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Interview with George Field
Holocaust Oral History Project
Date: June 12, 1990 Place: San Francisco
Interviewers: Emily Silverman and Peggy Coster
Transcriber: Lee A. Bursten

1 [Begin Tape 1]

2 MS. SILVERMAN: Today is June 13th, 1990.
3 We are here at the Holocaust Oral History Project in
4 northern California. We're interviewing George Field.

5 MR. FIELD: May I say something? Just for
6 the record, today is the 12th. Isn't it the 12th
7 today?

8 MS. SILVERMAN: Okay. You're right. Thank
9 you for correcting me. Can we take that again? And
10 the interviewer is Emily Silverman, and the second
11 interviewer is Peggy Coster.

12 BY MS. SILVERMAN:

13 Q Why don't you tell me about your childhood
14 and where you were born, and the members of your
15 family.

16 A Okay. I was born in Budapest, Hungary,
17 June 21st, 1922. I was an only child. I had no
18 brothers or sisters. I lived in Budapest until I was
19 about 11 years old. Then my parents and myself, we
20 moved to the suburbs of Budapest, and we stayed there
21 until I was drafted to the Hungarian forced labor on
22 October 3rd, 1943, and I was 21 years old.

1 My childhood was not very eventful.
2 Unfortunately, my mother passed away when I was 16
3 years old. And I think this is of some interest to
4 some people; my father was sergeant in the First World
5 War, and when I was about 17 years old, after my
6 mother's death, my father was drafted again into the
7 Army because there was a conflict between the
8 Hungarians and the Czechs over territory which the
9 Hungarians used to own, and after the First World War
10 the Czechs took this territory over, and they drafted
11 my father.

12 So I was all by myself. We had a home and
13 a small business, it was a textile business, and when
14 my father left I was in charge of that business. But
15 we were very poor because my mother had cancer, and
16 whatever money we had my father had to spend on
17 account of my mother's sickness.

18 My father told me, just watch the business.
19 I was not very good, and -- I was not very good myself
20 at the business. I was young, and I just managed.
21 But the interesting story is that my father was a
22 sergeant in rank, but in fact he was almost like a

1 commandant of not just a company, but of the whole
2 brigade at the time, because he had excellent
3 handwriting, not unlike myself, and he was very
4 well-respected.

5 And he took care of all the office work of
6 the whole -- perhaps it was a regiment. I know there
7 were a lot of people in that group. Once I visited
8 him, and I noticed that even the captains and all the
9 officers, they were very polite to my father because
10 they were dependent on him. When they want some kind
11 of a favor, they ask my father to tell the general, if
12 they want to go on a furlough or something like that.

13 The interesting story is, this campaign did
14 not last too long, perhaps a few months, maybe six or
15 eight months, this conflict; but in the meantime the
16 Hungarian government leaned quite a bit towards the
17 Nazi ideology, and they made a law that all Jews,
18 regardless of their position or rank whatsoever, they
19 have to -- in the military, they have to wear yellow
20 armbands at the time.

21 And this happened at the same time my
22 father was in the Army and was a sergeant and so on.

1 And when this law became effective, from one day to
2 the next, they degraded my father, took away his stars
3 and everything, and they put on a yellow armband,
4 which psychologically I think was a terrible event.
5 And while not everybody was a Nazi, he was a very
6 well-respected man, some of the officers still went to
7 him, he was still in the same position, except he
8 didn't have a title as a sergeant, but like a forced
9 laborer.

10 So anyway, this kind of blew over. He was
11 old at the time. He came back, and in the meantime I
12 don't remember what happened to the business. I think
13 probably I was broke. I guess I didn't have much.
14 And I was working in Hungary in a hosiery mill until I
15 was drafted, as I said before, in 1943, and I must say
16 that I was young and I was together with my age group,
17 and some of my friends, and we -- for about six weeks,
18 I believe, they trained us like soldiers, with the
19 exception -- they did not give us any kind of weapons.
20 The weapons were maybe a pick and shovel or something
21 like that. Otherwise we get the same training.

22 So it was kind of nasty, like training the

1 Marines. Can you imagine a soldier -- no fun, but
2 nevertheless because we were way above in intelligence
3 and education than our guards, we made a lot of fun at
4 them, regardless of the rank. We were young and
5 strong, and we didn't care too much about it. And
6 sometimes we had a very good time, you know? I cannot
7 complain.

8 As far as the work is concerned, at least
9 for a year we didn't do much work. We tried to
10 sabotage as much as possible. We were supposed to
11 build roads, and some kind of air strip. It never did
12 get finished. And we were very lucky. We had a very
13 good commander, who was a captain, and very
14 sympathetic, and besides being sympathetic, he
15 benefited a great deal, because some of our parents
16 were well-to-do people with quite a bit of money, and
17 we paid out the commandant's expenses and vacations
18 and whatever he wanted to get.

19 So he had a very good life. But he was a
20 fairly decent man, nevertheless. He tried to protect
21 us. I'm going to jump a little bit here, to a
22 different period, which I still remember. I go to

1 Hungary almost every year, at least the last maybe ten
2 years. I didn't go to Hungary for a very, very long
3 time. After ten or 12 years I started to go. And I
4 discovered one of my best friends is still alive in
5 the city of Budapest. I'm not surprised, because I
6 was so remote from Hungary and the events over there
7 that I did not care, and I had the impression that --
8 or belief that perhaps most Jews who -- in my age
9 group, probably they immigrated, probably somewhere to
10 Israel or the United States or Australia or whatever.

11 But I made this discovery when I went back
12 to Hungary, and he and I made an attempt to organize
13 them over there as a group, because we were one of the
14 luckiest companies as far as this battallion is
15 concerned. We survived, perhaps 80 or 90 percent of
16 us. The rest, very few survived, because they took
17 them to Russia and they made them do all kinds of
18 things, and very few ever came back. But we were
19 young and strong and energetic, so we did survive.

20 So I organized this group, and they were
21 interested in having meetings in Hungary, and I intend
22 to go there also in maybe a month or so.

1 Q You said he protected you, the commandant.
2 How did he do that?

3 A Well, we had a few nasty guards, and not
4 all of them, but some of them were antisemitic, or
5 perhaps jealous, even, or whatever, because some of
6 them, they didn't even know how to read or write.
7 They were very primitive, peasant stocks who had no
8 education, and most of us had some education, some
9 even very good education. Some went to universities
10 and things like that.

11 So they understood. So this commandant,
12 whenever some injustice has been done to us, he cooled
13 it off. He told them, just keep it cool, don't do
14 that again. As a matter of fact he put some of the
15 guards, our guards, into jail, even, or punished them
16 in some way. And also, next to us happened to be --
17 it's a very hard name, Hungarian name,
18 Esztergom-Tabor, it's about maybe 40 minutes away from
19 Budapest.

20 And next to this camp, adjacent to it, was
21 a German military base. And I remember it had a high
22 ranking German officer who didn't like the Jews that

1 much, and he thought we had it too good or too easy,
2 and he tried to inflict all kinds of punishment or
3 whatever. And this particular commandant, he tried to
4 make it easier.

5 Now, as far as my story is concerned, I
6 believe October 19th, I believe, the Germans come into
7 Hungary and tried -- or in practice they took away the
8 regime and it became a Hungarian Nazi government.
9 They called it in Hungarian "Nyilas," that's a
10 Hungarian name. In English you would say Arrow Cross,
11 in English.

12 Q What year was this?

13 A This was October 1944.

14 Q So this is after you were drafted into the
15 Army?

16 A Yes.

17 Q Can you talk more about where was the camp,
18 what was the name of the camp, what was your
19 day-to-day life, and how did you sabotage the work
20 there?

21 A The camp, as I said, the name was
22 Esztergom-Tabor. It was uneventful. We did sabotage

1 the work every way we could, by not working so fast.
2 Sometimes we had to bribe our guards and didn't do the
3 work we were supposed to do, and if we made some
4 construction, made it a bad way so it would collapse,
5 and things like that. It's not such a great deal,
6 really. We had it fairly good, I must say, in spite
7 of everything.

8 We knew something, that they picked up the
9 Jews in Hungary, and they repatriated them. That's
10 what we knew about it. We didn't know where they took
11 them to, Auschwitz or other camps. We had no idea
12 about that.

13 But of course we knew that things were
14 getting worse all the time.

15 Q How did you get the information that the
16 Jews had been rounded up in Hungary?

17 A Personally I got a post card from my father
18 saying that they took us to a place, another city, we
19 had to leave. But it just was very brief. And he
20 didn't know where they took him, and we didn't know.
21 But we thought they were going to work, those who are
22 able to; and those who cannot work, no one knows what

1 the fate would be.

2 Q Was that the last time you heard from your
3 father?

4 A Well, that was 1944, sometime in March, I
5 guess. And they took him to Auschwitz, and I made a
6 lot of research about it in Hungary, in Israel. I
7 want to Yad Vashem, I researched the matter
8 personally, and I still have some correspondence to
9 that effect.

10 But he certainly was in Auschwitz, and he
11 died there, there is no question about that, together
12 with all my relatives. I had relatives, aunts,
13 uncles. Everybody died, with the exception of my
14 father's younger brother, who right now lives still in
15 Israel. He is 91 years old. Right now he's still in
16 Israel. But I lost just about everybody, my family.

17 What might be interesting is, when the time
18 gets worse, in 1944, this was about in August in 1944,
19 I was still in a forced labor camp. About 20 of us
20 escaped and went to Budapest.

21 Q How did you escape?

22 A Well, there was a project. Budapest was

1 bombed by the English and the American bombers at the
2 time, and there was a lot of damage, and they took us
3 to Budapest to clean up the rubble and things like
4 that. And I wasn't in that group myself, but when I
5 found out about it, I remember that some of my friends
6 were in a truck. I asked them where they were going.

7 They didn't know too much, but they said,
8 well, we think we're going to Budapest. So I left
9 everything there, all my clothing, everything.
10 They're going to Budapest, and the truck is moving. I
11 had to run after the truck, fast. I was a good
12 runner, very good runner. And I caught up with the
13 truck, and they pulled me. So I left everything,
14 whatever I had, and I went with this group. There
15 were 20, 20 of us.

16 We went to Budapest, cleared some rubble.
17 In the meantime, we got some kind of a paper, Swiss
18 and Swede consulate issued a paper. We called it, at
19 least at that time, sutz pass. This is a kind of
20 protection paper. It basically says that whoever
21 possesses such a paper is under the protectorate of
22 the Swiss or the Swedish government.

1 Q Was this done by Raoul Wallenberg?

2 A Yes.

3 Q You were one of the lucky ones to get that.

4 A Well, it's kind of an interesting story.

5 Again, fortunately, we got this paper, but we never
6 had to use it. Again, I'm maybe going to sidestep a
7 little bit, but you mentioned Raoul Wallenberg. You
8 may have heard about a Congressman by the name of
9 Thomas Lantos.

10 Q He's on our board of directors.

11 A Tom? Well, he's also from Hungary.

12 Somehow my son went to State College, and Tom was his
13 teacher, professor at the time. But anyway, I got a
14 letter from his wife, Anette, about Wallenberg. We
15 went to lunch in San Francisco, to the Palace Hotel,
16 with the Swedish ambassador, Raoul Wallenberg's
17 brother, and I can't recall the name, a nice group of
18 people, tried to find out what happened to our
19 fathers, and I was very much involved in that. I was
20 on the committee that organized it, and so on.

21 But later on, when Tom was elected and
22 became a Congressman, he went to Washington, I was the

1 secretary treasurer. I belonged to B'nai B'rith and I
2 sold them a building, I almost gave it to them,
3 because it's my business, I'm a real estate broker.
4 So I was very much involved in this thing. Maybe my
5 memory is not so good, so I say things as they come to
6 my mind.

7 Referring to my friends in Hungary, I also
8 urged them to publish a book about our story, and they
9 did publish a book. It's not a big book, a small
10 book. It just became published a year or two ago.
11 It's sad, in a way it's kind of interesting too,
12 because we have done some crazy things. We made fun
13 of all the Hungarians and Germans in any way we could.

14 Now, going back to my story, we were in
15 Budapest in 1944, cleaning rubble. Then things get
16 bad to worse. We went into the countryside and met
17 with some other people, ten men and two girls, two
18 sisters, both of them still alive in Hungary. I see
19 them all the time, they're nice girls. I saved the
20 life of one of the girls.

21 Q Can you tell us how you saved her life?

22 A Well, she was -- I don't know if she liked

1 and had a good time. And she was a very attractive
2 girl, but -- and she slept next to me all the time,
3 but we had nothing to do with each other as far as sex
4 or anything was concerned.

5 I didn't have it in my mind, she probably
6 didn't either. But we kind of each liked other. But
7 then we departed.

8 Q When you say you kept escaping from place
9 to place, how did you do that?

10 A Some things, I don't even remember. We
11 went to this group, first there were 20 of us from the
12 original company, we were drafted in 1943, with false
13 papers. For instance, some of us borrowed Hungarian
14 military uniform and went ahead of us, like he was our
15 guard or something like that, or sometimes we had a
16 friend who was really in the Army, and we told him or
17 paid him something, told him, you come with us, you ar
18 our guard, and we made false papers, and he took us to
19 XYZ place, whatever, to do something.

20 So if we were stopped either by a Hungarian
21 Nazi or a German military police or whatever, he had a
22 paper that he is supposed to take these Jews to do

1 such and such work.

2 Q When you say "false papers," you meant
3 false orders?

4 A False orders, right, and identification.

5 Q And all this time you were passing off as
6 non-Jews?

7 A No, no. We were Jews.

8 Q You were Jews?

9 A We were Jews. We had the yellow armbands.
10 We had yellow armbands, and there is a soldier with us
11 or two, maybe one in front, one in the back, like
12 taking us to a place to work, something like that.

13 Q So people wouldn't perceive it as escaping.
14 It just looked like you were moving from one place to
15 the next.

16 A Right. Absolutely right. You know, those
17 days, if you tried to escape, there were no courts.
18 The justice was done right on the spot. Right on the
19 spot, they probably shot you. We were in a few
20 situations, very close calls and things like that.
21 And I don't even remember all of it. When I go to
22 Hungary, some of my friends, they revive my memory,

1 me or I liked her, one of those things. I gave her
2 men's clothes, because otherwise she would be
3 discovered. She was sleeping next to me all the time.
4 And I remember this was -- we were supposed to work
5 for, at that time, for a German organization, they
6 called it the Todt service, Todt, that's a German
7 labor organization, military labor organization. And
8 they recruited people whenever they could.

9 And this was constantly, we were escaping
10 from one group to the other group, one group to the
11 other group. We were constantly in a come and go
12 situation. Referring to this girl, I give her men's
13 clothing, whatever. We were in a big barn, I
14 remember. Huge. We lived on the top of the barn, we
15 slept there. And I remember she had to go to the
16 bathroom or something, and downstairs, there were
17 guards all around us. And she was frightened.

18 She said, if one of those guards finds out
19 I'm not a boy but a girl, I'm going to be in trouble,
20 you guys are going to be in trouble. So I had to go
21 with her all the time to distract the guards. It was
22 kind of a funny, interesting situation. We laughed

1 tell me, you remember this, do you remember that. I
2 tell them I do remember. But in my lifetime, you
3 know, after I've done so many things and everything,
4 the memory has faded.

5 Q You mentioned earlier that you saw a really
6 dear friend you hadn't seen since the war when you
7 went back to Hungary?

8 A Right.

9 Q Was he part of this group of 20?

10 A Right.

11 Q What was his name and what type of special
12 relationship did you have with him?

13 A We were friends, and his name was Andy
14 Indig, I-N-D-I-G, that was his name, whom I intend to
15 visit again. As I said, now, this might be
16 interesting. To continue my story, after these two
17 girls and these events took place, we knew that the
18 Russians were closing, they were closing in, getting
19 closer and closer. It was a totally chaotic
20 situation. Nobody knew what's going to happen or what
21 can happen. And everybody, Jews, non-Jews, Nazis,
22 everybody tried to save his or her own life. That was

1 the situation. There was no law and order. Total
2 chaos.

3 And we got into a village in Hungary. I'm
4 trying to remember. 20 of us, and maybe ten more.
5 And the two girls.

6 Q What were their names?

7 A Who, the girls? Well, it doesn't make much
8 sense in English. One was Lenke, the other is
9 Roseanne, you might say in English. Two sisters.

10 But anyway, we went into this village. We
11 tried to hide somewhere. There were a lot of military
12 activities in the village. Hungarians, Germans,
13 soldiers in battle gear, back and forth. How can we
14 hide here, so many people? So we find what Russians
15 would call a kulak. A kulak is -- the Russians call
16 it a rich farmer or something like that. That's a
17 kulak. He was a rich Hungarian farmer, who was a
18 Nazi. We didn't know this at the time.

19 He had one of the biggest buildings in this
20 village, and that happened to be the headquarters of
21 the Gestapo. Probably you have heard of the Gestapo.
22 He had his building for the Gestapo. We find this

1 guy, and he knows right away we were Jewish, and
2 things like that, but he wanted to save his skin too,
3 because of the guns and everything.

4 So I didn't do this negotiation, someone
5 else did, told the guy, we're going to give you one
6 kilo of gold if you can hide us. And he was thinking
7 about it. First of all, for the gold, number one.
8 Number two, then he got good credentials, that he
9 saved the Jews and so on. So he said, I'll tell you
10 what, I've got a very good idea, the best place you
11 can hide. I'll put you down in my building where the
12 Gestapo is above you. You're going to be in the
13 basement.

14 Not a good place, they're sure going to
15 take good care of us over there. And we don't have to
16 worry about it, they're never going to find us there.
17 I said, what about food? He said, don't worry, I'm
18 going to smuggle you some food. It won't be long,
19 three or four days. That's how close the Russians
20 were at the time.

21 This sounds like a very good idea. I don't
22 know exactly what happened, either he bribed the guard

1 or distracted him, whatever, but when we got to his
2 building there was no guard, and we just went down to
3 the basement. The basement, I remember, has a kind of
4 a trap door. I don't know if you can visualize a trap
5 door, two doors. I haven't seen this in this country,
6 that kind of basement.

7 Anyway, a very small basement. I think
8 maybe not much bigger than the size of this room.
9 We've got about 30 of us here. So we were like
10 sardines. And he did give us food. He brought some
11 food to us, so we didn't starve. And we had an area
12 somewhere to use as a bathroom. It was not very
13 pleasant, but we had to live with it.

14 But anyway, the Russians didn't come as
15 fast. It took the Russians about maybe a couple of
16 weeks. So we had to sweat it out there. Then they
17 come, liberated us. We told them we are Jews. The
18 guy, the front soldier had no idea what was going on.
19 He didn't know who we were. He said, just go back.
20 We wanted some papers, we had no papers. We kept
21 saying "document," "document," in Russian. He said,
22 no, I can't give you, go back.

1 So behind the front lines they were chasing
2 the Germans towards Berlin. And we kept going. In
3 the meantime -- as a group. We find out that the
4 Russians, they attached to us some German prisoners of
5 war, some Hungarian prisoners of war, all kinds. So
6 anyway, by the time -- not much food. It was terrible
7 conditions. In the cold, wintertime.

8 By the time we come to our senses, we were
9 surrounded with Russians soldiers, guards, and we were
10 a huge group of several hundred people, all kinds of
11 prisoners of war, civilians, and us, and we went to a
12 Russian prisoner of war camp in Hungary. We
13 protested, but it didn't do us any good.

14 Q They didn't differentiate the Germans --

15 A They didn't know any better.

16 Q -- from the Jews, or anything?

17 A They didn't care much. They didn't care
18 much.

19 Q What happened in the Russian prisoner of
20 war camp?

21 A First it was rough, then it became a little
22 better, because some came to recognize that we were

1 not the Russians' enemy. We told them we would try to
2 help them. Some of us were even partisans -- you know
3 what a partisan is?

4 Q Yes.

5 A -- among us. And some were speaking
6 Russian. So we came into a better position in the
7 camp. And everybody had some kind of a -- we were
8 like the administration of the camp, later on, not in
9 the beginning. For instance, I was a doctor. All I
10 know is I had a friend who went to medical school, and
11 he was the chief surgeon, and he said, well, okay,
12 you're going to be a doctor. He gave me a white band
13 with a red cross. And my position as a doctor was to
14 feed some prisoners. That's all I remember.

15 So anyway, I was over there for about maybe
16 eight, nine months. Then they let us go.

17 Q And what happened after they let you go?
18 Did you track down your family?

19 A I looked. Of course I couldn't find
20 anybody.

21 Q Did you try coming back to the apartment or
22 home that you lived in before?

1 A There was no home, no apartment. And to
2 this day I don't remember how did I get from this
3 prisoner of war camp to Budapest. I have no idea how
4 I got there, whether I walked or train or bicycle or
5 whatever. I have no idea. I cannot remember.

6 Q Before you became an administrator in the
7 Russian labor camp, you said you got the title
8 "doctor." Could you go on about what the differences
9 were between the German labor camp and the Russian
10 labor camp, how you were treated?

11 A Well, a camp is a camp. In a Nazi labor
12 camp, you feared for your life at all times. That was
13 the primary consideration. If you did something, you
14 didn't have much chance to survive. In the Russian
15 camp, perhaps, they might work you to death, maybe,
16 something like that. You didn't have to fear for your
17 life physically, that they're going to kill you becaus
18 you're a Jew, so to speak.

19 Q What was the comparison with the food they
20 were giving?

21 A Who, the Russians?

22 Q Between the Russians and the Germans.

1 A The Russians were very poor. They didn't
2 give us much either. But a little bit more than the
3 Germans. A little bit more. The Russians themselves
4 didn't have much food, the soldiers. So we didn't get
5 much food, put it that way. But in my mind we were
6 better fed under the Russian camp than under the Nazi
7 camp.

8 Q Would you say then in the Russian camp the
9 Jews weren't as persecuted the way they were in the
10 German camp, there wasn't the same stigma?

11 A No. In the Russian camp they didn't
12 differentiate between a Jew and non-Jews. It's your
13 ability, that's what counted, what you can do. It
14 made no difference. At least at that time, no
15 religion. It didn't come into play.

16 Q And in your German labor camp, were there
17 many different groups there besides Jews?

18 A Well, where I was, they were all Jewish
19 companies. But I know or I heard later that there
20 were non-Jews too, also, for instance Rumanians, I
21 believe, perhaps some Poles or Czechs. There were
22 some other minorities, they took them into forced

1 labor.

2 But I cannot recall that we ever get mixed
3 personally. Under the Hungarians, as I said, most of
4 these forced laborers they sent to Russia, in 1941,
5 '42, or '43. They died. They died terrible deaths.
6 So we were really lucky, very lucky.

7 Q To what do you attribute 80 or 90 percent
8 of your group's surviving? You made the statement
9 earlier.

10 A Well, primarily it's luck. Primarily it's
11 luck. That's number one. Number two is youth,
12 strength. Perhaps some ability, we felt that we are
13 smarter than our guards, we outwitted them. But I
14 would say at least 50 percent, at least, is just luck,
15 because I know many young people who were just as
16 strong or stronger than we were, and they were dead.

17 They were at the wrong time in the wrong
18 place, that's all. I know the time that I was in
19 Hungary, they took thousands of people at the edge --
20 in Budapest, to the edge of the Danube River, and they
21 shot them with machine guns. Children, babies. Some
22 of my relatives died there too, I know that. They

1 just lined them up at the bank of the river and they
2 machine gunned them. And they all fell in. The
3 Danube River was red for days with blood.

4 Q What year was this?

5 A This was 1944. This was after the Germans
6 come in, I believe October 19, '44, when the Hungarian
7 government kind of collapsed, and the Germans
8 suspected the Hungarian regent by the name of Nicholas
9 Horthy to want to get out, want to pull out of the
10 war, and wanting to make some kind of deal with the
11 English or the Americans. So that's when this Arrow
12 Cross group, government, they took over.

13 Q So after you left the Russian labor camp,
14 did the 20 of you stay together?

15 A After the Russian -- well, not really.
16 Everybody went his own way and tried to pick up some
17 normalcy in life. Some of us -- a lot of us became
18 policemen and went to higher education, and I have
19 some friends who have very high positions in the
20 government or retired, some diplomats and ambassadors
21 and doctors and lawyers and newspaper editors,
22 whatever, or artists, a lot of them. We went our own

1 way.

2 Q What did you personally do? How did you
3 pick up your pieces?

4 A Well, I did get married in Budapest,
5 Hungary, in 1946.

6 Q Tell us how you met your wife.

7 A It's a coincidence. Somebody introduced me
8 to her in Budapest.

9 Q Were you working at the time?

10 A No, not at the time. I didn't work. I
11 couldn't find myself. I just kept walking up and down
12 the boulevard in Hungary. At the time, I didn't have
13 a job. I was kind of dazed.

14 Q You were in shock?

15 A In shock. I didn't have anybody. And I
16 remember that I didn't have a place to live, really,
17 or money or food. And I remember somehow I got a very
18 nice suit at that time, elegant suit, and I kept
19 walking down the boulevard in Hungary, and everybody
20 thought I was a millionaire, and I didn't even know
21 how I was going to eat or where I was going to sleep.

22 That's what I remember, after the war.

1 Everybody thought I'm rich. I must have been, if I
2 wore a nice suit and everything. Everybody said, what
3 are you doing? And I said, nothing. Are you going to
4 do something? No, I'm not going to do anything.

5 Q Did you have any thoughts about Palestine,
6 America?

7 A No, I had no -- I didn't really think about
8 anything. My wife, who became my wife, her father was
9 in America at that time, he came in 1939. So that's
10 how I come to this country, because she wanted to come
11 here to see her father. He was the only surviving
12 relative. So I come here. Otherwise I probably would
13 have wound up in Israel.

14 I went to Israel many times, and I have
15 some good friends who are there. And in some ways I'm
16 sorry I didn't go there, I must say, even though I'm
17 very successful in this country. I cannot complain.
18 I love this country. But some of my friends in
19 Israel, when I met them, they said I should have come
20 over there.

21 Q Are these the friends from that group of
22 20?

1 A Yes. Some of them I knew here and there,
2 in the camp or whatever, or childhood. I was a little
3 bit in the military side myself, so they said, we
4 could use you here, we could have used you. I said,
5 well, it just so happened that I went to America. And
6 I became a businessman, against my better judgment.

7 Q In your childhood, did your family do any
8 Jewish things, like did you go to synagogue, did you
9 keep the Sabbath, did you have any religious
10 upbringing?

11 A Yes, my mother was Kosher, and they went to
12 the temple, mostly on high holidays. I went sometimes
13 too. I became bar mitzvah'd. But I'm not very
14 religious, I must say. And I do go, high holidays, to
15 temple now. But other than that, that's about it.

16 Q What was your mother's name and your
17 father's name?

18 A My mother's name was Charlotte Katz. My
19 father's name was Alodar Feldmayer.
20 F-E-L-D-M-A-Y-E-R. When I became a citizen, I became
21 Field.

22 Q Did you have any groups that you belonged

1 to as a child, like any youth groups or Zionist group
2 or anything like that, as a teenager?

3 A No. There was some sports group. I went
4 once to the Zionist group, once, I remember maybe two
5 times, a meeting. But my mind wasn't there, somehow.
6 I wasn't that interested at that time. Then I became
7 sick. I had very serious surgery when I was about 18,
8 19, so I had to quit sports altogether.

9 Q So after you married your wife, you came
10 here in 1948?

11 A About 1948, I believe.

12 Q How do you feel about the things are
13 happening in Europe right now? German unification and
14 the coming down of the wall, stuff like that.

15 A Well, I felt it very closely. How I feel
16 about German reunification is probably best described
17 like how the Russians generally feel about it. There
18 is an element of danger, knowing fairly well the
19 German people. I did live in Germany after the war,
20 prior to coming to America. I lived in Germany in a
21 DP camp, together with my wife.

22 Q Can you tell us a little bit about that?

1 A It's not very eventful. Basically just we
2 were awaiting over there to come to America, in DP
3 camp. That's what it is. I did all kinds of work
4 over there, cutting wood to being a policeman, to
5 being administrator and distributor, you know, for the
6 -- what did they call it? UNRA.

7 Q United Nations Refugee Agency?

8 A Yes. I don't recall all the names, but
9 there were other names too, I think. I worked for
10 them, also. Basically it was just waiting for to come
11 into this country, which was not so easy. There were
12 restrictions. They asked a lot of questions and
13 things like that.

14 Q So you were saying about German
15 unification, you had experience living in Germany --

16 A Well, I would say unease about it, knowing
17 that they started the war, and the Kaiser before, and
18 they are quite militaristic. My opinion is that as
19 long as the economy holds up and they have it good,
20 it's not going to be any problem. However, if there
21 is any change and things get bad, they might become
22 very militaristic again. That's the way I see it.

1 And that probably goes for Japan also, the
2 same thing. Maybe it's ingrained. I really don't
3 know the answer. But all I can say is that my
4 personal experience with them, I'm somewhat skeptical.
5 I also have to be realistic about it. The way things
6 are going, it cannot be changed.

7 East Germany and West Germany, they're the
8 same people, and no matter what the West or the East
9 will do, they will reunite, with or without our
10 assistance, regardless. And they're strong
11 economically. In my opinion they will surpass the
12 Americans, if they haven't done so yet, unfortunately.
13 Economically, that is.

14 That's the way I see it. I hate to say it,
15 but I see a sad future economically for the United
16 States of America, because of the competition we are
17 having all over the world. We cannot compete with
18 other people. That's the way I see it. Why or what,
19 I'm not able to say. I'm not competent. But I feel
20 for the future American generations.

21 Q Do you think it could happen again?

22 A Where?

1 Q In Europe. After German unification.

2 A Well, no. They say that history repeats
3 itself. But I wouldn't say that the same thing can
4 happen, German versus Jews again. Not for at least a
5 couple of thousand years. That's my opinion. It's
6 just, I don't see that in the cards. It is like --
7 I'm not saying they're going to love the Jews, or I'm
8 not saying that they're not going to be antisemitic.
9 But I don't think they will use their gas chambers
10 again and create Auschwitzes and Dachaus and
11 Bergen-Belsens and so on. I don't think it would come
12 that far.

13 And also there is the experience, the
14 Spanish Inquisition, for instance. They were perhaps
15 more antisemitic at the time. And Spain became, I
16 would say, fairly tolerant of the Jews, put it that
17 way. They may not like them, but at least they don't
18 burn them like they did. Between Isabel and
19 Ferdinand, you know what happened.

20 Q Can you tell us a little bit more about the
21 groups you organized in Hungary with your friends, the
22 reunion group you have?

1 A Well, they're having a meeting, to the best
2 of my knowledge, about once a month or twice a month.
3 Now, unfortunately, as time went by, some of them died
4 already. Some of them were very sick. They're not in
5 the best of health. We're getting into the age now,
6 how long can we last? I help as much as I can,
7 financially and otherwise.

8 And I meet them, and when I go there
9 usually we meet in a coffee house or restaurant or
10 something like that as a group, and we're very happy
11 to tell some of our stories, how we made fun of the
12 Germans and the Nazis. As I said, lucky for us, we
13 didn't have it as bad as most of the people. We were
14 very fortunate, very fortunate.

15 Q You mentioned earlier that you went to Yad
16 Vashem to find out what happened to your father. Have
17 you tried to go back to archives in Hungary to try to
18 find out what happened to your relatives in tracking
19 down information?

20 A I have, whatever I could, and I talked to
21 many people. I went to locations and to buildings. I
22 know where they used to live and everything. And I

1 asked tenants or managers of buildings, anywhere. And
2 this was -- I do it to reassure myself, so to speak,
3 that I had done whatever I could, under the
4 circumstances, to find some kind of a trace. But I
5 know it's hopeless in the beginning.

6 Some of my friends knew what I was doing,
7 they said I'm crazy. What are you doing that? You're
8 torturing yourself. You know what's happened. But
9 that's a sad story, to lose your relatives and friends
10 and everybody like that. That's terrible.

11 Q How did you recover emotionally? What did
12 you do?

13 A I don't know if I recovered. Maybe I am --
14 I don't know, sometimes I think I'm pretending. Well,
15 you know, life goes on. I have two sons. Life goes
16 on. That's all. You cannot recover. I don't think
17 anybody can recover. There is no way. You cannot
18 forget. Your memory is fading. I forget certain
19 things, or days, or whatever. But the big things, you
20 cannot. There is no way.

21 Q Did you talk with your children about this?

22 A Yes. They have a fairly good education,

1 and also a Jewish education, so they know what's going
2 on, what happened.

3 Q No, I mean about your personal experiences.

4 A Oh, about my personal -- well, they know
5 some. Some. I didn't tell them everything. As a
6 matter of fact I didn't tell them a lot, because
7 sometimes it's almost like unbelievable. I mean, if
8 somebody would tell me some of the stories I've been
9 through, I would be maybe skeptical about it, you know
10 the guy is pulling my leg or something. It's kind of
11 unbelievable to me, some of it. I can't believe it
12 myself.

13 Q Did you tell us any of the stories you
14 haven't told your sons?

15 A Oh, yes. I don't think they know all this.
16 I know they know some of it, but I didn't tell them in
17 detail like I'm saying it now.

18 Q Do you have anything else you would like to
19 add to the tape, to this interview?

20 A Well, I'm sure there are a lot of other
21 things, but I cannot think of it now, really. Let me
22 try to refresh my memory, if something interesting,

1 whatever, occurred.

2 Q So you spent a year in the German labor
3 camp, from 1943 to when you escaped in 1944?

4 A Yes, it's about a year.

5 Q And then you were in the Russian camp until
6 the winter of 1945?

7 A It's about eight months or something. Some
8 of it I really don't remember the dates, but
9 approximately.

10 Q And what exactly was your work in the camp?
11 You were building roads, you were repairing airplanes?

12 A Yes, we were supposed to build some roads,
13 and a runway for an air field or something. Never did
14 get finished. Never.

15 Q So did the Germans know since that you were
16 sabotaging your work?

17 A Oh, they suspected a lot of times, but not
18 much they can do about it.

19 Q They weren't harder on you?

20 A Well, they tried. They tried.

21 Q How did they try?

22 A Well, sometimes they put us in jail, they

1 bound our hands in the back, and the handcuffs on a
2 tree or a rope or something like that, inflict certain
3 punishments like reducing food, rations and things
4 like that, when they know they have a concrete proof
5 or evidence that happened.

6 Because we said, well, when the road
7 collapsed or a building collapsed, we said, well, we
8 are not builders. We don't understand architecture or
9 design or the strength of materials. How did we know?
10 You guys should know it, you should tell us what way
11 you want it. So we tried to get an excuse whenever it
12 occurred.

13 Q But it probably helped your morale to know
14 you were making fun of them.

15 A Oh, yes, we had very high morale. We had
16 such high morale that in the camp we even had our own
17 theaters, we made plays.

18 Q How did you make plays without --

19 A Well, the letters. And they come, even the
20 Germans, the Hungarians, to watch our plays. I
21 remember we played Cyrano de Bergerac. The Germans,
22 they loved it, they eat it up, and the Hungarians,

1 because some of us were very good actors, not me, but
2 some, and good musicians, and they enjoyed it.

3 Our situation, I would say, was maybe
4 totally different than most forced laborers, you know,
5 in a company. Perhaps maybe it was privileged in that
6 sense, that due to our age or whatever, and we were in
7 Hungary, not in Siberia, God knows, we had a fairly
8 good life, fairly good life. And we were at that
9 time, I must say, not so hated. It didn't come to
10 real antisemitism or hate the Jews at that particular
11 time.

12 The real trouble started after the Germans
13 come in on October 19th, I believe. That was really
14 getting rough and tough. But prior to that, we didn't
15 have --

16 Q So you noticed a different treatment by the
17 Germans towards you in the camp after October 19th?

18 A Well, yes, that was -- we were escaping
19 already because things are getting worse all the time.
20 All the time. So we knew we had to do something. We
21 hoped in all of this to go to the Russian side. That
22 was our intention. And we did succeed eventually.

1 Q How did you get the Swiss papers? Did you
2 go to the Swedish embassy, or did somebody from the
3 partisan group give it to you?

4 A Yes. I don't exactly recall, but I have to
5 assume that some of us knew somebody who knew somebody
6 who knew somebody again, and they went and told them
7 that these 20 Jews, going around Budapest, we have to
8 give some kind of papers. I have to assume that.

9 Q Did your group at the time of its escape
10 think about joining the partisans?

11 A We were not in a position to really join
12 the partisans. We were not -- we never were that
13 close in a situation. We knew about it and we tried,
14 but you just couldn't. We couldn't. You can join the
15 partisans if you could escape from where you're at to
16 go to the other side. But we were always in our own
17 side.

18 When we escaped finally, then we were in
19 the Russian prisoner of war camp. We gave the
20 Russians our services. We told them right there,
21 look, we are young and strong, we will join the
22 Russian soldiers or American soldiers or whatever,

1 just to fight these murderers. They said, we don't
2 need you, the war is finished, we don't need you.

3 That was more or less the Russians' answer.
4 We offered our services. We wanted to fight. So it
5 is too late.

6 Q If you have more questions at some point or
7 any more things you want to talk about --

8 A I think I told you some kind of highlights,
9 anyway. I don't know how interesting it is. I don't
10 think it's anything special about it, because most of
11 the people can tell you maybe more interesting
12 stories, or, you know, some maybe sad stories. I
13 don't know, my story is not so sad, maybe.

14 Q Your friends published a book in Hungarian,
15 you said they published this book?

16 A Yes.

17 Q Maybe if you could get a copy for the
18 Holocaust Oral History Project?

19 A Yes, I can get that. Do you want some kind
20 of pictures?

21 Q Yes, photographic pictures.

22 A I can get some pictures. My father, I

1 think I have him in a uniform at that time, something.
2 I will look around. If I find something which might
3 be of some interest to you, I will let you know and
4 drop it off. Now, my plan is to go to Hungary
5 probably -- maybe the early part of August, when I can
6 get away.

7 Q I want to thank you.

8 A I thank you.

9 [End Tape 1]

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