25 Q. LET'S TAKE A QUICK BREAK THEN. WOULD YOU LIKE

1 SOME TEA?

2 A. Yes.

3 (Break)

4 A. I can drink tea, right? Nobody will stop me?

5 Q. NO. YOU CAN DRINK TEA.

6 A. You are the director. You are the producer,
7 everything. Right?

8 Q. RIGHT. THIS IS A VERY CASUAL SESSION.

9 TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE PROBLEMS AND
10 CONFLICTS AND FEELINGS THAT EVERYBODY HAD IN YOUR
11 FAMILY, TRYING TO REBUILD A FAMILY AFTER THEIR
12 INDIVIDUAL -- INDIVIDUALLY DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES. AND
13 PARTICULARLY ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP YOUR PARENTS HAD.

14 A. Well, maybe we should start up with saying that
15 after we all got together, the family was extremely
16 close. And not only did the Holocaust that we
17 survived it and we were aware that something like this
18 happens maybe one out of a hundred thousand families.
19 It was very, very rare that you all came back. The
20 immediate family, I mean. The rest, I mean, most of
21 my family was killed. In Auschwitz.

22 What was so unique, maybe it wasn't unique for
23 the times, but unique for today's generation, is that
24 we had a common goal and a goal was the future. We
25 always thought -- it was starting a new life as a

1 family. We are going to a different country where
2 this horror didn't take place and we'll be free.
3 Because -- and I say we would be free because the D.P.
4 Camp was still a camp. And it was not the feeling of
5 freedom.

6 Everybody talked about immigration. That was
7 the -- just like during the Holocaust, the only
8 conversation people had was food. When you are in a
9 D.P. Camp everybody was talking about going somewhere.

10 So my brother had a job, I remember now, my
11 brother had a job in Bamberg where he was working in
12 the immigration department. And he was sending people
13 all over. And there was stock and he was sending
14 people, I remember, he was sending people to like in
15 Norway and Denmark and Sweden. People that were
16 taking Jews in. And the United States, there was
17 still the quota system, I think, at that time. And we
18 couldn't go to United States. And anyhow, we -- I
19 always wanted to go to the United States.

20 As a matter of fact, I have to retract, because
21 it's very funny. Very funny. Because I remember that
22 we're instructed before we left Budapest. We had to
23 appear in front of a couple people, saying what are we
24 going to do. And we're instructed that we're going to
25 go to Israel and we're going to go to a kibbutz. And

1 so my father says, yes, we'll work in a kibbutz. And
2 my father says yes, we'll work in a kibbutz. And
3 think brother, yes. And they look at me and say, yes,
4 I'm going to kibbutz. Say I believe every one of
5 them, and the little one will never work in a kibbutz.

6 (Laughter.)

7 Couldn't fool them. I still remember that.

8 So --

9 Q. THIS WAS YOU'RE GOING TO HAGANA QUESTION?

10 A. Right. Right.

11 Q. MAKE SURE YOU WERE SINCERE?

12 A. Yes. Yes. Obviously, I wasn't sincere enough.
13 His eyes tell the story. He's not going to be in a
14 kibbutz.

15 Well, they let me go anyhow. Right. So, humm.
16 So this was the dynamics were that we were -- we had
17 enough to eat. A lot of canned, you know, food. But
18 we ate much better than the Germans. I mean, we ate
19 like kings next to the Germans. But it was a confined
20 life. It was, you know, living in a D.P. It was a
21 camp. It was a damn D.P. Camp. And it was a country
22 which we all hated. And it was, you know, no love for
23 Germany. No love for the Germans.

24 It was a temporary place to go somewhere. So
25 this brought the family much closer, because we had a

1 common goal.

2 I remember there were always stories and
3 opportunities and rumors that one day, you know, the
4 quota would be lifted and the refugees. So this was
5 all going on. In the meantime, the all of us were
6 going to Israel and then the war broke out. And this
7 is the time where -- I don't know if this describes
8 family dynamics.

9 My mother basically was -- did her role as a wife
10 and did a little bit of cooking or whatever, to --
11 what we didn't get she managed always somehow to cook
12 for us. Don't ask me how. But she always managed to
13 get her something and to cook. Because people were
14 fed basically in the D.P. Camp, you know. They had
15 communal kitchens and they were served food. But she
16 always managed to do something.

17 My father was very busy on his job with the
18 UNRRA. And my brother worked in an office.
19 Immigration. And I was -- (Pause.) With friends.
20 Sometimes I worked, sometimes I didn't. Chasing girls
21 was very important.

22 I got a kick out of walking on the street. I
23 smoked like a chimney. I smoked maybe a pack of
24 cigarettes a day. And I think I did tell you that a
25 pack of cigarettes, those days, was 80 -- I still

1 remember, 80 Deutsch mark. And I smoked it a day.
2 And 80 Deutsch marks could rent a flat.

3 I used to take pleasure in taking a butt,
4 cigarette butt, and I learned from the American
5 soldiers how you threw the butt like this. And about
6 six around Germans, and I throw it and the five, six
7 Germans jump on the butt and try to get the butt. And
8 that gave me a -- (Pause.)

9 I knew some Polish Jew -- satisfaction. Some
10 Polish Jews would take a hundred -- we used to go on
11 the street and drop change, coins, marcs, coins,
12 behind the girls so they would turn around and pick it
13 up. And then one Polish was in a train and somebody
14 dropped, I don't know, a pfennig. You know, a penny
15 or so. Looking for a penny. He took a hundred marc.
16 He lit it up and helped her to find it. So this was
17 the revenges, you know. We had a lot of money.

18 I got into the gasoline business, which is the
19 black market later. When I -- oh, yeah. This was the
20 time I started to learn to drive in my father's Jeep.
21 I was 16 when I got a driver's license. And then my
22 life obviously changed a lot.

23 Q. WHAT DID YOU DO WITH THAT DRIVER'S LICENSE?

24 A. I started driving. I got a job, I think,
25 driving an ambulance. Not that I was driving sick

1 people. It was just happened to be a military
2 ambulance.

3 Q. U.S MILITARY?

4 A. What?

5 Q. U.S. MILITARY?

6 A. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And then I was driving some
7 GMC 6x6 trucks. There was a driver and he taught me
8 how to drive a big GMC 6x6. And then I started
9 driving it by myself on some illegal trips. That was
10 when I lived in Hof. That was living on the edge,
11 very much so.

12 Q. WHAT KIND OF ILLEGAL?

13 A. Well, we found a German Graf, a Graf is a count,
14 who had champaign in his cellars saved from the war.
15 And we bought it from him. And we found an officer in
16 By-gart (ph), American captain, who loved champagne.

17 (Laughter.)

18 So we would go and exchange like I forgot how
19 many -- how many bottles of champagne are in a case,
20 12? I think 12? We take four, five, six cases to
21 By-gart and give the order and will fill up a GMC 6x6
22 truck with gasoline in exchange. And then we take
23 this gasoline back from By-gart to Hof and then we'll
24 sell it to the Jewish cab drivers. Because the Jewish
25 cab drivers did nothing else but smuggle cigarettes.

1 That was their thing. They went to Belgian or
2 wherever they went outside of Germany and brought back
3 cigarettes.

4 So I was doing the black market, selling gas.

5 Q. HOW MUCH DID YOU MAKE DOING THAT? WHAT WAS
6 THAT --

7 A. Oh, God, enormous amount of money. On one trip
8 you could have lived years, years. I had so much
9 money, I -- I threw the money on the floor and I had
10 the maid. We had two maids in Hof. My mother had a
11 maid and then she had another one to do the washing
12 and then we had a man. She had a man who would cut
13 the wood. And then we had a chauffeur.

14 I don't think my father even knew what I was
15 doing. I was very independent with my brother. I did
16 the driving, my brother would sit on the side. And I
17 don't know how much money. I couldn't tell you.

18 I just know that I bought -- my brother and I
19 went and bought for cash a Mercedes Benz. God, I wish
20 I had this car today. I bought the Mercedes Benz,
21 which belonged to a Nazi doctor. And how do I know he
22 was Nazi, because who was belong to the Nazi party
23 couldn't get any gasoline. And so he was forced to
24 sell this Mercedes which was sitting in a garage
25 during the whole war.

1 Mercedes had wooden wheels. It was a Cabriolet.
2 I bet today it's worth maybe a million dollars. I
3 don't know how much it's worth. I think we paid for
4 it 30,000 German marcs in those days. And so this was
5 became our private car.

6 I remember it had wooden wheels. I remember we
7 bought a battery, changed the oil, turned the damn
8 thing and it started. It was sitting like four, five
9 years, you know.

10 After we left Germany, we left this car. Sold it
11 for peanuts, you know.

12 Q. DID YOUR PARENTS WONDER WHERE YOU WERE GETTING
13 ALL THIS MONEY TO DO THINGS LIKE THIS? DID THEY
14 PREFER NOT TO ASK?

15 A. I'm trying to remember. I'm trying to remember.
16 Because my mother was never so involved in, you know.
17 She was very busy playing the housewife when we were
18 in Hof and we lived in this beautiful villa. My
19 father was out most of the time, you know, doing his
20 thing. Traveled a lot. And so I sort of did my own
21 thing, you know.

22 I wasn't supervised. I wasn't a normal teenager.
23 That was over for me.

24 For me, supervision, you know, I mean, I was --
25 ever since the Holocaust, you know, I was an adult.

1 An adult. Sometimes trying to be a child. (Pause.)

2 And I don't even, if I think back, I don't even
3 know why I did it. Because I didn't need the money.
4 I think I enjoyed the excitement, being on the edge.
5 You know, because I knew if I get caught, I can go to
6 jail. Thus I knew, back of my mind, if I go to jail
7 my father can pull me out because very influential.
8 But it was just being at the age, I think, gave me the
9 excitement. So it was a crazy life.

10 I remember I had a girlfriend -- oh, yeah. I had
11 this girlfriend. Girlfriend. Her name was Lydia. I
12 remember that was in Hof. And Lydia was a little
13 Nazi. She was 16 years old and I was 16 years old.
14 And she didn't know I was Jewish, because she knew my
15 father ran around with an American uniform, right? So
16 maybe I was a refugee from Hungary, you know. And I
17 dated her. Started dating her. Was very pretty.

18 I had this deep desire for revenges, but in a
19 very different kind of revenge. Because she -- and --
20 how did I know she was a Nazi? Because we talked
21 about it. And one day, she pulled out a picture of
22 Hitler she carried with her, you know, at her heart.

23 So, I didn't sleep with her yet. And after I
24 slept with her, I said, "You know with whom you slept
25 with, because it was great?" "No." She looked at me.

1 I said, "You slept with a Jew. I'm a Jew." And she
2 turned -- I don't know. I can't -- it's hard for me
3 to describe the expression on her face. I don't know
4 it was surprise or disappointment or confusion or
5 shock. Say, "Yeah, you slept with a Jew. Just want
6 you to know I'm a human being just like you." I
7 wanted to talk her out of being a Nazi. I wanted to
8 convert her.

9 So afterwards, I mean I spoke by that time pretty
10 good German. Quite fluent. And I remember that, all
11 comes back to me now because of the Mercedes Benz and
12 Mercedes Benz I started living off of my fantasies.
13 Because they always called me as a kid, the
14 aristocrat. Aristocratic allures, they said. You
15 know, very champagnic taste. Better things in life.

16 So I knew that the aristocrats had champagne and
17 calves liver for breakfast. Said I'm going to do
18 that. So some of the champagne we packed in the bag
19 in the Mercedes, and I took that. My brother had a
20 girlfriend and we took the two girls and ourselves up
21 to By-gart. And we rented a hotel room and we just
22 drank and lived it up and was fantastic time. Had
23 incredible time. As much as you could. And I was
24 going out with this girl for maybe a month. To become
25 friends, I didn't want to dump her. Though, you know,

1 in this age, 16, you know, I wasn't, how can I say it,
2 I was never in love with her. Just attractive. Just
3 having a good time. But I didn't want to leave her
4 with a bad taste in her mouth. So I somehow gently,
5 you know, ceased our relationship. I forgot what
6 excuse I found. Stopped seeing her. And this was, as
7 I think back, I think back this was -- obviously I do
8 remember this very distinct moment. It was a very
9 satisfying experience for me when I told her that I am
10 a Jew. I could tell her that and show her that, you
11 know, in bed, you know, everybody is equal. I mean,
12 you know, we are -- (Indicating.) I communicated to
13 her on this level.

14 Then I had another girlfriend, German girlfriend
15 by the name of Helga. That was in Hof. So I suppose
16 I lived, you know, the life of a wild teenager, to say
17 the least. Not by today's standards. Didn't have
18 that many girls. Maybe had three or four. (Pause.)

19 What else do I remember? Oh, yeah. I remember
20 weird story. In Bamberg, when I was in Bamberg locked
21 up in this room. And this friend of mine, Micky
22 Boker, and he reminded me what we did together. He's
23 about a year or two years older than I am. He's also
24 from Hungary. And we were desperately trying to get
25 out of this camp.

1 This was at the beginning where my father didn't
2 have this high position. And I couldn't stand, you
3 know, being cooped up all the time in this room. And
4 so he came up and says Robert, Yoshka, he said, why
5 don't we pretend like we are crazy. And if we pretend
6 we are crazy they're going to put us in a sanitorium
7 or something and then we'll be able to -- I said,
8 "Hey. That's a super idea."

9 So we went to the -- I think to the American or
10 the UNRRA local doctor and we made up stories with
11 nightmares and stuff like that. Don't know how to
12 deal with life. And so they send us to -- I remember
13 the name, sanitorium. I don't know how to spell it,
14 sanitory, sanitory, where a German psychiatrist
15 questioned us. They question us about the war, you
16 know. So it wasn't very hard. Didn't have to be
17 convinced. Two young kids. I was 16, he was 18 -- I
18 was 15 -- 15 and he was 17. Something like that. So
19 they said, well, we need rest.

20 So they each of us got a room by ourselves, which
21 was incredible. With white sheets. It was clean.
22 And these good looking nurses would come. And I would
23 tell them stories. And I had chocolate and I had
24 coffee. I mean they would cook coffee with me. I
25 would take them to the movies. I could go out. In

1 and out. I wasn't locked up like somebody is crazy.
2 I could go in and out. And the food wasn't bad
3 because we had our supplements. And I think we stayed
4 there for two or three weeks. And I had the time of
5 my life. It was wonderful. And it was an insane
6 asylum. Wasn't insane. It was like a sanitorium.
7 Shouldn't call it insane asylum. It was like -- it
8 was sanitorium.

9 So this is the crazy things we did. And it is
10 still there I met him now. He brought it up and still
11 talking about it.

12 Q. IN THIS AREA?

13 A. He lived in San Francisco and just moved
14 recently. Actually, I let you meet him when he comes.
15 He will tell you the story. He was together with me
16 in the D.P. Camp in Bamberg. He can tell you what a
17 big shot my father was. He really was.

18 So going back to Hof, we left Bamberg now. We
19 live in Hof. With a maid and the full catastrophe.
20 And one day, this was the time that the war, I think,
21 the State of Israel, when was the date of Israel
22 formed, in May?

23 Q. UH-HUH.

24 A. In May of 1948. Right. And then they were
25 asking for volunteers to fight the Israeli Army and

1 the pressure was on and they came to the D.P. Camps.

2 One day my father, I remember there were
3 thousands of people. He made a speech. And he didn't
4 tell me anything. Didn't tell my brother anything.
5 And he made a speech, a very pro-Israeli speech, what
6 a country means to you. He must have just got carried
7 away. And in his carried away speech, he said, "As a
8 matter of fact, I want everybody to volunteer to go to
9 fight for Israel. And as a gesture, to show that I
10 really mean business, I am sending both of my
11 children, both of my sons to go fight in Israel."

12 So, "Yeah, good. I'm glad. Here, Dad," you
13 know.

14 Q. HOW DID YOU AND GEORGE FEEL ABOUT THAT?

15 A. We are in shock. So remember we came back and
16 your names would be written up in the books, you know,
17 in Munich. Probably my name should be written up in
18 that. They must have a book in Munich. Do you know
19 about this book?

20 Q. HUH-UH.

21 A. Okay. So it was a big thing. So we came back
22 and I think he didn't really realize what he did. And
23 we start talking. Can't back away. And we start
24 talking, well, we have to go somewhere and the war
25 will be over fast anyhow, I think.

1 So I think I talk -- we talk ourselves into it.
2 You know, I mean father said it, father knows best,
3 right? And so we volunteered to go to Israel.

4 So they load us on trucks and I think by truck
5 and by train I got to Marseille. It was in 1948. I
6 think it was in September -- I know in September I
7 arrived in Israel. Remember I arrive in Haifa. And
8 in Marseille, I had second thoughts about going to
9 Israel.

10 We had plenty of money with us and I remember I
11 told my brother, I said, "You know, this Army business
12 is not for me." I was never much for discipline,
13 anyhow. So I said, "You know, let's go. We got some
14 money." We had dollars, actual U.S. dollars. Good
15 anywhere. "Let's go to Paris. Have the time of our
16 lives. You know. And then when we spend all the
17 money we go back to Germany. To Dad and Mom."

18 George said, "But what about the luggages? Our
19 luggages are already on the ship. They're taking our
20 luggages." I said, "Screw the luggages. Who cares
21 about the luggages?" I said, "Let's go to Paris."

22 So we argued. But he prevailed. He was the
23 older brother. And he said, "No, no. The luggages
24 are going, we are going." It was my brother, the
25 luggages.

1 So I remember I went with a bunch of Americans
2 and women and children. Because we entered, and the
3 ship's name was SPAN YORK. I think it was a Greek
4 ship. And we arrived in Haifa. I had very bad
5 feeling. I was crying. I was crying. I didn't like
6 it.

7 I remember the first night we slept outside in
8 desert, some barricks in the desert. And I heard --
9 first night I never forget. I heard like children or
10 women crying. And I said, "Oh, no, there is a
11 concentration camp or something around here." I heard
12 screaming and crying. And I didn't realize it, next
13 morning they told me they were the jackals. And I
14 never heard, you know, a sound like this before.

15 So this is how we arrive in Israel. I think the
16 trip took five or six days.

17 I remember the American Jews who said, we'll kill
18 Abdula. Abdula was at that time the King of Jordan
19 that was Hussein's father. I remember that. And I
20 remember even the song they were singing. "Oh, yay,
21 yay, yay, Maria, Maria, oh, yay, yay, Maria." They
22 sing it on the ship.

23 So the soldiers, who would be soldiers, mixed
24 with women and children. So probably they catch us,
25 they couldn't tell we were going to be soldiers.

1 So --

2 Q. THIS WAS AFTER THE BLOCKADE HAD ENDED?

3 A. No. No. This was during the blockade.

4 Q. DURING THE BLOCKADE.

5 A. Yeah. The friend of mine, several friends of
6 mine who live in Israel now were on EXODUS. EXODUS
7 left before PAN YORK. I think two weeks difference or
8 one week. I could have been on EXODUS. I wasn't on
9 EXODUS obviously. So that was the same time. During
10 the blockade.

11 Q. DO YOU REMEMBER, WAS IT DIFFICULT TO GET INTO
12 ISRAEL? HOW DID YOU --

13 A. I know we arrived at night and I know we entered
14 Israel illegally. Wasn't legal. (Pause.)

15 I remember we're rushed off with trucks and it
16 went very fast. Very fast. You want more?

17 Q. YEAH. YOU TALKED ABOUT SOMETHING. I THINK IT
18 WAS BACK IN BAMBERG. YOU SAID YOUR FATHER WAS OFFERED
19 A REMARKABLE BUSINESS DEAL.

20 A. Oh, yeah. It's not a business deal. It wasn't
21 a business deal.

22 My father was -- he was offered that, too. My
23 father was very popular with the Germans, also. They
24 liked him a lot. And remember that the former Mayor
25 of Bamberg came to our house, you know, was -- had a

1 lot of kavod. A lot of, how do you say kavod.
2 Respect.

3 Q. Uh-huh.

4 A. And he was offered -- I mean anybody could have
5 taken the German citizenship. That was no big deal.
6 Germans would wanted you to stay. But he was offered
7 if he takes the German citizenship, as a condition, he
8 takes the German citizenship, they offered him a movie
9 theater, they offered him the entire goot (ph), the
10 estate.

11 I'm trying to remember the name. Was it
12 Wiesenmeyer? I'm not sure. Who was the head. He was
13 a Nazi, big Nazi of the Gestapo in Budapest, Hungary.
14 And he had several thousand acres of estate with
15 tractors, with animals, with a castle. A whole thing.
16 And if my father -- could be only given to a Holocaust
17 survivor. See, my father takes the citizenship
18 they'll give them to him, whole estate.

19 My father refused. And I remember, not that I
20 loved the Germans at all. But I was walking with him
21 and we talked about this. And he and I were alone.
22 We were walking in Bamberg. And you have to imagine a
23 city which is sort of -- is hard -- how can I say?
24 (Pause.) A city that is dormant. You know, no life.
25 No shops open. Everything is closed. No, is not

1 dormant. City like has been not evacuated, but
2 something. There is another word for that. Like run
3 down, way run down downtown, some in the U.S. see but
4 much worse. But with bullet holes in buildings, etc.
5 Factories closed. Nothing functions.

6 I said to my father, "You know, one day I see, I
7 see people are going to this field, all that you see
8 thousands and thousands of people will be working
9 here. This whole area is going to be revitalized. Is
10 going to become alive." I said, "I think you should
11 take it. You should take it. You should take this
12 opportunity and then when everything revitalizes
13 you're going to sell it and we move to Switzerland or
14 United States. Wherever. You can live like a king
15 for the rest of your life."

16 "No." His principle is German. I'm not going to
17 touch it. I want nothing to do with it. I'm not
18 going to become a citizen. And I couldn't argue with
19 him because he was right.

20 See, he spoke from his soul. And there was no
21 money in the world that my father would have taken
22 from the Germans. He's not going to do it. He was
23 very -- (Pause.) He was very spiritual. He couldn't
24 do it. He couldn't do it. He probably knew I was
25 right. I never find out if he knew or not, but that's

1 the way he felt.

2 I remember when we lived in a Barrake in Israel,
3 I reminded him what I told him. He said, "Maybe I
4 should have listened to you."

5 Q. BOTH YOU AND YOUR FATHER FROM THE STORIES YOU'VE
6 TOLD ARE VERY GUTSY.

7 A. Very.

8 Q. AND IT'S THE ONE PLACE WHERE YOU TWO ARE VERY
9 DIFFERENT ALSO, IS YOU'RE VERY PRACTICAL --

10 A. My father was a pure idealist. We're sometimes
11 rich, sometimes poor.

12 Talking about gutsy, I don't know if I said that
13 during one of the interviews, but when the Germans
14 occupied Budapest, I don't know if I said that, I
15 walked with my father, I am witness. And, you know,
16 when a German soldier walks on the street people would
17 get off the sidewalk. And my father walks with me and
18 he does like that. (Demonstrating.) To several
19 German soldiers. He does like this with his elbows.
20 He's not going to get off the sidewalk. And looks at
21 him and said, "That's right." In German he tells
22 them, "That's the way Hungarian Jew is." I mean, he
23 was almost crazy. He could have been killed. He was
24 just very, very proud and very gutsy. Yeah.

25 I have more had the balance of my mother and my

1 father where I had this -- they say I get it from my
2 grandfather. Owned a lot of businesses. And he had
3 everything in his head. I'm very good with numbers.
4 So I had a very strong between a dream and reality.
5 Both, I think.

6 I don't know if this is a result of what I went
7 through or maybe I had naturally inclinations for
8 that. It's maybe combination of both.

9 Q. LET ME ASK YOU ANOTHER QUESTION, ROBERT. IN THE
10 YEARS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE WAR, WHAT KIND OF
11 FALLOUTS OR REPERCUSSIONS DID YOUR WAR EXPERIENCE HAVE
12 ON YOU? DO YOU REMEMBER NIGHTMARES OR ILLNESS?

13 A. I was -- I had -- right up to liberation I had
14 what you call those days "Ukranian sickness," which is
15 a constant diarrhea. Which you would say, "Oh, it's
16 no big deal." But people were dying like flies from
17 that.

18 I don't know if you heard about that. They
19 called -- we call it the Ukranian sickness. I don't
20 know why. Maybe because Ukranian soldiers occupied
21 Budapest. Who knows what the reason.

22 And I had this diarrhea. Wouldn't stop. I had
23 head lice and had other lice. But you don't die from
24 that. I didn't have typhus. And I don't know how
25 long it took us. Several weeks. Maybe a week or two.

1 But somehow it stopped. And medication was not
2 available. I think I drank tea and I don't know what
3 else. Rice wasn't available. But I survived that.

4 Then I had many times, I wouldn't call it
5 nightmares. I don't know. Dreams. And I had those
6 dreams during the war and after the war, when in each
7 case I was afraid to wake up. I would just open my
8 eye a little bit and close, 'cuz during the war the
9 reality was like a nightmare. And I wanted the dream
10 to become the reality and the reality to become a
11 dream.

12 Maybe that's the way of escapism, from pressure
13 of life. But it was so horrendous. I think in my
14 case -- beside the hunger and the exposure of being
15 killed any time, you know, the unknown, when you get
16 captured, was the tremendous feeling of loneliness.
17 Because there was no one to share it with. No one to
18 share it with.

19 Which reminds me, I don't know I have to go back.
20 Did I say before I got liberated by the Russian Army
21 where I stayed in the cellar, where I could sleep only
22 one side or the other side. On a bench. And it was a
23 bench, I would say -- how wide is a bench, 18 inches?
24 All I know is I could not sleep on my back, because
25 it's hard to balance. So I would sleep with the right

1 and left. And little things like this. And then your
2 dream is to be able to sleep on your back. Because
3 when you sleep on the side and you -- it was hard
4 bench. There was nothing. Just bench. And at the
5 end, I was so weak that I couldn't even get up.

6 I remember once I urinated right on the wall. I
7 just urinated just laying there. Made sure it doesn't
8 go on me. It went on the wall.

9 For a while, I think I remember I took a few
10 times up on the -- up from the cellar, up to the --
11 because it was not a cellar. It was like a basement
12 in a property which was bombarded. So there was
13 nothing upstairs. So people wouldn't think that
14 people live underneath. And we used to take out -- I
15 seen those babies die. Turn, go puffed up and blue
16 and we had to carry the babies out and to leave them
17 there.

18 It was wintertime. I think I was liberated in
19 February by the Russian Army. And you feel nothing.
20 You just -- no feelings. And I was there with
21 partisans, with all kinds of people. We're all --
22 (Pause.)

23 And one day -- and this was the food that I got
24 with my friend and his mother was giving us, you know.
25 I gave to her everything and she would feed us,

1 whatever. I mean she rationed it for us.

2 One day, a couple of Nazis show up. I still
3 remember it was sort of a light coming and I could see
4 them, their uniforms. And we're a bunch of people
5 down there. I don't know how many. Forty, 50.

6 And I just remember saying something, "We'll get
7 you. We'll come back. We'll get you." But that time
8 there were already street fights in Budapest. I don't
9 know if you read it or know it, but Budapest was
10 defended, I think, by 200,000 German Army and the
11 fight was going from house to house, from room to
12 room. It was an incredible fight. And we had no
13 place to go. And we were sitting ducks there. We're
14 waiting to be taken.

15 The hours go by. I don't know, two, three, four,
16 five, six hours went by in total tension. And
17 suddenly we see upstairs, we look. Because there was
18 somebody always on lookout. "Come, come. The
19 Russian, we see Russian soldiers. The Russians are
20 arrived." And we see, I still see it, three or
21 four -- three to five Germans with their hands up.
22 And I see the Russians holding them like this. And I
23 said, "We are free. Ha!" That's how I am liberated
24 in this cellar.

25 I never wore the star. Not in the cellar,

1 either. Yeah. It was a beautiful picture to see
2 those Russian soldiers.

3 Q. IN THE CELLAR PEOPLE WORE A STAR.

4 A. We did not wear a star.

5 Q. YOU DID NOT WEAR A STAR.

6 A. No. Not a -- basement. It wasn't a cellar.

7 Basement.

8 Q. YOU TALKED ABOUT THIS THE OTHER DAY. I WANTED
9 TO ASK YOU TO RELATE IT TO ME ON TAPE.

10 WHAT WAS YOUR -- THE FIVE SENSES, SIGHT, SOUND,
11 SMELL, TASTE AND FEEL. WHAT WAS THE SENSE, YOUR
12 STRONGEST SENSE DURING THE WAR YEARS IN BUDAPEST?

13 A. (Pause.) The sight, the vision. (Pause.) Is
14 very interesting, because it should be the sound. And
15 because I learn everything by sound. I'm a visual
16 person, but also sound is very important to me.

17 I mean, I had the gift of learning an entire area
18 by hearing. I learned La Traviata in three weeks. In
19 Italian, I couldn't speak a word of Italian when I had
20 this fellowship in Vienna. So I have very musical
21 ears. I learned five languages by hearing it.

22 My memory of the Holocaust is not associated with
23 sound at all. It's like cut out. Only vision. I see
24 pictures. When I talk to you I see the pictures. I
25 don't hear the sound. I don't feel the smell. I have

1 no feelings, except the visions. Isn't that weird?

2 Q. WHAT VISIONS STAYS -- STAYED WITH YOU THE
3 LONGEST?

4 A. Which is the strongest? All this visions are
5 strong that I remember. I don't know. (Pause.) I
6 remember very, very powerful picture.

7 I hear the sound of the bells when they took my
8 mother -- my father and my brother away. And I hear
9 the bells. I hear the bells. I hear the bells now
10 when they took my mother away, the same bells.

11 Q. WHAT BELLS?

12 A. Because they always rang the bell to call the
13 peoples. Somebody stand in the courtyard. And the
14 bell is very loud when -- the acoustics are very
15 strong when you have an empty courtyard and you start,
16 and they always come the bell. Always is twice, but
17 you see I hear the bell.

18 I hear the sirens. I hear the sirens. All the
19 time the sirens, before the bombardments. I don't
20 hear the bombs so much. (Pause.)

21 I see -- I said this picture comes to me, when I
22 sat next to this dead man and his belly wide open, and
23 I didn't realize it and I sat on this, outside
24 somewhere where was by myself in Budapest running and
25 I found, I found a jar of jam. I haven't eaten --

1 found a jar of jam, also jam. And I grabbed the jar
2 of jam and I opened it, and I started eating. I think
3 I had a spoon and I eat the jam. Whatever find a
4 place you sat down, eat the jam. And I didn't look.
5 And I look suddenly to my right and there is this man
6 with his belly wide open. Must have been from
7 bombardment or something. Laying there. Next to me!
8 I mean, like I'm here, he is there. And I remember
9 that I wanted to get up to get away. I said, "No." I
10 kept on eating. And he was dead. I remember that
11 picture.

12 Q. DO YOU REMEMBER THE PEOPLE IN BUDAPEST? YOU
13 TOLD TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT THE BODIES IN BUDAPEST.

14 A. I remember the bodies being stacked up like wood
15 in those department stores, the department store and
16 sometimes on the street. I remember dead horses,
17 where people cut off flesh to eat, that were killed.
18 Through bombardment or through machine gun. By
19 airplanes.

20 Q. PEOPLE STACKED IN THE DEPARTMENT STORE?

21 A. That was wintertime. They would stack the
22 bodies, big department store. Five, six stories high.
23 And it was winter, so, you know, they would -- they
24 were frozen.

25 I remember when I was -- after I was liberated in

1 Budapest, fights were still going on in Buda. I
2 remember the sound of the cannons coming, shooting.
3 Was a sound of liberation. I was already liberated.

4 Everything is pictures. Mostly is pictures.
5 Like the words, when I got out of this -- of this
6 place of the Gestapo headquarters in Budapest. I
7 remember, I see the guy's face. He was tall and fat.
8 I see his face, but I don't -- I don't hear his voice.
9 I see -- mostly I see things the way they were.

2
10 Q. WHEN YOU CAME OUT OF THE NAZI HEADQUARTERS, WHEN
11 YOU WERE -- WHEN YOU WERE CAUGHT --

12 A. Right.

13 Q. -- AT NAZI HEADQUARTERS --

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. -- IN BUDAPEST, IS WHEN YOU LOST YOUR -- WHEN
16 THEY TOOK AWAY YOUR FALSE PAPERS.

17 A. Right.

18 Q. DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU WERE THINKING AT THE
19 TIME THAT -- WHEN THIS NAZI CAUGHT YOU, WHEN HE ASKED
20 YOU TO DROP YOUR DRAWERS, WHAT YOUR FEELINGS WERE?

21 A. (Pause.) Beside being scared, the thought went
22 through my mind of, it's very unfair. Though I fought
23 so hard to beat the Nazis in their game and I stood up
24 to them, my own way, that I should die. I should die
25 without being able to put up resistance. Because in

1 my fantasies I always wanted to -- I had certain --
2 certain ideas what I would do in case they question.

3 See, most of the questioning, not in a place like
4 this, but they will always ask you to come under the
5 door, under a gate, to show, to identify yourself.
6 That means to show your penis. And how did I tell the
7 story I was caught again one more time?

8 Q. I DON'T THINK YOU MENTIONED THAT YOU WERE --
9 AFTER YOU GOT OUT OF THE BUILDING?

10 A. Oh, yeah. One more time it happened to me.
11 This was -- I was going on the street and at that time
12 I didn't have any uniform. This was after this. And
13 I was schlepping the food. I was on my way to pick up
14 the food. And a young Nazi with his girlfriend, I
15 don't know, his wife, probably his girlfriend, with
16 his automatic, you know -- (Indicating.) On his belly
17 stopped me on the street.

18 At that point I didn't even say eljen szalsi or
19 nothing. I just walked. I didn't give a damn. But I
20 learned a lesson. See, what I figured out in my head
21 is, I got caught the first time because the picture
22 fell out. What I did, I was dressed normal, but I had
23 picture taken of myself as a Nazi and I put it in my
24 pocket. Because I didn't have any identification.

25 So this guy stops me on the street and says --

1 asks me for identification. I said, "I have none.
2 You know, I'm just -- said maybe I have something.
3 You know, I just come running from the Russians." And
4 I'm looking in my pockets and I make purposely that
5 the picture fell down the stairwell. And he grabs the
6 picture. And he sees me. I didn't say anything. He
7 just sees me like this. Says, "You sure you don't
8 have any identification?" "No, no. This picture of
9 me." "You don't?" I said, "No." He says, "Let's go
10 under the door, the gate." I said, "Okay."

11 So I figure I had no weapon. Said going under
12 the gate. This is the end, Robert. Good-bye, Robert.
13 But I felt my heart right here in my throat. But I'm
14 so -- I figured I'm going to take the finger and right
15 in his eye. Try to blind him and then run away.
16 Because I knew this was a technique somebody taught me
17 how to do that. To take the finger and right between
18 the eye, into the eye.

19 I walked with such indifference, you know. And
20 we got to the gate, the big gate. Says, "You're okay.
21 You can go." Just like that. Yeah. I was that
22 close. (Indicating.) Second time.

23 That's what went through my head that time.

24 Q. TELL ME ONE MORE STORY. THAT'S THE STORY ABOUT
25 THE SKELETONS.

1 A. Skeletons.

2 Q. AFTER THE WAR.

3 A. The skeletons. Humm. The skeletons, I started
4 seeing. You see, I got this opportunity to go to
5 Vienna to study music, to study opera, in 1956. So
6 that was 11 years after the Holocaust. And because
7 before that nothing -- this never happened. And this
8 was the first time I was removed. Because don't
9 forget, that by the time I was 18 years old, I went
10 through two wars. I went through the Israeli, I --
11 the World War II and I went through the war in Israel.
12 I mean, Israel for me was more of a vacation. I was a
13 Halutz, it was Hakhshara. It was guns, Arabs around,
14 you know.

13 15 And here in this country, Vienna, memories come
16 back. I have saw the Danube red, full of blood. You
17 know, it wasn't red, but I was in Austria, which
18 reminded me of the Nazis. And I remember very
19 distinctly, I see. As I'm walking down one day on
20 Kutnerstrasse. And I'm a student. I go to the
21 conservatory. I'm with my private teacher studying
22 drama. And it was a nice sunny day and as I'm walking
23 on the street and the people are well dressed and
24 everything is so proper, so beautiful. The sun is
25 shining and Kutnerstrasse, the main street.

1 I don't know if you have been to Austria. Next
2 to the opera house, going next to the Steffonkirshe.
3 It's very fashionable street. And I see the people
4 and everybody sort of looks, you know, well dressed
5 and very, very normal.

6 Suddenly, I said, "Look it." And suddenly I
7 start see them as skeletons walking. And I start sort
8 of smiling, or not smiling, but having this -- this
9 weird vision of -- I don't know why these people are
10 so casual and so happy and so, you know, sublime about
11 life. Don't they know they are going to die and they
12 are just all skeletons. You know? Because I saw the
13 old church. I saw everything is old, you know. The
14 buildings are two, three hundred years old which is
15 not uncommon, you know, older. So some on the
16 sidewalk is probably older and I'm envisioning that
17 the skeletons and the new people coming and I saw this
18 whole cycle of life. And then for many years, I had
19 this vision coming back to me, seeing people as
20 skeletons.

21 I don't know if it has anything to do with the
22 Holocaust or not, but it happened to me only after I
23 got to Vienna. And 11 years after the Holocaust.

24 Q. AND FOR HOW MANY YEARS AFTER THAT DID YOU?

25 A. I don't know. Probably four -- four, five

1 years. Something like that. On and off. I don't
2 want you to think always saw. Just on and off, you
3 know, have this flashes.

4 Q. DID YOU ALSO HAVE ANY NIGHTMARES AFTER -- AFTER
5 THE HOLOCAUST?

6 A. Dreams. Maybe nightmare. Dreams, where I would
7 pinch myself after the dream. Then I would have the
8 dream of the Holocaust after the Holocaust that it
9 still going on. Then I walk the street and I say,
10 "Hey, you know, look, look. (Demonstrating.) Feel
11 something. You know, you're free. You're free."

12 I remember when I went to Germany, it lasted for
13 two years probably. Every time I saw a German
14 policeman in uniform my heart started banging. And I
15 knew that nothing to be afraid of, that I'm a free
16 person. I knew that. But I just couldn't help it. I
17 couldn't help it. Was a terrible feeling to -- I
18 couldn't stop my heart. Like having an anxiety
19 attack.

20 Not when I saw American soldiers. Only when I
21 saw a German, German police. And they had -- to tell
22 you how grotesque it was, because they didn't have --
23 they could not even arrest a Jew. I don't know if you
24 know that.

25 Q. HUH-UH.

1 A. After the war. Only an American or the UNRRA
2 could arrest a Jew. They had no jurisdiction over us.
3 The German police couldn't arrest me. I wouldn't let
4 him arrest me. But I don't think even they had guns.
5 I don't remember. I don't think they had guns.

6 Q. HUMM.

7 A. So how long those -- those dreams and those
8 pinching period lasted, probably a couple of years.

9 Q. DID YOU EVER TALK ABOUT IT WITH -- YOU SAID YOUR
10 FATHER WAS SORT OF -- VERY SPIRITUAL. DID YOU EVER
11 TALK ABOUT IT WITH HIM? FEELINGS ABOUT SIMILAR
12 PROBLEMS ADJUSTING?

13 A. Have I ever -- I never told this to anybody 'til
14 now. (Pause.) I don't think I even told all my
15 stories to my parents. Bits and pieces maybe.
16 (Pause.)

17 There was very little discussion about the
18 Holocaust in our family at home. Very little. I
19 mean, you know, I knew everybody's story and, you
20 know, and they knew partially my story. But we are
21 much more -- I think the whole life was around
22 survival, continued to be survival. Surviving the
23 D.P. Camp, surviving the hard life in Israel. Always
24 on the go, you know, going out of Israel. It was
25 never any -- what I call real peace, real peace.

1 Sense of stability, of permanent -- sense of
2 permanency.

3 I don't think that I have the sense of permanency
4 today, either. I don't know what it means to -- to
5 feel. The only thing is I feel very much closer to
6 home here than anywhere else in the world I ever been.
7 And I have been around a lot. (Pause.) And I know
8 that I have -- you know, with survivors, for instance,
9 I think I will have less in common with a survivor, a
10 common survivor than a Vietnam Veteran. I will have a
11 better rapport. Because I know one thing. I think I
12 told it to you. My wife's cousin, first cousin was a
13 sergeant in the Marines, who came to visit us. He was
14 a combat veteran. He had very high decorations. He
15 was in combat.

16 After he came out, back from Vietnam, he came to
17 visit us. My wife, she have reminded me that I had an
18 incredible rapport with this man and he cannot talk to
19 anybody in the family. And we got along just like
20 that. Nothing even talking about it, and it just --
21 (Pause.)

22 I didn't figure it out why that is yet. Maybe it
23 is because I did not have -- in my experience, I did
24 not have the group experience. You know, that -- when
25 there are a lot of people, just like if you go to --

1 people go to a temple because they're sharing the same
2 experience. They get a strength from each other. I
3 don't know what it is. And I didn't have that. Like
4 being a lonely wolf or something, you know? (Pause.)

5 I never bothered to analyze my feelings. I never
6 did up 'til now. I know that when we talked one day,
7 talked extensively for four hours, and I didn't
8 realize it but after everybody left I had almost
9 nightmares coming back to me, and remember things that
10 happened before. And I couldn't get the thoughts out
11 of my head. Things that I never thought about before,
12 you know, were surfacing. Which I think is good,
13 because they're always there. Just, you know, buried.
14 (Pause.)

15 But if I look at it as an outsider, it was quite
16 an experience life -- quite interesting life. And
17 this whole life is life. As I'm talking to you right
18 now, seems like a dream, even right now. As I think
19 about back, the past going through 'til today, in a
20 way is really fiction. Is nothing normal about it.
21 (Pause.)

22 Maybe to me, to me, the normal is fiction.
23 Really. Yeah. So -- (Pause.)

24 Q. WANT TO STOP FOR TODAY AND WE'LL PICK UP AND GO
25 THROUGH YOUR STORY IN ISRAEL NEXT TIME, ISRAEL?

1 (Blank tape)

2 (End of September 5, 1990 interview)

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