

Continued Interview with ROBERT FEHER.

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Interviewers: Barbara Harris, Tammy Unann,  
and Jackie Caldwell

Transcriber: Mary Ward

Q ROBERT WHEN WE FINISHED OUR LAST TAPE, YOU  
HAD LANDED IN ISRAEL AND BECOME PART OF A MILITARY UNIT.  
CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT UNIT YOU JOINED AND WHAT YOUR  
DUTIES WERE --

A Well, let me start out, you didn't join any units.  
We were transported. We arrived in Haifa, and then I  
think by trucks or buses, I don't remember. We were  
transported to BAILEET, which was a training center for  
the army, approximately, I think, I don't know, maybe ten  
or six kilometers from Netanya, and this is where I got so  
called my training, which wasn't much.

I remember I had civilian pants. I don't  
remember if I had army boots or not, and we got a hat  
and a stand -- I think I got a stand, and the entire  
thing was about two weeks. There was no time to  
train, was no time to train, so it was really nothing  
to speak of.

Q WHAT WAS THE DATE THAT YOU ARRIVED AT --

A I arrived sometime in the month of September of 1948. So the war just started. Yeah, I mentioned I was 17 years old. I was one of the youngest -- maybe one of the youngest, I don't know, and my brother and I -- oh, yeah, I know, it was the PALMACH.

Q WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

A The PALMACHS were something like the storm troopers. We were in the front lines, and then this was only for a few days. We were in PALMACH.

How do we end up we were in the PALMACH? I had no idea what a PALMACH was. They asked me, why go with PALMACH? Why do you want to join? PALMACH, that sounds like good, you know? I had no idea what it was, and little did I know this was another one -- this is where the guys who were like, you know, the storm troopers in the German army. Then we were together with my brother. They said because it is the likelihood -- we were together, if somebody gets killed, it's not a good idea to have both brothers together, if one should survive. So they separated us, and I was in a different unit and he was put in a different unit. I lost touch with him, and this was the infantry.

And I remember it was the HAMSEEN. If you heard the word HAMSEEN, was the peculiar thing. It is where the air stops moving, and it's very hot, and it can last

either one or three or seven or nine days - it was an odd number. Even a leaf won't move, nothing moves, and it's very, very killing hot, and there we are in the desert with our guns, and they put on the -- they gave us these British rifles and guns, and this fancy hat, you know, metal hat, and somebody did something - I forgot who - and they were a sergeant -- a sergeant, a very tough guy. I couldn't speak Hebrew. I spoke English. We just learned the orders were in Hebrew, but chaotic. Nobody's -- you know, the people did not understand each other. And I spoke some English, and to make a long story short, we were standing under this heat punishment, or something stupid. The guys all lined up, and we were standing there, 15, 20 men in a line. Everybody's tired, and I thought, I had enough. I took the position I came to Israel to fight, you know, fight the "Arabs", quote, you know. I didn't come here to be punished. Didn't make sense. And I get out of the line in the shade under a tree, and the sergeant came up and said, what are you doing? And I said, I'm resting. And he said, you know, I -- and he told NORFALTINNWA. With that, I'm giving you an order to get back into the line. I said, I'm not moving, forget about it. So he took

his gun and pointed at me: You know I can blow your brains out. I said, you're welcome to it. I knew he was bluffing. He was not going to blow my brains out. He says, you know you have potential to become a great soldier. Little did he know that I was too individualistic to follow orders - obviously, I didn't even know myself. So I said, well, maybe, but I said, you know this kind of standing around, and also, marching, this is not for me. I said, you know, I drive -- you know, I used to be a driver. When I was sixteen, I used to drive this GMC 16 x 16, and I started pitching what a great driver I am, and I think the conversation ended up that he didn't know what to do with me, and he gave up and he transported -- transferred me to -- to the COLACKBIER, to the airport, and I become a driver. That's what I was.

So it was very hot - it was 101, and this was the -- the so called fighting squadron of the Israeli Air Force, today's elite probably, and my commanding officer was IZER Weizmann, who was the -- the nephew of Chaim [Charles] Weizmann, who was the first president of Israel. I was MAHACH, you know, his driver, personal driver, and I was driving trucks with the troops. I was carrying bombs once, and I was said to have a good life in the Air Force. I knew my way around.

Everybody called me Rubin, which is Robert. In Hebrew they couldn't transfer, so they called me Rubin. Didn't do anything extraordinary.

I actually did a lot of favors to the cook, so, therefore, I was fed. I actually ate better than the colonel or even the VIZYES. He was cooking from his special KOPSELLS; has lobster, would make it for me. I would arrange to make special trips to take him home and stuff like that.

And so danger, I don't think I experienced anything dangerous. The most danger I almost got in would have been that they picked me to go and to carry some troops or some bombs, whatever, to Jerusalem. This is when we were first under siege by the Jordanian troops, and they were only taking people as a matter the same as me - volunteers who were single, no family - because a lot of the trucks were shot up, and somehow, I don't know how, I know that I was carrying a bomb, but I don't think I was diverted. I had to go somewhere else. I had to go to GEDERA house. So I don't think -- I can't say anything great about the war. My heart -- I saw my brother once during the war, and he was -- he was in a PALMACH, and he was the

one who took Be're Sheva', you know, and those two, so really, I was lucky. There is a survivor, too, you know.

Q WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THE ATMOSPHERE IN ISRAEL DURING THOSE YEARS?

A Well, you know, we heard a lot of people got killed. The spirit was very high. Spirits were very high. I know we got paid about three and a half pounds a month, if I remember correctly, and we didn't get our so called salary, or whatever, for months - six, seven, eight months, and nobody really grumbled because we were all for the State of Israel, so it didn't really matter. It was an incredibly unique experience, because nobody -- we didn't have people -- people had ranks, but it's -- I call them AEUZ/SER. There was no, you know, total equality. I mean, it was a wonderful -- wonderful atmosphere of, you knew you were doing something worthwhile. You sensed it. You knew it was -- there was no question about it. And I remember we had MESSAGE/SH/PHITZ. We had spit fires, we had tanks, because there was a BUDDING, and we had vipers, you know, sometimes they flew over the line and took the bomb and took the bomb by hand and dropped it. It was very quite primitive. Most were MESS/SANGS which we lost due to the fact that our pilots, which were from all over

( the world - we had Jewish pilots, we had some English pilots, Jews, and paid mercenaries, and they didn't know how to fly a MESH/SHIN/VITS They would usually lose them in the -- not in the air, but they would lose them on the land, because the raid was very narrow.

I remember once we had these planes flipped over. I think it was a spit fire by the runway, next to the runway. To give you an idea of the spirit at that time, I was on a fire truck, fire truck, an ambulance on, I don't know, one of those things, and we ran to the plane, we drove to the plane, and hundreds of people, and we lifted the plane by hand, because the guy went upside-down on his head and going like this, and we knocked the thing, where the pilot is, this plastic or wherever, they cannot be opened, and we pulled him out by hand and holding the plane up by hand so he can exit -- surface between the ground and him, so he can get out, and then took him back. So it was just, I don't know. I enjoyed that time. I was pretty happy.

( You know, the Air Force was my family, and I was very well-liked. We used to take the guys up to -- from Tel Aviv up to the desert to -- I was stationed at 'Akko, next to 'Akko, which is between Nahariyya and Haifa. 'Akko, there was a military

air field there.

Q WHAT WAS ASSAD WERTMAN LIKE?

A He was a young kid, he was nineteen or twenty years old. He was a captain. I remember he had blond hair - curly blond hair, blue eyes; and he spoke -- I think he spoke with almost a British accent, I think. I don't remember. Tall, slim. He was a -- had a lot of quote "spine", very gutsy, and we used to make a SCHWIPER. SCHWIPER is called SHWOE, and he would take the SCHWIPER, and instead of going on the runway this way, he would take the SCHWIPER across and take off with it. I don't think we ever shot down a plane. We were mostly into ground forces. Maybe a few tanks we shot down.

Q MINISTER OF DEFENSE?

A Oh, he is. Yeah, yeah, but eventually became the head of the whole Israel Air Force. He even today is very powerful in Israel.

What happened when the war was -- let me see. The war was over in 1949, and my parents arrived, my mother and my father arrived to Israel, and they had money, because they took money to join NASHAUF, where you have your cooperative, where you have your own land. You don't own the land, but the land is leased to you by the State of Israel like for 99 years. I forgot how much money we had to put out, five or ten thousand



dollars, to get this plot of land, which were maybe one of those prefabricated, you might not call it a mobile home, but something like that, and so they started farming,

Well, my father was in his sixties, working the fields, and my mother and I went down on the HOFSHAW - that means on leave - and they were in a very bad situation. This land, they couldn't cultivate it, and they didn't have the manpower, and they needed me very badly, and I went to HOFSHAW for a week, two weeks, and then went back, and then I went again on HOFSHAW, and the family was really in a very bad situation, and I said, well, you know I have to go back, but don't worry about it. So I kept on working at home. The war was over. Working and started thinking, well, a week went by, two weeks, three weeks, three weeks went by. I'm in trouble. I mean, I'm in serious trouble now, because I could be, you know, called a deserter. I deserted, you know. You could get court-martialed, you get jailed. But to me, the war is over; you know, it's done, it's over.

So the family got together. What should we do? What should they do, because they wanted me -- they needed me at home. So my

mother comes up with this brilliant idea. She says why don't you play with sugar, play crazy. Go back, you'll be crazy. You are very young anyhow and, you know, they should not have taken you anyway, and I said, well -- well, I didn't see any other alternatives you know. I either go to jail or be crazy. And I remember maybe I stayed another week. I must have gone for a couple of months, and I was working, I was practicing to be crazy. So this is the first time I'm saying it, because no one knows it but my immediate family, but I want it for the record. I want it to be honest, and so I went back.

I went back to the camp and I practiced a certain act that I can put on, and I came to the conclusion while I was thinking it out, that most people who have mental problems never admit they have any mental problems. So a man with a mental problem says he is not crazy. Only other people say that he is crazy. So I went back, and I think I can still do the look, maybe, which was something like this (demonstrates). See? Fairly expressionless, something like that. I had that look for about two months, because when I went back, they asked me where have you been, and I said that I was in Haifa. I said I was trying out some field trucks and wanted to get a donkey and to plant some

flowers at the house. So I was talking like that, but I very happy to be back and I want to be a soldier, and I said just the opposite they would expect me to, you know. So they sent me to ASAYA Weizmann, the first one, and I pulled the schtick on him, and he looked at me and he said, this kid is acting. He did not believe me. He was the only one smart enough, but he had no choice, and he said okay, well, let's send him to a military psychiatrist.

I fooled all the psychiatrists. I could fool anyone - he is the only one. He said, "he's acting", and I went to another psychiatrist. It was a -- a two month ordeal. I had to play crazy for two months, which was very strenuous, because I met my buddies who I had to talk to, and they said, he's not the same person, and people felt sorry for me. I couldn't believe it. And finally I got a discharge, honorable discharge, with a "K", which is disabled. As a matter of fact, they offered me a taxi, you know, because in Israel those days, was to drive a taxi you make more money than a prime minister. I didn't follow through on that - I didn't have the stomach for it. It was over with. I didn't have to go for -- I wasn't in the reserves. I was done with the Army, great. So this was my great military

career with Israel, and I worked after that very, very hard.

We had this land, and I planted everything by hand. Very primitive. Then I was carrying ice. I got a contract to carry ice for three POLEGES, for three villages. I got up like 2:30 in the morning, at 3:00 - I had a mule - with my mother and brother, and we went to Netanya from PETAH TIQWA, which is about three or four kilometers from Netanya, to an ice factory, and we filled up the cart with ice. People would line up from the village with buckets, and we'd take one and cut it in chunks. One of us would cut it and throw it in the buckets, and we did that. So I started working maybe two, 3:30, 4:00 in the morning, and by 10:00 we had delivered all three villages. Then I would go have a big breakfast, and I'd go to sleep. I maybe slept, I don't know, till one or two o'clock in the afternoon, and I had a bite to eat, and I went to plow the fields; and also, I worked for other farmers. We didn't have enough to do. They called it CABLISHNOOT, which means whatever you produced that's what you got picked up. So by Israel standards, I worked probably - I'm not exaggerating - at least 16 hours a day, at least, for awhile, for six months in my career.

When the ice business was over, we would be working on the fields, digging, plowing, and at night I was a SCHMEERA. I was a guard on horseback, guarding villages on horseback, you know, like in the west. I was disabled by the Army, but I wasn't disabled for that - I'm just kidding - but I did that for about six months, and nothing ever happened - because the Arabs used to come over to steal things - they'd hire a paid guard.

What else? I worked a part of SIM, which is in the orange groves in the OTAURIA to cultivate the orange groves. I worked in construction. I worked in cleaning of the chicken shit from the latrine. I was a SABALL, which was carrying sacks on my shoulders up to a hundred kilograms, 120 pounds of salt, which feels like rocks, because it's hot, and I carry that over my head.

What else did I do? In the village they thought that I was an extraordinary worker, and so was my brother, and I applied for a contract to deliver all the fruits for all three villages, because it was more shop cooperative, and we had a contract, and I bought a tractor, and I was delivering the food, the chicken food, through all three villages with the tractor, and after that we got a contract with the

( government to plant trees, where you have these eucalyptus trees all over the country. I was doing that in the military to cover up air fields. Then we got another truck, and at the end we had three trucks all working for the government.

The problem with the business was that the government -- every house pays on time in Israel, so we had to borrow money, like at 18 percent. I didn't handle it, my father did, and I think the business went under. We had so many cost assumables; we couldn't collect from the government, so I remember that. And so that was the end of the business, I think.

( Q WHAT YEAR WAS THAT?

A Oh, I think 1955. We are up to 1955.

Q CAN I ASK YOU TO BACK UP A MINUTE? WHY DID YOUR -- YOUR PARENTS WERE CITY PEOPLE. WHATEVER POSSESSED THEM TO GO INTO THE FARMING BUSINESS?

A My father was a dreamer. He was sort of an idealist. Idealist. You know, he had this, the dream of having the land, you know, and going back to Israel and have, you know, build a country. I mean, we worked with doctors. I see people, my neighbor was a doctor -- actually my neighbors were two British officers. They were Jewish, and actually, you know, the jam that you get

( today from Israel -- did you ever get BASOOSIE Jam from BASSAY? They were the people who founded that factory. They were my neighbors. I forgot their name. When I went back to Israel, I looked for them. They sold it. They're out of it, but they founded the whole thing.

We had another neighbor on the street that was a lawyer, so, you know, I remember anecdotes. Interesting, we had -- one of our friends was a doctor. It was not uncommon in those days to be a doctor and also to be a chicken farmer. I don't know if you heard the stories or not, and he said he had a regular practice, and every time he treated Arabs he gave them an injection - water, whatever - because otherwise they felt they were not treated properly. I remember that.

( What else do I remember? One of our neighbors who started out as a farmer was from Czechoslovakia - he spoke Hungarian, Dr. Sol VABA. He finally became a lawyer. He's practicing law in Netanya, actually. What else do I remember about Israel?

Q DID YOU LIKE ISRAEL?

A I adapted very well. I spoke fluent Hebrew. I had a SABBA girlfriend. That's where I fell in love the first time, big love. And did I like Israel? I felt more like a sense of duty. As you say, one day, I don't care. You know, when it's all over, I can say I did my duty, you

(

know? I quit the war, because to me the war was over. When the war was over there was no point -- actually, I forgot. They wanted me to become an officer. They thought I was very intelligent, the officer lieutenant. They wanted to keep me in the Air Force, but it wasn't for me, you know? I was always asking "why?". You know, when they give you an order you're not supposed to ask why. To be a good soldier, you're not supposed to ask why. So I felt imprisoned toward the end in Israel. I felt like I was a prisoner, because I didn't belong to any political party, wasn't MY/MAPA, NAPAM, NASHAUER, whatever. I was a laborer, and in Israel, I don't know what it is today, the key word was "protectionism". I couldn't. It's not what you know, but who you know, and I saw it working so hard. I mean, I worked -- I worked on Shabbat. I worked on Sunday. I remember for awhile we used to go to the movies with a little Beretta drawn in my pocket because we lived very close to the border. But I didn't feel free in Israel. I felt -- even wanted to go visit another country, I couldn't go.

I really never wanted to stay in Israel, first of all. I just thought because my father made the speech and went to Israel, and a doctor, and I knew it was a good thing to fight for your country, but after that, I didn't feel I wanted to stay



there. We wanted to go to the United States, and this is where the opportunity arrives. You want to go into long details, where I was coming home.

Did I state on tape where I was coming home one day from -- this was when we worked for the government, and I was working in 'Akko. Actually, something interesting happened. I made a lot of money. My father couldn't collect it. When I was working in this air field in 'Akkko, we had -- we had -- wait a minute. We had a Ford truck, and we had a Chevy truck. Yeah, I was wrong, we had only two trucks. My brother was somewhere else. Where was he? My lieutenant -- that's right, my brother was a lieutenant, and I was in 'Akkko. And the job on the truck was nothing. I mean, I'd get up six o'clock in the morning, I'd take mostly the Jews from the MAY NIGHTS MEN NONE NIGHTS, who would -- we would pick them up, and the truck had benches, and I still remember, you could fold the benches up, and they would not sit on the bench, but he would sit like this. They sat like this, and they could sit for hours. And it came Friday, and I just take them all morning, and at five o'clock, 5:30. But, we take them home. It was a whole thing, and the whole day, I just lay on my stomach, and I became desperate to

read a lot. I read Dostoevsky, you know, because I was bored; and I did that for two, three months, and there was this MAN/NA/HEL - I don't know how you say it - supervisor, and he was a Jew from South America, and he was a slave driver. He was pushing his people. One of the nicest people I ever met in my life were the people from Tel Mond, the Jews from Tel Mond - very primitive people, very honest, but there were a few -- but we had a few Turks, and they were wild. And one day, they're going, you know, they had like a platform. They put it on a truck, and then the ground, and the people walk up on the platform, and they were in line, and the men are held -- oh, the guy that was in charge was standing on the side, and I was standing on the side right next to him, little bit behind him, I don't know, and I see one guy, a Turk pulling a knife and ready to stab the MANAHEIT guy, and I grabbed the knife like this and I struggled him down to the ground, and they took the man away, and he was arrested. And I saved this man's life. This was the best thing that happened to me. He didn't know what to do for me. So for awhile I become his bodyguard. Wherever he went, I had to go.

Then he said, I want to do something for you. So I said, you know, you want to do something for me? Look,

they bring these trees in with all the trucks during the day, I have nothing to do. Why don't you let me pick those trees up from the GALLEL. I'll bring them in, and I'll still have time to bring them home. He said good idea, Rubin. They gave me a phony license plate, like it would be another truck, and I would get paid for one truck and then I get paid for another truck, and then weekends I go home. So he'll give me empty containers where they carry the trees, fill up my truck, and he paid for that. So I was making a bundle of money. And I did it almost to the day.

So one of these troops coming home, in 1956 I think it was. I don't remember the month. I was driving home, and -- 1956, right. So I was about 25 years old and I see this Oldsmobile with American -- I mean I forgot what class it had, but it had an American flag. It was a diplomatic car on the side of the road, and an older woman standing on the -- well, two women there, right, and an older woman waving. So I stopped. I see these two women stranded, and this car. One was younger - maybe late twenties, early thirties, and the older woman tells me -- you know, I spoke English, and she says, you know, this is a very important lady in here, and we are stuck on the road. The car won't start, could you help us? So I knew a

little bit about cars. I -- I checked, and I couldn't do anything. It was flooded or whatever, and I said, well, you cannot stay here, you know, without a car. I said, I live very close by, I'll give you something fresh to drink or something. So I took both of them into my truck in the front, and took them to the village where I was, and we give them to drink, to eat, and I forgot, started talking, and ever since I was a little kid, since I was six, I always said I should sing, because I have this beautiful voice. My father would say to sing, and I started to sing, and she was, you know, very impressed with my voice, have I ever studied. I said, well, no, a little bit, but not much. So, along, we came to another -- I think she invited me to some fancy party in Tel Aviv, invited by the Diplomatic Corps, and other people come, and I would be singing, and make a long story short, her name was Olive. She was very rich, and she said, I want you to study, ta da ta da ta da, and she has arranged that a friend in Vienna by the name of Ludikkar, L-U-D-I-K-K-A-R, I think. That's his last name, and used to be a base singer at the Metropolitan opera. He was from Czechoslovakia, and he was an old man - I think in his eighties. He said I can take private lessons with him and she'll sponsor me and paid

for my trip. And I got this invitation from Vienna, and this I got myself. And my father and my brother and my mother were left in Israel, and the business went under, and they had to give up their farm, and the whole family, after I left, ended up in Elat, which is by Al 'Aqabab by the Red Sea. In those those days, there were no air conditioning, and it was an incredible hot heat, where they would take wet, not the towels, the bed sheets with water, and this cooled them. My brother was driving one of those big eucalyptus trucks in the mines for copper, and I was in Vienna.

I arrived in Naples by ship. I went by ship, and then the train from Naples to Vienna. I think I found myself a room -- as I remember it, I paid eighty shillings. God, eighty shillings for the room, which wasn't much of a room. It was in a house owned by a landlady - big, fat Austrian woman in her seventies, and two cats, and I had a room which was probably six feet wide and approximately ten feet long. I remember, because I rented an upright piano, which cost 25 shillings -- I think 25 or 50 shillings a month, and I could not -- I mean, there was not enough room to walk in with the upright piano and my bed. But I had privileges. I could cook, which I did much

cooking, and my life began in Vienna.

I was very uncultured, a guy from the desert. Didn't know a soul, except this Ludikkar. Couldn't read music, but I had tremendous ears. I could pick up languages hearing it once, so people thought I was quite gifted, and I started learning how to play the piano a little bit. I knew I was struggling with it for four hours a day, and --

Q YOU WERE STUDYING MUSIC?

A And she is Jewish. She is Jewish.

Q NOT ALL OUR INTERVIEWERS ARE JEWISH.

A Okay. He's not Jewish, either.

Q I AM. TWO OUT OF THREE IS NOT BAD. ONE, ACTUALLY --

PERSON UNIDENTIFIED: I don't know if I should be honored or insulted.

A It's no honor being Jewish. You know, my father used to say, I am very proud of being Jewish, because if I wouldn't be proud I wouldn't still be Jewish, so I might as well be proud.

Q ROBERT, TELL ME, WERE THE YEARS YOU SPENT IN AUSTRIA STUDYING MUSIC, WERE THEY HAPPY YEARS?

A Not really, and it was very complex, because don't forget, I came from the desert. I remember we used to have dreams to see something green. Something. I was in Vienna and I saw everything was green, and I saw the

roses. I felt guilty that I can't share it with my family. We were very close. So I was ridden by guilt, and I was the first one who left Israel, and they said there would be a future for me. I thought I would make it big, not for myself, but my family. They're counting on me, which when I think back was absolutely asinine, but I couldn't -- but I felt guilty breathing the fresh air after a very, very difficult life in Israel.

Don't forget, when I went to Israel it was primitive. There were 600,000 Jews in Israel when I arrived. Today it's luxury. Today it's not the same country, Number One. Number Two, I was in Austria, and many times, like when I went to the Danube, and the Danube was called the City of Blue. Danube is not really blue. It's more grayish or greenish-grayish, but I saw many times the Danube red, full of blood of Jews being killed, and the language -- the language of murderers. I lived in Vienna for six years, and after I think two years I switched teachers from the school of Ludikkar, when this woman stopped sending him money. Then my aunts took over from Mexico, helped me out. And then about two years after, I studied privately with TINO PATTIERA was my teacher, my professor; was a

great maestro. He had lots of singers of the Met who used to be his students. He was called a German because he was a tenor. He made a short career, but a great big name, and he thought I was very talented. As a matter of fact, to get in to see him was very difficult, and I may be skipping time, but he started teaching me for nothing. He wouldn't take my money; and after being with him for two years, and not having a high school diploma, which I didn't, eight years of education, I was admitted. I auditioned for the Conservatory of Vienna, and I was accepted into the Conservatory because of my voice maestro, and he made a big deal about me, and they recommended me for Austrian citizenship. And I remember the director of the school, the conservatory, had written a special letter to the government that I would be an asset to the Austrian -- to the country's culture, to give me permission to be an Austrian citizen, which I got. I became an Austrian citizen, and what was weird about it, not only when I went to school I learned German, I didn't have a single Austrian friend, not a single one. All of my friends were American. I had some Italian, Japanese, French.

I basically refused to sing even in German. I sang maybe a little bit from the *Magic Flute*, which is the only opera by Mozart which is



written in German. Everything else he has written is in Italian. You seem to know that. Yeah. And I became a very good baritone, and I just -- I felt I was in a strange country. I felt I -- -- the only reason wanted the Austrian citizenship is because with my Israel passport I was a prisoner, I couldn't go anywhere. With the passport, you became a prisoner. You couldn't travel with a passport. With an Austrian passport you could go.

So I stayed in Austria for six years, and my study didn't cost me anything. After the two years, I got some money from the Conservatory. In addition to that, I had a fellowship - not much - and I got some little money from my aunt to supplement this, and this I struggled.

I had a few girlfriends. I had a French girlfriend from Paris who had a little bit of education. She had a masters degree in philosophy. She was a singer, came from a very aristocratic family from France, and found out that I had a talent for poetry and stuff like that. I lived a life of -- probably a lot of *La Boheme*.

I never wanted to come to the United States, though, because I was afraid of this country. I didn't know much. I just knew enough -- I mean I never -- I

always wanted to, but once I came to Vienna I became, quote, "very cultured" over time, and I lived for one thing, basically to make a career, and not to become famous. I loved my opera. I loved my singing. It was my whole life, to an extreme. I could care less if my shoes had holes in them. Nothing mattered. You didn't ask how someone was; how is the voice? People told me you have a great career, and maybe there are a few voices like yours in the world, and I had all those kind of -- I mean, there is only two people who had a fellowship from this conservatory, myself and a girl who, when I left, was singing in a Bavarian opera house. She was a first soprano, ACCA MEETSIA. She was from Bulgaria.

So, my life really was a weird thing, because I graduated, which means, big deal, not a regular graduation, but you became part of the union. That means you're in -- in Austria, everything is style. You become HALLOWSANPRANSIA. It's crazy, and I auditioned for the Graz Opera House, and there were 13 of us who auditioned to be first baritone - the very, very baritone, and about a week or two weeks later I get a phone call and they say that I got the ORCHMA, I got the -- in Graz. In Graz, Graz, G-R-A-Z, which is a fairly famous opera house in Europe.

That was a time when they built a brand-new opera house, in 1960 I think. It was new, fairly new, and I can't tell you the happiness. I mean, I was competing against 13 baritones - one of them was singing in the Viennese Folk Opera, Folks Opera. They had stage experience for years, and me, I'm just out of school. And those days American singers would come from the United States and would sing for nothing just to be on stage in Europe just for the competition. Me, I'm getting paid. They're giving me an apartment, which was like \$350 a month, which was to me a fortune. It was \$350 versus 25 shillings, and it was a lot of money. I mean, I could live very nicely on \$120 a month; 200 I live like a king; 350, hey, you know, I'm a millionaire. So, I said, well, it was all worth it now.

From Graz, if you started in Graz, then you go from Graz to the Folks Opera. If you made it to the Folks Opera, you could probably make it in the SCHSTATZ opera, and if you go to the SCHSTATZ, maybe you would go to the Met. This was a fantastic springboard for you to start your career. Germany had like 80 opera houses, West Germany, and so anybody who wanted to start a career had to sing in German, which actually didn't

( impress me much at all, didn't turn me on at all. Actually, it was a very depressing thought, and I think I was supposed to start the next month rehearsing, and I get a call that the budget has been cut and they are sorry, ta da ta da ta da, and I was out. It was devastating.

( I gave a concert with a pianist - I forgot her name, but she was quite famous. She was an older, elderly lady, and I know that she performed in England for the Royal Family, so she was a big deal. I mean, she was a very big deal, very useful in Vienna, and somebody from the Viennese SCHSTATZ got sick. I was supposed to give a concert in Baden Baden, and so their conservatory recommended that I take the place, and I knew some Hungarian names by ECODIE and ECODIE, de la BARTOKE, and I gave the concert and was very well-received, to get me into the Austrian GROUPFUNK. Austrian GROUPFUNK. GROUPFUNK means the Austrian radio, to sing there. You know, great. Anything. And there the same thing happened, you know. I was promised, and SCHLINK (noise). Budget.

( It was a time when my father and -- yeah, my brother was, as I mentioned before, my brother and my sister-in-law and my father and my mother were in Elat, and

somehow through my sister-in-law's uncle, I think, who lived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, they got a sponsorship to go to the United States, and so my brother went with his wife and I think one child. They had one child. Right, one child, and my parents followed. So my father got -- was very, very ill, was very sick, and passed away, and he was the closest person to me in my whole life. And there was my brother with his wife and a kid, and my mother living with him, and he kept on pressuring me to come to the United States. And I told him, you know, I say, I have nothing to do in that country, because I knew that anybody who wanted to make it in opera came to Europe. You go to the United States when you're a star. You don't start in the United States. Anybody, even today. You start in Europe. This is where the garden is. You get your experience. So he insisted, he said you can make it here. I can't support mother here alone; why should I carry all the burden - but not directly, but planting the seeds, Chinese style. So I said, okay, but they wanted me to go to the consulate and pick up the papers. You can go preference because you are here.

So I got the papers, and I remember, I looked at the papers, those bureaucratic papers. One of the things was, have you ever been a prostitute. I felt like

( putting down "yes, I was always a prostitute". You know, I just found those questions ridiculous. "Are you a homosexual", and being rebellious by nature, I took the entire package and I sent it to the United States to my brother. I said, "Dear George: If you want me to come to this country, you better fill it out, because I'm not going to deal with this shit". So my brother wanted me to come very badly and filled it out, and so I was called into the American consulate, and I put down profession, "opera singer", and was interviewed. And the consul asked me if I filled this out myself. I said, "No. I'm going to tell you in all frankness, I would never fill this out." I said this is ridiculous, and these questions, I said, you think that if somebody's a prostitute he's going to say he's a prostitute? You know, and I was surprised he would let me in, because I thought I'm very artistic. I'm expressing my disgust with the whole bureaucracy. He thought it was very flamboyant, you know. I was very lucky. In spite of me, they let me in. And I remember that they LOST, and finally I I knew I was coming. I had a little car.

What else, the other things I did?

Well, when I was in Vienna, I went one summer to Antwerp in Belgium, and during the summer I had a friend

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there who served in ISYA in the army, and we were quite close, and he somehow -- I forgot how we got in touch. He got in touch with me in Vienna because of some reason, and he went to live in Bershem, and he was semireligious, whatever, orthodox. So he had a cap -- no, he said, come, because he knew I knew how to drive, but he didn't know, but he knew a Rabbi. He said, we're going to buy a cap together. I have the money, you'll drive, and we'll take the women to the METZGA. So we were schlepping the women to the METZGA, and we were also delivering gefilte fish Friday, and the Rabbi was checking out the cab to see if it was Kosher or not, and in the meantime, while I was there I met a pianist. I met a woman and I sang, and she liked my voice, and I auditioned for the Amsterdam RAOUFOLT, for the radio, and I got a contract to sing for a twenty minute concert for Christmas, and I still remember I sang some -- I must have a tape somewhere, Negro spirituals I sang, and I sang Hungarian gypsy songs. What a program - five minutes.

So there was this Dutch girl singing this American Negro spirituals, and *Go Down Moses*, and I sang, and sometimes I feel like a motherless child.

What else? And I did the Hungarian songs, folk songs. I must have done a couple of pieces from BERTOLOSS. And he and I stood fighting over a car. I remember, he wanted to wanted me to stay, and I said no. So I came back, went to school. That was my experience outside of -- of Austria.

And I had a lot of friends, colleagues. And it's interesting, before I was interrupted, all my friends were not Austrian. I mean, they were Italian, and I had one friend who was from South America. I didn't experience any anti-Semitism. Everyone knew I was a Jew, I was from Israel. And what Israel has done for me is that I really became an Israeli, which means that when I left Israel, I never called myself Hungarian. They said, what are you; I said I'm a Jew. Oh, I'm from Israel. And later on, I started calling myself, I got four citizenships -- but it was

four -- yeah, Hungarian, Israeli, Austrian, American -- yeah, four.

Q HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR JEWISH IDENTITY IN THOSE YEARS IN ISRAEL AND AUSTRIA?

A You know, the paradoxical thing in Israel was that it's -- I can adapt very well. I was the first in the family who learned Hebrew. I couldn't



read or write it, but by hearing it I could pick up the language. My girlfriend was sabra - could only speak Hebrew, very fluent. But all my friends were sabras. I did didn't have any friends newcomers - and I -- you know, wanted to, you know, I wanted to be Israeli, live like them. But deep down, I loved this girl very much. It wasn't in my, how can I say it -- I couldn't really identify; a misfit, don't fit in. I can play the role and they think I fit in, but I really don't. I didn't fit in, and it became, later, more and more apparent, because I was very, very miserable, because I couldn't fit in. I wasn't at peace with myself. I found the country too small, too limiting.

But what I liked about the country was when I went there, I was very -- I became very idealistic. I loved the spirit of the action, you know. I liked the spirit of all for one and one for all, and that was great. But once the war was over - and the struggle began as a child - and I felt this community against me, because there were the BAT IKEEM. Do you know what BAT IKEEM means? They are old-timers, and when we came to Israel in the MASH'ABBE, we lived up on the hill away from the village where the newcomers live. There's six or eight, what we call prefab, what we call affordable houses in the desert. It

was pure sand, and we had no electricity. And you looked down from the hill, you know, maybe a kilometer, and there are the chickens at night with the light bulbs on, electricity, so they would lay eggs. And we were just very upset, you know, we're without electricity. We had a refrigerator, we had to sell it because we couldn't use it. We brought it from Germany, you know. We had an icebox. We were suffering. It was thrown up in your face. There in Europe I was a Jew. First I thought I was Hungarian. I was told I'm a Jew. Here, I'm a newcomer, I'm green, I'm not a BAKEEM. There's always something going on, not being part of something, you know. I felt -- I felt discriminated against, I really did. It hurt more in Israel to be discriminated than anywhere else in the world. You know, because I think that these are my people, you know? So.

Q WHEN YOU WERE IN VIENNA, DID YOU GO EVER GO BACK TO BUDAPEST TO SEE YOUR HOME?

A I was there at the border, I was there when the 1956 Hungarian uprising occurred. I was in Vienna -- yeah, I forgot something else. In Vienna, summertime, for a couple of summers I organized a Hungarian gypsy band. I had this old TANTA, an old car, a silly match. It was a MORISNER, which is smaller than a Volkswagon, and I managed with one gypsy. We had a NANBURGER. This is

a big base we put on the top. I don't know how many gypsies there were. One played the cymbal, one the first violin, second violin, and the bass, and the cymbal, in Graz. Five of us in a MORISNER. I don't know how we did it. And the MORISNER was smoking like a chimney, because I think I bought it like for \$50. We would go to the small towns, weekends with the gypsies. We would play in the Graz House, and we would sing, and they would and I would sing, and they would give us money, you know. Tips. And I was very good looking, and I had a very good voice, and I always got the highest tips, you know. That was funny. That was funny. Yeah. Instead of lot of talks with this gypsy, because he talked about the stories from origins of gypsies. They come from India. He liked classical music a lot, but at heart, he was still a gypsy.

Living in Vienna was, now that I think back, it was almost unreal for me because it was such an extreme from Israel, where it was everything manual labor and very hard life, nothing intellectual. They didn't have intellectuals. And in Vienna, I could think. I had a lot of friends who were -- well, there was a writer, a sculptor, a singer, piano, virtuoso. It was alive. I think the best way I can describe it is, you know the opera *La Boheme*? This kind of life it was, especially in Vienna, which is a city in

which we talk among ourselves, you know. If you want to experience life, you go to Paris - you feel the present. I talked to Americans - you know, New York - you feel the future; and in Vienna, you lived in the past. I mean the Viennese are probably 50 years behind. Everything is slow and GIMITISH. GIMITISH, very comfortable. Very comfortable. So.

Q WERE YOU SCARED ABOUT COMING TO THE UNITED STATES? DID YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU MIGHT EXPERIENCE WHEN YOU ARRIVED?

A Was I scared? I didn't have any great hopes. I think I was very depressed. You know, I lost my father. I had two huge disappointments. It was so weird. The best way I can describe it is through the anguish. You know, if I never had it. But I had it, and it was taken away from me twice within a very short period of time. And they say you have to have thick skin, and I know all that. But I never thought it was maybe because I was Jewish. It was so weird that they congratulated me. You know, they say I have it. I never thought about it. It wasn't meant to be. It wasn't meant to be.

And the Austrians liked me a lot. I mean Austrians, my colleagues in the concert. We had a lot of respect, and having a fellowship was a very big deal, and all my teachers, you know, took special interest in me, all my

professors. So as far as in the music, it made me feel special. But it's very complex, because underneath I felt that I'm surrounded by the enemy. I mean, they were Germans, they were Austrians. They spoke German. They were Jew killers. I didn't want to live in Austria. The only reason wanted to become Austrian is to give me the passports, which to me meant freedom. I don't think that I have found peace with anyplace I lived in the world, until I came here. Not to the United States here. San Francisco was the first time that I felt -- I felt that could I could identify. Maybe because it was very cosmopolitan. Maybe there are so many refugees here from all over the world, you know, that I think I felt -- I felt at home here. I'm skipping it, but --

Q WHY DON'T YOU SORT OF TELL ME BRIEFLY, JUST BRING US UP-TO-DATE, FROM WHEN YOU CAME FROM THE UNITED STATES, THROUGH THE PROGRESSION, WHAT YOU DID, HOW YOU GOT STARTED?

A I arrived in the United States in 1961, 19 -- 1956, 1962. I think in May of '62. I arrived in New York with one suitcase. We had a paper, you know, this European type kind of cheap suitcase, which had probably about -- big one. It was a big suitcase, and I had another container. In the suitcase was full of music, notes, and I had \$25 in my pocket. And there, somebody greeted

( me, an old friend of my father's, and my brother, all the papers, and I stayed in New York for a day or so, and then I flew to Milwaukee where my family was. And I arrived at the airport, and my brother was there and his wife and the kid, and my mother, and I saw them, and I was very happy. But I was so -- Milwaukee, I was so depressed. It was so depressing. I felt like I'm not in the United States. If this is America, I want nothing to do with this country, this is a terrible country. I was just -- my brother was dumb enough -- from the airport, he shows me his office. He says you see, this is an elevator. You know, like I've not seen an elevator in my life. No culture, nothing. People talk about the weather and watch the bridges rust, and all the women are fat and eat hamburgers. Hamburgers tasted very good, by the way. But I spoke fluent English. Fluent English, like that.

The strange girl I lived with, she was a head governess, and so she spoke with a British accent, and so actually my English has improved tremendously - probably spoke better English than my brother, and in Vienna I only spoke English. I refused to do -- I speak German fluently. In school I would speak it,

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but in my social life it was always English. So, you know, quite a few years, you know. Except certain colloquialisms: "It was such a pleasure meeting you". You know, most people, they like me. Or, "we'll see you", and I would say "when?". They say, "how are you?". I wanted to say, "well, I don't know. Today, let me see." See, I didn't realize that people didn't give a damn how you are. It's just an expression. Never thought about it, did you? But when you're new, impressions are very big. And then, oh, he's got a hundred dollar suit on.

I found all those things very shocking. And I found people sitting around watching this dumb tube. I saw my whole family like this. You know, I used to go to concerts, I used to go to the opera. I had coffee houses. We had intellectual conversations. We had life. And here's these people in front of the tube. I said, "what happened to social life? You people don't talk to each other", and we started fighting, naturally. They called me a snob. And to me, the shock was so -- I -- I couldn't relate to this kind of life, you know? So, I wasn't very, very happy, I can tell you that. It was pretty bad.

And so for awhile I was -- there was this

house. There's no piano. There's nothing. My brother schlepped me around to audition. I auditioned in a nightclub. I sang *Granada*. I brought the whole house down. God, people went crazy. They said I'm too classical, I'm not commercial enough, and I got a job. I became a leading singer for the Skylight Theater in Milwaukee. I did *Mack the Knife*. I was -- I was the highest paid. I think I got \$125 a week, and sang on television, sang on the radio a few few times. Highly disorganized.

What did I do? I can tell you. I was part-time singing in a synagogue, in Ben Shalom, as a -- not not really as a cantor, just participating in the services. I did some solo singing, and I did some choir singing. I was a factory worker. I was a page boy, I was a dishwasher. I was selling hearing aids. I sold signs. I sold for a famous school out of New York, writer and photography courses. I gave seminars on syndications, syndications, which I learned took two years, I learned in six months; became very good at that. Then I was in commercial real estate -- no, I sold car washes, set up 11 car washes. Then I got in syndications, and then commercial real estate. In a couple of years I was national salesmanship for two companies which I had 13 states and Canada.



Canada. That's what I did in this country.

Q WHEN DID YOU MARRY YOUR WIFE, SYLVIA?

A I met her in 1965.

Q IN MILWAUKEE?

A In Milwaukee, yeah. I was very unhappy in Milwaukee, and I have a family -- became a very strong believer in the mind. I was so unhappy.

I worked for American Motors, and I sang I think for the Skylight Theater. And I was laid off at the time, and I thought about my whole life, and I really didn't want to live, wanted to die. I was very unhappy because when I came to this country I realized I lost everything. I lost my music, which meant so much to me, and with my own family, I couldn't relate. We had grown apart too much. I couldn't talk to my brother. There was a huge gap between us, much bigger than before. I wanted to die, and I started getting some chest pains. I was 32 years old, and I walked around with those chest pains for several weeks. I got a chest pain. I laid down on the floor. It would go away, but one day it was so bad, it was like a ton on my chest. And I called up my brother, I said, you know I'm very sick. I said, take me to the doctor. He says, can you walk. I said, yes, but I don't feel good. He said, I don't have any time. So I got on the bus, and I went to

the see Dr. Saichek. Then somebody recommended that I should go to this guy, and they put me on a -- on a electrocardiogram, and he said that I have a heart attack right now, coronary thrombosis. I almost died. I was between life and death. I spent six weeks in a hospital, and this was the end of my career as a singer, because I can never sing again.

And I met a Jewish guy next to me, was the name of Morris Katz, and he was a very funny guy. He had also had a heart attack. I was very young, 32. And I didn't realize it, the younger guy you are the less you are likely to survive a heart attack. I don't know if you know it. And somebody came in - a very good friend of his - to visit him. His name was Art Cohen, C-O-H-E-N, and he's a Jewish guy. And we started talking, and I said, what do you do, you know? I was interested, what do you do? He said, I'm selling hearing aids. I said, what's that? He says it's a little thing you put in your ear. I have to do something. I said, you know, I can't go -- my singing career's over, and he said, well, when you get out of the hospital why don't you come and interview with my company.

So this was this Beltone. Beltone. You've probably heard the name. I said, okay. So I interviewed. I didn't know anybody else, and they said, insurance, regular things. My brother, he said hearing, it has

something to do with hearing, with sounds. And I told my mother that -- no, no, no, no, that isn't exactly right. That was in 1964, December of '64, that's right. That's when I was hired, and I was hired strictly on commission. I remember they gave me audio equipment to carry around to test people, and they gave me an area which is Wauwatosa, which is the toughest area - nobody could sell to these people. Couldn't make it. So in those days, I think on a hearing aid you made \$150 commission if you sold one; 140, 150, one. Sold two, it was \$300. The average salesman sold six hearing aids a month, \$600 a month. Six hundred dollars a month. Those days, it was good money. Six hundred dollars is more than I make as a singer at the Skylight Theater, but you see, 125, 150.

And there was this one guy, Art Cohen - he was to me God's gift on earth. This guy was number one, always number one, number one. He admits he sold twenty - \$3,000! Unbelievable! Three thousand dollars. You could buy, 1967, a Mercedes Benz in Stuttgart for \$3,000. So it was an enormous amount of money. So I started out okay. They assigned me to another guy, gave me training for about three weeks. And I still had enough money, because I got my unemployment check - I think \$40 a week, or something like that. I had the money saved up, and I couldn't get anywhere in this territory.

Nobody would buy. And I remember, first time I knock on the door - because they give this lead, "write in for free", and they slam the door in my face. I was devastated. It's an incredible rejection. And they give me this spiel that you're going to help people, and most people don't admit they have a hearing problem. So you're a crusader, plus you make money. This is helping people and make money. So make a long story short, I can't get anywhere.

So I sat down one day. I said, you know, no, no, that's not okay. I was struggling. Then they let me go. I sell one here, one there. I was doing about five or six a month, maybe four a month. Yeah, I think I made about six hundred dollars - enough, because my rent was \$80, and I'm doing this for six months. I'm not putting my heart into it. For me to go from an opera singer to selling hearing aids, you know?

So one day they call me into the office, and this was the first or the second largest dealer in the United States, and in a -- they crossed the United States. It was like 4,000 consultants. In those days, 4,000, this was the number one dealer. They were selling like 100 hearing aids a month. Big dealer. They said, Robert, we had hopes for you, et cetera, but you're not, you know, panning out for us, you know, and he said, but we want to

( give you another chance with this Harry. I don't remember his last name. You can work with Harry. He's going to take an override on you, but he's going to teach you. And Harry was probably one of the dumbest people I ever met in my life. He was no genius. He was typical Milwaukeean. So I said, look, you know, don't let me work for Harry. Give me another 60 days or 30 days, I forgot. I asked 30 or 60 days. I said, I'm on straight commissions. It's logical. I'm on rent, you have \$20 per month, I'll pay for it. Don't take my territory away. Just leave me alone, and if I don't pan out in your 60 days, I think I asked, then I just leave on my own. So -- so they said, okay, we'll give you sixty days.

( I remember that I was devastated. Somebody said "you're no good". They really hurt my ego. So I went home my little studio apartment, and I locked myself in this room for three days. I didn't go out. I sat down with myself and I started thinking, who the hell am I? What am I doing in this world? What do I want? What is this world about? What makes me -- I'm thinking, what does hearing aids have to do with me? How do I relate with people? How do I confer with this artistic -- and everything I learned, self discipline, the expression, et cetera, communication, everything. I really tore myself apart for three days.

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I came to the conclusion after that, and I had a little pushover. I remember I bought it for \$625 with \$25 down, and I convinced the bank to give me the money, because I didn't want my brother to give me. I said on my own, I'll make it. I'll pay you back, and First Wisconsin Bank it was, and I went and I came up with an idea. First, I realized that I would never be an American salesman. I don't fit, I'm not the type. I have to be me, and the first thing I did is I -- in Milwaukee, I went to visit the Catholic priest, and I said to myself, forget about this lease, nothing works. I went to the priest, and I asked him, I said, look, when people come to confession - I spoke to him in Hungarian - and you can't hear them, I said you have a problem, right? He said, "yes". You have a problem, you can't scream. So I said, "do you have stuff for people who can't hear you"? He said, yeah. I said, I tell you what. I said, you give me the list of all the people and everybody that I can help with the hearing aid, I will donate \$10 to the church. He said fine. So he gave me like 15 names. I forgot, twelve or fifteen names.

I got smarter. I left my equipment in the car, went to the door, knocked on the door, came out, said Fr. So-and-So sent me. Come on in. So I sit down, and I start schmoozing, and I said, I understand that you have a

( problem with the church, you don't hear, you don't hear God's word. And I'm not saying it's a sin, but you know, if you get help - I'm sure you want to help yourself. So to make a long story short, I sold that month like 15 hearing aids. Everybody bought one. Sometimes two, because God gave them two ears, right? Stereophonic sound.

( So make a long story short, I became so good. I became so good that it was frightening. I became in this company -- Art Cohen was number one. Robert Feher became number one. I became number one, not only in this locale, but across the United States, in four months. In my top month, when I left this firm, I sold 39 hearing aids in one month. I had what they call -- I developed a frontman system.

( Where I had a SCHMETZ who would knock on the door -- I wouldn't knock on the door, and I come in like the expert from Vienna. And my closing ratio was better than one-to-one, because eighty percent of my sales were -- I sold to doctors - there was no limit, and I just talked. I was myself, and I wanted people who said, no, I never heard it. You know, I just -- and they say, well, how do you do it? I never went to school. How do you sell? I said, I'm not selling. I allow people to buy, because nobody wants to be sold, but everybody wants to buy. Everybody

wants to buy, and the word "hearing aid" never entered my -- came out of my mouth, because I sold hearing betterment, understanding, whatever. I found out. Some understood the sizzle. I understood.

You know, when I came to this country I wanted people to help me, wanted people to have compassion with me. I felt the world should love me because I suffered so much. I never grew up. I never was a kid, and I realized that the world doesn't give a fuck. I realize that people are looking what you can do for them. And so I reversed the process and I forgot about myself, and it worked. And it worked that I made so much money after this business -- then I opened my own business. I opened up my own office in Madison, Wisconsin, and one day, I sat down and I told my wife, I can't do it anymore. And everybody said, you know, I was making, God, those days, probably 30,000 a year. Now, I don't know if you realize it, but this was like -- I remember our duplex. We bought it for 27,5, \$30,000. I know that after two years being in business, I closed the business. I sold it and I walked out with \$35,000 cash, after paying taxes. I had that much money. I -- I couldn't do it because I started to understand. I started to feel guilty. See, for awhile I thought that I'm really helping people. Then I said, you are selling whether they needed it or not. You're not a doctor. I



started -- my conscience was getting to me.

And everybody said, "what a great job", da ta da ta da, I said no. So I said, I don't want to do it. This is wrong. This is wrong. This is not honest. And the minute I started feeling guilty, I couldn't do it. I sold it to an accountant.

How did I sell it? I had this accountant who -- I put an ad in the paper, and I hired him. I went out with him, and I had one of those huge lots. You know, you go in with leads. You get people who write in. And I went out with him. I think I sold six hearing aids in one day. The average demonstration took two hours, and I did six. I sold three doubles. So that was exceptional, because I think the dealer's profits -- I picked up the profit as a dealer and also on the salesman. So six, you make like \$1,500, in one day. So the guy got so crazy, so money hungry he quit his job, and I said I'll help you in the business. And I did. I took him, trained him, et cetera. I sat with him. And so I walked from it. I walked from it. And by that time, I had a big name in the industry. I mean, I was a desired commodity. I could pick up any franchise, where people would pay up money. I called up Dahlburg hearing aids. Dahlburg is part of Motorola, which you today. You see Miracle Ear being advertised on

television, I think about one of those things, whatever, and I was handing Dahlburg when I had my own dealership. And I sold it, and they -- they said to me that I should go to San Francisco. They have a company store, and I can have it for nothing. As long as I carry their name, they give it to me. Because he was bringing the production, advertising the production. And so I flew to San Francisco with my wife. I loved the city. I fell in love with the city. I went back, and I don't know what happened to me - but God took my brains away.

Why? I said I miss my family, and we talked, and I said I want my family. And I went back to stupid Milwaukee. I want to be close to my family, and I got stuck there. I got stuck there. Got into this car wash business, so. Enough.

Q WE HAVE ONLY 15 MINUTES ON ONE OF TWO.

A You want to expedite.

Q RIGHT. I WANT TO MOVE AHEAD A LITTLE BIT FASTER THAN I DO NORMALLY. ONE QUESTION YOU DIDN'T ANSWER. WHEN YOU GO TO VIENNA, DID YOU EVER WANT TO -- OR GO BACK TO BUDAPEST, OR WAS IT ALREADY TOO LATE?

A I never had a desire to enter Hungary. Never.

Q HAVE YOU BEEN BACK SINCE?

A Once. Only once, and that was a year ago. And the

only reason I went back, because I wanted to show it to my son, where his roots are coming from. But I didn't have any desire.

Q WHY?

A Because it was an enemy country for me. It was something that -- they killed maybe sixty, seventy, people, you know, people of my own family, and I just -- I had a very worse -- much worse feeling even today seeing Hungarians than Germans, because they directly affected my life. And they have -- that country has betrayed me, because -- because I was, as a kid, as I told you, as a kid, I was a Hungarian first and a Jew second, and they told me, you're not a Hungarian, you're just a dirty Jew. That's all you are.

Q Did you feel as negative when you actually went back to Hungary?

A You know, I left Hungary I was 14, 15 years old, and I have not spoken Hungarian except to my mother. I have very Hungarian friends. I refuse to speak the language.

I still felt persecuted. When my wife wanted to talk to me -- I couldn't tell people I was Jewish. I felt threatened. Like when we were looking for this Jewish temple, we say in the Hungarian, SHEEDO temple. I didn't want to ask anybody where is the Jewish

temple, didn't want to them to know that I was Jewish. I felt like I'm being surrounded by enemies. It was a very, very strange psychologically, very feeling wise, very strange experience when I went back to Budapest after so many years - 40, 42, 43 years, 43 years. After 43 years, I came back. And I could afford to stay in the best hotel. I drove the fanciest car. Only the prime minister of Hungary had a car like this - a 12 cylinder BMW. And, see, I'm a businessman - became a very good businessman, actually. I knew there were opportunities there. I saw it, you know, so, going the direction I suppose that it is going, and you know, it's very difficult to describe the feeling. But the feeling is very similar maybe when I played the Hungarian Hitler youth, not to show your identity. You're inside of your car, you feel sheltered. They look at you. You can't be yourself. You can't show your true identity. I mean, that's the way you feel inside. You feel trapped.

Q INTERESTING, YOU SAID WHEN YOU SAW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES THERE --

A Oh, yeah, wouldn't touch it. I couldn't. I couldn't do business with those people.

Q SO YOUR FATHER SAID IN GERMAN?

A Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I couldn't do it. I don't care how much money is there.

Q TODAY YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR FATHER WAS TELLING YOU?

A Probably, yeah. Yeah.

Q WHEN DID YOU BEGIN TALKING TO YOUR SON ABOUT --

A The Holocaust? On and off since he was a little kid. I brought him up very -- it's a very funny way I brought up my son, because I brought him up first as a Jew. And I told him that he can choose any or religion he wishes, because I think that, you know, this is a free country, and I wanted him to have an easier life than I had. But I must have done something, because I even let him go to Sunday School, to expose him. Weird, hunh? I did.

Q TO SUNDAY SCHOOL, YOU MEAN AT A CHURCH?

A Oh, yeah. I did. And my son is very, very, very Jewish. But it's not the kind of Jewishness that has been forced upon him. It comes from the heart, and I didn't -- I just brought him up to be God fearing, and to believe in God, and not in a Jewish God. In a God. I told him that God has no religion - and he doesn't. She shakes her head. Most Rabbis shake it, too, when I say it, too. Hard to argue with.

Q TELL ME HOW YOU STILL BELIEVE IN GOD AFTER ALL YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH.

A Oh, absolutely.

Q TELL ME THE STORY OF HOW YOU LEARNED ABOUT GOD.

A I told you the story.

Q NOT ON THE TAPE.

A It's not on the tape? Well, you want to tell the story about the broom?

Q MM-HMM (AFFIRMATIVELY).

A Well, first of all, we were reform Jews in Hungary, but we used to go to the temple every Saturday - sometimes we miss it, but we're not what you call, you know, very religious, and the high holidays. That's about it. I mean, more than I do here. Here we go high holidays. So I think I was asking about God to my father when I was possibly four or five years old. Something like that. Probably four. I wasn't even five, because I wasn't going to kindergarten yet, and I remember, I said, you know, talk about the power of God, or, you know, and my father said, you know, my son, I'm going to tell you something. You see this broom? Yeah. So he took the broom and he took it in his hand and he took the broom like a gun, and he said, you see my son, if God wants this broom will turn into a gun it will fire five bullets, you know, as it shoots. If God wants, even the broomstick will explode.

It's (Hungarian Language). If God wants, even the broomstick will explode. And somehow it stuck in my mind, even today, when I tell this story. And I was

standing there and literally saw this broomstick exploding. It was my father, my adored, saying this. So it was -- whatever God wants, it will happen. And he used to tell me always, nothing is impossible. And so I was brought up with tremendous faith in the supernatural, and I really believed it. If God wants it, it will happen. And you know what? I still believe it.

Q BUT EVEN AFTER ALL YOU SAW, ALL THE CRUELTY, ALL THE BODIES YOU SAW, IN BUDAPEST DURING THE WAR, YOU BELIEVE?

A I had little doubts -- I tell you when I had little doubts about God. When I got into this so called intellectual company in Vienna - and everybody was much more educated than I was - and they started to talk to me about Freud, and you know, psychology. And my girlfriend was a so-called French intellectual. She was a writer, extremely critical person, an atheist. Catholic-then-turned-communist. Communist. I mean she was an intellectual French communist with a millionaire father and mother. You know, this kind of rebel. Very French, very French.

And -- but, you know, the doubt in my mind, because intellectually, I couldn't justify the existence of God, and you go through the process of saying, well, you know, how -- if there is a God, how could he let six million Jews die like this? How could he let all these

cruelties go on? And so I went through a period in my life where I have where I lost my God, and this happened in Vienna. It happened in Vienna.

It's a very good point, because I'm trying to figure out when I started believing in God again. And I just know that when I started -- I think I started believing -- it was about sixteen years ago. But I -- I realized in my case, and I'm not trying to preach to anybody, that God is not an intellectual exercise. And God is not an intellectual exercise. And without putting myself down as a human being, I -- I think that -- that it's quite obvious to me that God is more of an experience and a feeling and a connection on a subconscious level, where it cannot be subject -- the minute you start interpreting it and analyzing it, you destroy it, because your intellect is limited. As my father was fond of saying, he said, son, intellect has limits, but stupidities are limited. There's a lot of truth to that.

And so -- because ever since then, I don't accept -- one of the desires of my life, for instance - I think I did put it on the tape. You know, when I prayed and those things happened to me as a child during the holocaust, they came true. And since then, my son grew up. All kinds of miracles



happened to me directly, and I made medical history. I'm not supposed to be here. And so it's just -- some wonderful things have happened.

And, yeah, I think one of the greatest moments of my life is if I could really pray, just very generally pray, which is for me very difficult to pray, and it's not -- you know, somebody asked me, do you believe in God, and I said -- the answer came to me. No, it's not a question of believing in God. I know there is a God. And for a long time I was fighting death. I think I'm even coming to the point where I'm sort of making peace with it, and when my time comes, I go. Once the process of life -- death and life, they go together, and one can't exist along without the other. It is -- I think it's a beautiful thing, and I know I am not alone. There are a lot of people who think the same thing -- experience different things, similar things, but once you experience something like that.

I once, when I had this incurable disease called, FOLISEPTEMIA. I diagnosed it. Nobody ever got cured, and my wife started looking for a -- for a cure, and she looked all over, and she found a book of famous healers, and she found his name by the name of an orthodox CAVILISTIC rabbi, Rabbi Frelander in New York. And she wrote to him, and that was, God, about 16 years ago,

something like that. 1974 -- yeah, 16 years ago. I had this disease, and this man was written up as a wonder Rabbi, and very famous, a healer, and a CAVILIST, who would go -- start praying, I think, at midnight. He was a Hasidic Jew, and he called me up and he spoke to me in Hungarian,, and when I was diagnosed with this disease - and he was the first man who said to me I'm not going to die. I told him -- and he gave me a new name in Hebrew. He gave me a new name, Heim, Heim, which means "Life". So I'm Josef, and he told me I'm not going to die.

And I worked those days very hard. I was very -- I remember I had to give every three weeks one pint of blood, and I was giving a pint of blood, and I was making a lot of money, and I bought this STAMPELA Torah. I remember I sent him three or four thousand dollars for the Torah, and they made it, and have it in the Temple. And he used to call me once a month. And my faith was coming and going and coming and going. This is a very, very long story, and I think it should come later, so -- it's a very long story.

Q OKAY. ALL RIGHT. ALL RIGHT, DO YOU WANT A -- DO YOU HAVE ANY QUICK QUESTIONS THAT YOU WANT TO ASK BEFORE WE -- JUST A QUICK QUESTION?

A The questions are always quick, only the answers are long.

Fehér

Q ALL RIGHT. OKAY, WELL, LET'S CALL IT A NIGHT.

(End of Tape.)