

-TITLE-GEORGE SARLO

-I DATE-DECEMBER 23, 1990

-SOURCE-SAN FRANCISCO HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

-RESTRICTIONS-

-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT

-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT

-DURATION-1 HOUR 39 MINUTES

-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH

-KEY_SEGMENT-

-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-

-PERSONAL_NAME-

-CORPORATE_NAME-

-KEY_WORDS-

-NOTES-

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0:01:50 George, whose real name is Yuri Briar (ph), was born in Budapest, Hungary in January 31, 1938. His grandfather was American; he had emigrated to the United States near the turn of the century, but moved back to Hungary to marry his sweetheart and was trapped. His parents married around 1930 (Miklosh and Cecelia Bariar-ph). He has one sister. Agnes Linhardt.

0:03:43 George was too young to remember much about his family's religious life. He described their house as kosher and said that they attended synagogue regularly, although not every week. He mostly remembered religious holidays, meals, the decorations and the singing. He noted that he had a large extended family. as his grandfather had remarried, and that they visited often.

0:04:50 The first sign of change that George noticed was that his father was at home a lot. He had lost his job as a clerk in a factory because he was a Jew. That was in 1942. In 1943, her remembers his father receiving a telegram-notification that he had been drafted into the first manual labor unit of the Hungarian army. Jews were not allowed to serve in the army proper.

0:06:40 His mother told him that his father was clever and thought he could get out of his conscription. His father, who had to leave early, didn't want to wake George up to say goodbye. He thought he would return. In his letters from Russian, George's father expressed regret that he never got to say goodbye to him.

0:09:01 George's mother sent his father packages in Russia. One time they received a package from his father with a birthday present for George. George thinks that his mother put together the package and pretended it was from his father. A fellow unit conscript returned from Russia. He said that George's father was sad. His leather jacket had been stolen. He was upset because he had pictures of George and Agnes in the pocket. George assumes that his father froze to death in Russia in 1943.

0:10:40 The restrictions became worse after George's father left. George's mother started her own business, making women's lingerie, in order to support the family, and became very successful.

The americans were bombing Budapest and so it wasn't safe. George's mother sent him to stay with his grandparents in the village (Ufiherto- ph).

0:12:07 George felt safe with his grandparents. He was reminded of previous vacations, which he had spent with them. He stayed with them from the beginning through the middle of 1944. George remembers when restrictions grew tighter and deportations began, after the Germans invaded in March of 1944.

George remembers when his grandmother was making up the first stars they had to wear on their clothes. He thought it was great fun and felt very special. George remembers looking at a yellow tablecloth that his grandmother had spread on a table and thinking. "Oh my, we could make lots of starts.

0:13:23 George could see that his grandparents were concerned. George was rescued from his grandparents' village the day before the inhabitants were deported to Auschwitz. George describes the rescue, which he says is a good story because it has a recent continuation. George's mother approached that brother-in-law of one of her employees and asked him to bring George back from the village. The man, lasla Bonamesa (ph), a christian, posed as George's father and smuggled him into the train. Covering him with a pile of coats. Soldiers passed through the train, looking for Jews. One soldier stabbed at the coat with his bayonet. George remembers seeing the blade pass in front of his face.

0:15:44 Recently George has been in touch with Lasto Bonamesa's widow, maria Bonamesa, and her daughter, who he says are in bad shape. George has forwarded Laslo's name to a Jewish organization, Yad Vashem (ph), for recognition as a righteous gentile. George mentioned the name of one of Laslo and Miria's two daughters (totish Vann-ph; her nicknamed was Dodi) George expressed the hope that he could meet Dodi again.

George remembers little of life back in Budapest. His family lived in an apartment just outside the boundaries of the ghetto. George's mother had to pay off the custodian with jewelry, a member of the Yellow Cross, to keep her from betraying them.

0:18:09 George described the Swedish, Swiss and Spanish protected house. George's family had relatives in Spain, and so they were able to get papers to move into a protected house. The houses were, of course, only protected up to a certain point. The conditions in the houses were poor, with twenty people per room, no heat or privacy and little food.

0:20:19 Most of George's extended family died in Teresien Stadt, Auschwitz, Dachau or Bergen Belsen. Of 30 family members, only 3 returned.

George was young, about five years old. He only understood that he was in grave danger because he was a Jew.. Jews knew that people were getting killed and saw the bodies piled up like railroad ties in the courtyard of the synagogue.

0:21:25 George's sister was the hero of the family. At age 10, she played some role in obtaining the papers for the Spanish protected house, although George did not know how. She was a "tough little girl", he observed, adding, "she still is."

0:23:30 George elaborates on life in the Spanish-protected house. There were raids, carried out by the Yellow Cross. He relates one occasion, when the Yellow Cross raided the Swiss-protected house next door. George remembers waving to his little friends as they were being led away at gunpoint. One of the children threw George a not, wrapped around a battery for weight. George doesn't remember what the note said.

0:24:52 George recalls a particular instance, while living in the Spanish-protected house. One day, he decided to visit a friend, who lived across the street, even though it was illegal for him to be on the street. He ran across the street, but the house was locked tight. he was terribly frightened and began beating on the door, trying to get in. Another little boy, walking along the street, saw George pounding on the door. The other boy pointed at George and shouted, "Here's a Jew! Here's a Jew!", trying to draw attention to George. George couldn't understand why this little boy was trying to get him killed.

0:26:29 George talked about the day of liberation, in January of 1945. The Russians besieged Budapest for several months. This period of time was marked by the most killing. The Jews remaining in the city were taken down to the Danube and shot, so that they would fall into the river and be carried away by the current. George's step-aunt (no name given) was shot, but survived, swimming down the river to safety. She became a professor of nuclear engineering.

0:28:00 On the day of liberation, George's mother was giving him a bath. They didn't have much hot water, so George had to stand in a pail, while his mother sponged him off. The room was so cold, that the hot water was steaming off of his body. His sister, who was standing at the window, shouted, "they're here!". George ran to the window, steaming all the way. He could see the Russians on the streets with their big fur hats.

0:28:54 George's family was allowed to return to their original apartment. George remembered pulling a little cart with all of their belongings on it. He also recalls seeing piles of dead bodies on the street, and their insides. George describes going out and begging for bread from the Russian soldiers. He was happy that he could take home a piece of bread for his family - at age 6, he saw a group of people cutting up a dead horse. George took home a piece for his family, although he said it didn't taste very good.

0:30:16 A few months later, his mother's cousin returned from a camp. He lost his wife and two children. George's mother and her cousin were married. His stepfather, Frank Sarlo, changed his last name to Sarlo from Schwartz, because Sarlo is a Hungarian name and translates as sickle. It was considered a good name during the communist regime.

0:31:33 George felt very intimidated as a Jew. He felt that something must be wrong with him. George's mother took him to school for the first time. He was already a year behind at age 7. The school was run by the Lutheran Church. (Most schools in Hungary were run by churches.) George felt strange, as if he were among people who had tried to kill him. George felt as if he had to do extra-well as a Jew to justify his existence. He describes this as having been a driving force in his life and responsible for some of his achievements. "It's a hell of a way to get ambition, but it worked."

0:36:50 George's stepfather blocked out the entire war experience and claims not to remember anything.

0:37:40 George says he was very shy at school. All of his friends were Jewish, although there were hardly any Jews remaining in Hungary. George felt very distant and alienated from Hungarian society, a feeling which persists today. George believes that Hungarians are anti-Semitic by tradition. Even after the war, "dirty Jew" was a common epithet. The advent of Communism suppressed anti-Semitism, as most of the leadership was Jewish. Anti-Semitism was revealed especially during the 1956 revolution.

0:40:56 George's mother, who had been very religious before the war, became profoundly anti-religious. She questioned how God could allow such things to happen. She refused to keep the Sabbath or cook kosher. The communist system made anti-religious attitudes very fashionable. Agnes participated in the Communist Youth and called her mother a capitalist pig for having employees. George's stepfather became very religious, although he was very secretive about attending synagogue.

0:42:17 George tried to deny all aspect of his jewishness. To him, it was something shameful and dangerous. His parents wanted him to have a bar mitzvah. George agreed, but very reluctantly. He thought it was too dangerous. To survive in the Communist system, George's family conformed. His stepfather, who owned a shop, became a machinist. His mother's business was taken away by the state and she became a seamstress.

0:44:08 George believed that Communism was the answer to the troubles of the past and the chance to create a new humanity. He "Used the right words, read the right books, and attended the right meetings", in order to become a functionary, "get the goodies", such as university education. He eventually turned against the Communist system.

0:47:35 George began to feel that he was living a lie and that one could only repeat the slogans so many times. George talked about the impact of propaganda, especially on young children. He told an anecdote about schoolchildren: the teacher asked the children, "Where is the best country in the world?" And all the children answered in Unison, "The Soviet Union!" "Where do kids have the best food in the world?" the teacher continued. Again, "The Soviet Union!" "And where do kids have the most wonderful toys in the world?" "The Soviet Union!" Then little Tanya in the corner started to cry. "What's wrong, Tanya?" asked the teacher. "I want to go to the Soviet Union!", Tanya wailed.

0:50:00 George became tired of the myths. "If you're willing to look in the mirror, the contradictions come up pretty quickly. It's only when you're not willing to look in the mirror that you can fool yourself.

0:57:11 George left with Agnes and her family for Austria, with a \$5.00 bill, a German and an English dictionary. They were in a refugee camp for a while, but left because the anti-Semitism was so bad. George called his uncle in America, who flew out to Austria. His uncle hired someone to return to Hungary and smuggle his parents out. George remembers that they owned the man \$700.00 upon delivery. The man that they had a transistor radio. He had never seen one before and was curious so he accepted that as payment for his services instead.

1:00:00 George emigrated to America with his parents and his sister. He describes his typical American experiences, such as getting struck in the wall in his Murphy bed. A Jewish agency (DX) helped his family find an apartment and George find a job.

1:03:35 George was brought up in the tradition that education was the best path out of poverty. He attended L.A. City College, and then transferred to the University of Arizona and became an electrical engineer, finishing college in 2-1/2 years. George went on to work in the semi-conductor business in Newport Beach. He quit when he found out that his boss, with 26 years experience, only made \$2000 more than he did.

1:10:00 George attended Harvard Business School and began working in investment banking. He feels that he's paying back American society for taking him in and allowing him to be free.

1:15:05 George's two daughters are Gabriella Stepphanie (age 23) and Susanna Georgette (age 22).

1:16:00 George says that the major motivation in his life has been the search for freedom of all types, including freedom from poverty, freedom from physical and emotional restraints, and freedom from inhibitions.

1:17:10 George said that the Holocaust was the single most important and influential event in his life.

1:19:28 George feels very ambivalent about being Jewish. On the one hand, he is very proud of the achievements of the Jewish culture, but on the other hand, he still feels ashamed, as if being Jewish were a bad thing. He says this feeling has been beaten into him.

1:20:35 George says that the other major issues in his life, which were a source of conflict for him with his ex-wife, are probably in some way connected to the Holocaust. His wife is Catholic.

1:21:08 George realizes that he never dated Jewish women. He believes that this was an unconscious choice, predicated on the desire to protect his future children from the dangerous life he has experienced as a Jew.

1:23:40 He did not raise his children in the Jewish tradition also because his wife wanted to raise them Catholic and because he wanted them to have a choice when they were old enough to understand that difference. He realizes though that they cannot choose if they do not possess sufficient knowledge regarding both traditions.

1:25:00 George says that the Holocaust has affected his life in many ways. It has motivated him to achieve in order to prove his self-worth, he is shy, he suffers from an inferiority complex which he says manifests itself in an unfriendly demeanor, and he suffers from survivors' guilt.

1:26:15 George admits that he has been hard on his daughters, expecting them to carry on his struggle without having given them the reason or tools for it.

1:27:33 George has met with other survivors of the Holocaust as well as children of survivors. He realizes how hard it is to have a close family life as either a survivor or a child or a survivor, let alone as both. It took George a long time to learn how to love or even accept the possibility of love.

1:28:40 George describes two other times when he was almost killed. Once when he was out walking with his mother in Budapest and an airplane strafed the street. The other time, a bomb fell two or three feet away from George on the street. It made a crater in the street but didn't go off. George could see USA written on the side.

1:29:15 George says he does not think too often about the "big plan". He is not very religious person, although he is more religious than he would have imagined he would be at this point. He believes that the purpose of life is to do the best you can with what you have. Life is easier that way. When asked about whether he thinks there is a God or a higher power, George says he is tempted to quote Karl Jung: "I don't know what he was doing in 1943 or 1944. Maybe he was busy with other things. And I cannot answer the question, how could he allow it. I've asked the question many times and the wisest person I ask generally answers, "that's the wrong question", so I've sort of given up on that. But when I hug my daughters or when I am sailing on a boat or when I'm at the top of a mountain, I know."

1:32:44 When asked, "who is George Sarlo?", he said, "a free man."
.END.