

Interview with George Sarlo
Holocaust Oral History Project
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Interviewer: Anne Feibelman
Transcriber: Sally Mason

Q. OKAY GEORGE, WE'LL START FROM THE BEGINNING, AND AS WE GO ALONG, IF AT A POINT YOU WANT TO STOP THE TAPE, WE'LL STOP TAPE. WE'LL START AT THE HARD PART: WHERE WERE YOU BORN AND WHAT YOUR NAME IS NOW AND WHAT IT WAS THEN.

A. I was born in Hungary, Budapest. And my name is *SP* George Sarlo now. My name then was (Briardurt).

Q. WHAT WAS THE DATE OF YOUR BIRTH?

A. January 31st of 1938.

Q. CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR FAMILY? SIBLINGS, THE NAME OF A PARENT, WHERE THEY WERE FROM?

A. Well, I should go back one step farther because my grandfather was American. He came to this country around the turn of the century. And then he went back to marry his sweetheart, and he got stuck, and then he had seven children. My father was about the middle of the range. My father married my mother about 1930, and my sister was born in 1931. So she's seven years older than I am. There were just the two of us.

Q. WHAT WERE YOUR PARENTS' NAMES, AND WHAT IS YOUR SISTER'S NAME?

SP A. My father's name was Nicholas (Briar). My mother's name is (Cicillia Briar), now Cicillia Sarlo, and my sister's name Aggi, Agness, (Lynheart). That's her married name.

Q. AND SHE WAS BORN AGNESS BRIAR?

A. Briar.

Q. TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT FAMILY LIFE AND JEWISH LIFE. WHAT DID YOUR FATHER DO? WHAT KIND OF COMMUNITY DID

SP YOU LIVE IN? DID YOU GO TO A (SHUEL)? WHAT KIND? WHAT WAS DAILY LIFE, THE QUALITY OF LIFE?

A. Of course, I'm too young to know very much about it because the War came when I was five years old. But what I remember is that we were religious. We had a kosher house. We went to the temple regularly, although I don't think necessarily every Friday. When I stayed with my grandparents -- which was often -- who lived in a small village in Hungary, I remember going to temple just about every night. I remember mostly the religious holiday celebrations, the meals, some of the decorations, some of the singing. That's about all I can remember before the war.

Q. DID YOU HAVE RELATIVES THAT CAME FOR HOLIDAYS, OR DID YOU HAVE AN EXTENDED FAMILY, OR WAS IT PRETTY CONTAINED?

A. No, it was a large family. My father had six brothers and sisters, who regularly visited us. On my

leave, and everybody was crying.

Q. THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

A. I guess he left. This is a story which I heard from my mother, that he was a very clever fellow, and he thought he'd be back the next day or in a week. He thought for sure he could get out of it. So when he left, he had to leave very early in the morning. And he didn't want to wake me up and say good-bye because he thought he would be back right away. And then my mother tells me that in his letters he often said from Russia, "I wish I had woken (Yudie) up." (Yudie) was my name. And he really regretted that he didn't. He never said good-bye, and that's the last time I saw him.

Q. WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?

A. We don't know. He was taken to Russia, and we have no documentation as to what happened. He disappeared. We got a letter from some officials that he disappeared. It was cold, it was winter in Russia. He wrote us a number of letters. My mother sent him lots of packages. There was a package from him which had a birthday present for me in it, but I don't think it came from him. I think my mother made it up to appear like it came from him.

And the last thing we heard, one of his colleagues from the labor units came back; and he said that my father was very sad. He had a wonderful leather coat, and somebody

stole his leather coat. And it was very cold, and he was sad because -- not because the coat was stolen, but because in the pockets were pictures of me and my sister. And that's the last we heard, so I assume he froze to death.

Q. WHEN?

A. The last we heard from him was in 1943.

Q. CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT THE PRESENT WAS?

A. I don't remember. My mother probably would. I'll ask her, but I don't remember.

Q. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FAMILY AFTER YOUR FATHER LEFT?

A. Well, things were awful. The restrictions on Jews were more and more harsh. It's an interesting sort of ironic story that, because my father lost his job, my mother had to start the business. And she became very successful. So for a while, we were pretty well off. But the bombing started. Mostly from American Air Force. And it wasn't safe to be in Budapest, which was a big city suffering most of the bombings. So my mother sent me down to live with my grandparents who lived in a small village which was supposed to be safe. So I lived there from, I would guess, early 1944 till mid 1944.

Q. WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE VILLAGE, AND WHAT WAS THE BUSINESS THAT YOUR MOTHER STARTED?

A. The name of the village is (Euifarhairtoauf), and

my mother was making ladies lingerie.

Q. AND WHAT HAPPENED WHILE YOU WERE LIVING WITH YOUR GRANDPARENTS? WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

A. I felt safe there. Life was very much like I remember from previous vacations. Small village, very modest home, lots of animals. It was fun, until the Germans came into Hungary, which was in March of 1944. And shortly thereafter the deportation started, and there were very serious restrictions on Jews.

I remember when my grandmother made up the first stars that we had to wear on our clothes, and I thought it was great fun. I felt very special. I guess I was. I remember looking at some yellow tablecloths she had, and I was thinking, "Oh my, we could make lots of stars out of this one." But then it became scary. I could see that my grandparents were quite concerned. And it was very close. I was rescued from the village the day before all the Jews were taken to Auschwitz, and very few came back. Maybe one or two.

Q. WHEN WAS THAT?

A. About middle of 1944.

Q. AND TELL ME ABOUT THE RESCUE.

A. Well, it's a good story because it has a recent continuation to it. My mother had an employee whose name I don't remember, a lady who worked for her, whose sister was

(
married to a very nice gentlemen, a Christian man, called
SP (Yazlow Barnamiss). And my mother asked Mr. (Barnamissa) to
try to get me back because she heard about the rumors of the
SP deportations. So he came down to (Effahart) to the village
on a train. And he pretended that I was his son, and he
smuggled me out of the village into the train. And he hid me
under some coats.

It as a long train ride. And I remember the
soldiers coming through the train looking for Jews. And one
of them poked the bayonet right through the coat, and I
remember seeing the knife going right in front of my eyes.
So it was exciting. And he got me back to Budapest. And the
reasons it's interesting, because I lost touch with him. I
know that he died many years ago; but recently, through some
of the Jewish agencies, I was able to locate his widow and
his daughter. And we started corresponding again. I'm
hoping to help them because they are in pretty bad shape.
And also I have written recently to (Yelvetsham) to suggest
his name as one of the righteous gentiles.

Q. WHAT IS HIS WIDOW'S NAME AND THE DAUGHTER?

SP A. The widow's name is (Mary Barnamissa), and she had
two daughters, one of whom lives in England, I think. The
SP other one recently wrote to me. Her name is (Dotitia Vanny)
and I know her from her nickname Dotti. She's about my age,
(and we were friends. So it's going to be interesting to

perhaps meet with her again.

Q. FANTASTIC. NOW WHEN YOU GOT BACK TO BUDAPEST, WHAT HAPPENED?

A. I don't remember very much of the next few months. However, I know that most of the Jews were taken from their homes and put into the ghetto. Where we lived, the apartment building was right at the edge the ghetto. It was just outside. And I remember that we were very afraid that they would take us also. The custodian of the building was a member of the (aircross) which was the fascist, Hungarian fascist organization. And my mother kept paying her off in jewelry and things not to report us, that we were not in the ghetto where we were supposed to be. But I know things were getting more and more scary.

There were certain excepted people in Hungary who were protected by a friendly government or a neutral government, such as the (Walanburg) passports that you know about. Those were Swedish protected people who were put into certain apartment buildings which were designated as Swedish protected houses. There were also Swiss protected houses, and there were Spanish protected houses. Since we had relatives in Spain, which was a very friendly country to the Axis, we requested immigration to Spain; and we received passports which enabled us to get into a Spanish protected house.

Now these protected houses were protected up to a point. As things got rougher and rougher, as more and more Jews are killed, they were entering the protected houses, the fascists; and this was sort of a hierarchy to them. First they took the Swiss and then they took the Swedes and then they started to take the Spanish also. But we moved into a Spanish protected house where we lived with a bunch of other people. I mean there were like twenty people to a room and under very poor conditions. We had very little to eat and no heat and no privacy. But we were relatively safe. We of course knew that the Jews were regularly taken and executed. A lot of my family were killed during that time.

Q. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FAMILY, THE PEOPLE WHO WERE KILLED?

A. Most of them were taken to concentration camps. Most of them were taken to Auschwitz, some to Dachau, a few to, a few to Bergen-Belsen. I'd say maybe thirty people, thirty members of my family were taken, and maybe three returned.

Q. AS A CHILD, DID YOU KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON?

A. I knew some of the things that were going on. I mean I knew that I was in grave danger. I knew I was in grave danger because I was a Jew. I knew that people were getting killed all around me. I saw bodies piled up. That's about all I know.

Q. YOU SAY SOME BODIES WERE PILED UP. WAS THAT INSIDE THE GHETTO?

A. Inside, outside, both. I remember the main synagogue building in Hungary, Budapest. In the courtyard, they had the bodies piled up like railroad ties, you know, five this way and then five this way and then up again. And I remember the smell more than anything else.

Q. WERE THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN STARVED TO DEATH? WHO HAD BEEN EXECUTED?

A. I don't know.

Q. NOW WHAT HAPPENED, TO GO BACK A LITTLE BIT, TO YOUR GRANDPARENTS? YOU LEFT THEIR HOUSE IN THE VILLAGE, AND WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?

A. Well, they were taken to Auschwitz. I think the next day.

Q. AND WAS YOUR SISTER WITH YOU, OR WAS SHE WITH YOUR MOTHER?

A. No, she was with my mother. She was sort of the hero of the family because she was at the time maybe 10 years old, but she was the one that got us the Spanish papers. And she was the one who would go outside the house when it was very dangerous to go and would get us food and things. She was a tough little girl. She still is.

Q. HOW DID SHE GET THE PAPERS?

A. Well, there was some correspondence between us and

our relatives in Spain. And I know there were official papers going back and forth, but I don't know what was involved in getting the papers.

Q. NOW, TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE SPANISH HOUSE, BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT IT. WHAT SPECIFICALLY DO YOU REMEMBER? WHAT A DAY WAS LIKE THERE, WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE? WHO WOULD COME? GERMANS? HUNGARIANS?

A. Mostly Hungarians, Hungarian fascists of the (airafasts), who were the real scum of the earth, of the lowest classes, who were in it basically because they hated Jews and because they robbed their victims. It was very scary.

I remember, for example, one day I was playing in the backyard of the protected house with some of my friends. And in the next building, which was a Swiss-protected house, were some of our friends who we would play with normally. And that particular day they came and took them, and I remember waving to my friends who were being pushed by these (airafasts) with their guns. And one of them threw me a note. And I remember the paper was wrapped around a battery for weight, and I remember picking it up and reading it. I don't remember what it said on the note.

Another thing I remember, that across the street from us lived a friend of ours, also, I think, in a protected house. And one day I wanted to go and visit her, but it was

illegal for me to go out on the street, but I sneaked out anyway. I figured, just go across. And as I got to her house, I tried to open it. It was locked, and I was terribly frightened somebody might see me. And I was beating on it and trying to open it. And along came a little boy, my age, maybe six; and he was looking at me and saw how frightened I was. And he started pointing at me and hollering, "Here's a Jew, here's a Jew." And I'll never forget how frightening it was, another little boy trying to get me killed.

Q. WHAT HAPPENED?

A. I guess I got away. I don't remember. I just remember the fright. What I remember most is that there wasn't much food, that we were always surrounded by lots of the people, and there was bombs falling all the time. We spent a lot of time under ground in the basement, which was protection from the bombs. That's about all I can remember.

Q. WHAT WAS IT LIKE? DID THEY EVER RAID YOUR HOUSE?

A. Not in the protected house. There were raids in our original apartment buildings, and I remember them taking people away. And I don't know why they didn't take us.

Q. WHAT ELSE DO YOU REMEMBER FROM THE PERIOD IN EITHER THE SPANISH HOUSE OR BEFORE THE SPANISH HOUSE ABOUT RESTRICTIONS OR INCIDENTS THAT LEFT A MEMORY?

A. I remember the day of liberation. Must have been about January of 1945. The Russians had been firing at the

city for a long time. They surrounded Budapest for several months, and that was a period when most of the killings took place. They would take the Jews down to the Danube, and they would shoot them so they would fall into the Danube so the bodies would be carried by the river. Anyway, I remember --.

Q. EXCUSE ME. HOW DID YOU KNOW THAT?

A. I think my mother told me. I think my mother's stepsister was taken. My aunt. And I think she was shot into the river and she survived. She swam, with a bullet in her. And became a professor of nuclear engineering.

Anyway, the day of liberation that I remember is that my mother was giving me a bath. And of course we had not enough water for a proper bath, but she had a little part of hot water, a little pail. And I would stand in the pail, and she would wash me with soap or cloth. And I remember standing in that cold room, and my body was giving off this steam because she was watch washing me. And all of a sudden my sister, who was at the window, screams, "They are here. They are here." And I remember running to the window, steaming all the way, and seeing the first Russian soldier with a big fur hat.

Q. HOW DID YOU FEEL?

A. Wonderful. That's when we thought all of our troubles were over.

Q. AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

A. Well, we were liberated; and we were allowed to go back to our original apartment. I remember pulling a little cart with all of our belongings, going back and seeing lots of dead bodies on the street. I remember the insides of people. And that's when the real hunger started. There was very little food at that point, and I remember begging the Russian soldiers, "(kraba kraba)", you know, "bread", and being wonderfully rewarded when I got a piece; and I could take it home to my mother and show her I was finally the breadwinner, truly the breadwinner of the family at age six.

I remember one rather gory part when I found a horse that was killed. And there were people carving up the horse, and I got a piece, and I took it home, and my mother cooked it, and it didn't taste very good. And I remember waiting for my father to come home. Never did. And then a few months later one of my mother's cousins came back from concentration camp, and he lost his wife and his two children. And then they got together and got married. That's my stepfather.

Q. WHAT'S HIS NAME?

A. Frank. He's a nice old guy. He's going to be 90.

Q. WHAT'S HIS LAST NAME?

A. Sarlo.

Q. OH, SARLO.

A. Originally it was Schwartz. But that was too

Jewish sounding, so after the War it was fashionable to change your name to be more Hungarian sounding. Sarlo properly pronounced is (Sharlow), which means sickle, which seems like the right sort of name in a communist regime.

Q. WELL, WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU RETURNED HOME, AND YOU WERE IN HUNGARY? WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE FOR THE JEWS AND FOR YOUR FAMILY?

A. Well, I felt still very intimidated. I felt, and that feeling lasted most of my life, different. When people try to kill you and you're a little boy, you probably feel there's something wrong with you.

I remember my mother taking me to my first school class right after the War. I missed a year because of the War. So I was seven years old, and I entered in a class of six-year-olds. And this particular school, like most schools in Hungary, was run by a church. That happened to be a Lutheran church, and I felt very strange there. How can I be among those people who, up to now, have been trying to kill me? Was this really safe? And I felt, as I still feel, sometime, that I had to do extra, extra well because I was a Jew, in order to justify my existence.

So I suppose, in a way, it was a driving force in my life, maybe responsible for some of my achievements. It's a hell of a way to get ambitious, but it worked.

Q. I SUSPECT YOU WOULD HAVE HAD AMBITION ANYWAY.

A. Probably.

Q. NOW, WHAT ABOUT OTHER CHILDREN IN THE CLASS? WERE THERE OTHER JEWS? DID YOU HAVE FRIENDS?

A. Not many. There were one or two Jews in the class. You must understand that 90 percent of Hungarian Jews were killed during the War. They were very efficient. They were probably as efficient as any country. Hungarians are by tradition very anti-Semitic, so they not only cooperated, but they led the charge. I think maybe I would like --.

Q. SOME WATER?

A. If by chance anybody has an aspirin, that would be great.

Q. YOU ARE FEELING OKAY?

A. (Witness nods head).

Q. AS YOU SAY, THERE WEREN'T MANY SURVIVORS FROM HUNGARY, AND IT'S AN UNUSUAL STORY FROM THIS RESPECT. TELL ME WHEN YOU'RE READY.

A. When I have my sister or my mother visiting, you might get more out of it. They would remember a lot more.

Q. WHERE ARE THEY?

A. In Southern California, but they both visit here from time to time.

Q. THAT WOULD BE GREAT, PARTICULARLY YOUR MOTHER. IT'S INCREDIBLE THAT SHE'S HERE TO TELL THE TALE.

A. Yeah, my mother remembers a lot. Probably too

much. It's interesting that my stepfather completely blocked it out. When I asked him questions about the war or concentration camp, he says he doesn't remember what I'm talking about. So it works either way.

Q. IT'S LIKE MY FATHER WHO HAD NO LIFE BEFORE 1940. NOW WHERE WERE WE? WE WERE TALKING ABOUT LIFE AT SCHOOL AND FRIENDS. WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE AT SCHOOL? YOU STARTED A YEAR LATER, AND THERE WEREN'T MANY JEWS.

A. I remember only being very shy, very intimidated. Never participated in games or sports. Being quite withdrawn. Some of it may be my personality. A lot of it probably is due to the events of the War. All of my friends were Jewish. There weren't that many, but I had no Christian friends. I felt very distant and very alienated from Hungarian society. And that persisted today. Hungary was never my home. And that's probably the reason that, as soon as I had a chance in 1956, I left.

Q. WERE THERE ANY INCIDENTS WHERE PEOPLE WERE CALLING YOU JEW OR BEING ANTI-SEMITIC TO YOU?

A. Yes, lots of them.

Q. LIKE WHAT?

A. It was a fairly common epithet to use, "dirty Jew", equivalent of the "kike", if somebody didn't like you. I guess with the advent of the communist, it diminished a great deal. Most of the communist leaders in Hungary were Jewish,

so the innate anti-Semitism of the Hungary population was suppressed during those years. But I felt it was always there. During the revolution, it came out.

There were quite a few ex-nazis at the time who participated in the revolution of 1956. A lot of Austrians and Germans came across the border, and when I escaped Hungary and was in a refugee camp in Austria among Hungarians, there were very strong anti-Semitic tempers. In fact, at one point I was threatened by a Hungarian with a knife for the only reason that I was a Jew. So I ran. I got out of the camp, and I went on my own.

Q. LET'S BACKTRACK A LITTLE BIT TO WHEN YOU WERE STILL IN SCHOOL AND GROWING UP, STILL IN HUNGARY. WHAT WAS HOME LIFE LIKE?

A. It was very different. My mother, who was religious before the War, became anti-religious after the War. Her attitude was, how could there be a god when those things were allowed? She would no longer keep the sabbath. She would no longer cook kosher. Plus, because the communist system was so much against religion, it became very fashionable to be anti-religious. My sister became part of the Communist Youth, because that was a way to survive. She would go to the point of calling my mother an exploiter of the masses and capitalist pig because she had a few employees.

Interestingly, my stepfather's reaction to the Holocaust was exactly the opposite of my mother. He became very religious. He continued to go to the synagogue, although not terribly often and sort of in a hidden way. I tried to deny all aspects of Jewishness. To me it was shameful. It was dangerous. My parents, my mother and my stepfather wanted me to have a barmitzvah. And I did it, but did it very, very reluctantly. I thought it was something very dangerous. So, no, there wasn't much Jewish life after the War.

Q. NOW TELL ME ABOUT COMMUNISM, AND HOW DID THAT CHANGE LIFE IN HUNGARY? WHAT HAPPENED?

A. Well, the communist, that's the Russians, were our liberators. They saved our lives. To survive after 1948, you had to be part of a communist system. That's if you wanted a good job or you wanted to go to school or you wanted privileges, you better conform. And we conformed.

My father, who before the War had a store, became a machinist. My mother had this little lingerie business, which was successful after the War; but it was taken away by the State. So she became a seamstress. I was a very good student; but for me, in order to go on to university, I had to be a member and a distinguished member of the Communist Youth, which I became. But I have to say I believed in it, too. Completely.

Q. WHAT DID YOU BELIEVE IN, AND HOW DID YOU BECOME A DISTINGUISHED MEMBER?

A. What I believed is that that was the way to live. That communism was the answer to all the troubles of the past for humans. That it was a new humanity. The way you became a distinguished leader was that first of all you became a member of the Communist Youth, and you worked to become a functionary in the movement; and you became -- you spoke the right words, and you read the right books, and you went to the right meetings, and you had good grades, and eventually you became the leader. And then you got the goodies.

Q. WHAT WERE THEY?

A. The goodies? Oh, it became one of the great rewards for me to become a member of the railroad, which was built for the Pioneers. Pioneers were the equivalent of the Scouts, but they were the communist Boy Scouts. And there was A railroad built for the scouts where distinguished functionaries such as myself could play railroad people. We were running a railroad. It was fun. You had a uniform, and you got to take off the day from school every other week. And you had your papers, and it was very honorable thing.

Q. DID IT MAKE YOU FEEL ANY MORE COMFORTABLE IN HUNGARY?

A. Being a communist? Yes, it certainly did, because the communist rescued the Jews from the nazis, and the

communist suppressed the innate anti-Semitism of the Hungarians.

Q. AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

A. Why I turned against communism? Oh, I think it's just the process of growing and learning and reading and having some ideas of your own. I mean, it's an old saying that anyone under 20 who is not a communist should have his heart examined, you know. Anyone over 30 who is not a communist should have his head examined.

I read. I read a lot, and that's when you really begin to understand that there were other ways, and that the so-called inconsistencies and contradictions of capitalism were not so contradictory after all. And I began to feel that you live a lie, you know, those demonstrations every May Day and the plaquards and the little flags. And you can only repeat those slogans so many times.

When we were in the Soviet Union last month, our guide, who was a pretty outspoken young man, tells this funny story about the communist school: Little kids, okay, in Soviet Union. And the teacher comes, and the teacher teaches them to say the right things. And the teacher asks the group, "What's the best country in the world?" "The Soviet Union." Everybody. "Where is it kids have the best food in the world?" "Soviet Union." "Where do they have the most wonderful toys in the world?" "Soviet Union." And little

Tanya in the corner starts to cry. "What's the matter, Tanya?" "I want to go to the Soviet Union."

You can only believe a lie up to a point. And then either you completely lose your personal integrity or you start thinking, "Well, maybe I was wrong. Maybe there's another way."

Q. WHAT WERE SOME OF THE LIES AND SOME OF THE THINGS THAT YOU READ? YOU KNOW, WHAT WAS THE PROCESS?

A. Well, the basic concept of communism theory, whereby everybody works according to his abilities and everybody gets rewarded according to his needs is a wonderful myth. We know it. I didn't. I thought it was possible. I truly believed that it was possible to create a new human being, a new human being whose is essentially fearless and selfless and will do all the right things.

When I looked around me, I couldn't see any. People were essentially greedy and fearful and acted out of their own impulses just like any other place in the world. So how long can you say that this is the workers' paradise, when you find out by reading that there were other countries with higher standards of living? And how long can you say this is a wonderful freedom, when you know you cannot say what you think and when you see people disappearing and when you see that the functionaries get their rewards and the workers don't? 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's when you can fool yourself.

Q. SO YOU'VE LOOKED IN THE MIRROR, AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

A. Well, I can't say there was this great transformation for the gradual process. But by the time I entered the university at age 18, I knew pretty well that this was an act, that we were living a lie. And when the revolution came, I participated. And there was an opportunity at this point to get out, and I did.

Q. TELL ME ABOUT THE REVOLUTION. WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED, AND HOW DID YOU PARTICIPATE?

A. Well, the revolution started in 1956 as a result of a speech that Krushchev made at the party congress that revealed all the awful things that Stalin did, or at least a part of it, which was the first crack in the mirror, the first time that you could look in the mirror and know that this god was really a criminal. And once you start looking in the mirror, all the other shades fall away.

So beginning with the Krushchev speech, there was an increasingly agitated intellectual layer of population who wanted more truth. Newspapers, unauthorized newspapers appeared out of nowhere. The bills were posted on the walls with demands for more freedom. And I was at the University

of Budapest, freshman; and at the university, we started to have meetings and demonstrations asking for the right to organize ourselves, outside of the traditional Communist Youth movement.

I entered the university about mid September; and on October 23rd, we planned a demonstration. And the demonstration started out very good-natured, laughing, singing songs; and it grew in size. We moved to the parliament building which was the center of Hungary. By that time, a lot of the workers from the factories came also; and we demanded freedoms, and we demanded that a new government be put in. But everything was peaceful. The last thing anybody expected was fighting or shootings or revolution. And then all of a sudden there were some -- later we found out -- secret police shooting from the roof tops on the demonstrators. A few people got killed.

And then a few of the demonstrators went to the army barracks; and the Hungarian army essentially joined the demonstrators and opened up the weapons; and people started shooting at each other, and after that we took what we wanted. We took over all of Budapest. I had a nice little tommy gun. I was guarding the Minister of Interior, including some of the secretary employees that we locked up; and it was very romantic and very exciting, and we won for three days. And after the third day, the Russians came in

with tanks. And tommy guns don't work against tanks. So I felt like I'd better take off. And I ran.

Then a few days later, it became obvious, those of us who were in the revolution could end up in Siberia. And we heard that things were very chaotic at the border. So my sister and myself and her husband and our little son took off together. And we first got on a streetcar, and then we got on the train, and then we got on the bus, and then we got on a horse-drawn carriage, and then we walked, and then we crawled, and we got across.

Q. TO?

A. To Austria. We crossed at the bridge at (Andour), which was written up and destroyed a few hours after we got across.

Q. AND THEN WHAT?

A. And then I ended up in this camp that I told you about with a bunch of other fugitives, and there were some threats made by some of the other Hungarians for whatever reasons because they were Jewish. And we escaped from there into Vienna where I had my only treasure.

I had a \$5 bill which my mother saved during the War when it was illegal to have currency. And she sewed it into my sleeve as I was leaving. That's all. I had just \$5 and a German dictionary in this pocket and an English dictionary in this pocket.

And I used that \$5 to call my uncle in the United States, who wasn't really my uncle but he was my stepfather's brother, who didn't really know who I was; but he was a nice guy, and next day he was in Vienna. And he wasn't a rich man, but he and his wife came over and found us and bought me an overcoat and got me a hotel room and a good meal and my first Coca Cola.

And then we decided that unless we get my parents out I will never see them again. So we hired a person who made a living out of bringing people out. And the way it worked, you pay him so much down and then the rest is COD, you know. So he went into Hungary, and it was very dangerous by then. And we waited and waited, and he didn't show up. And we thought maybe he got killed or maybe they all got killed or might be he just took off with the money.

But no, three or four days after the date he was supposed to be back, he finally showed up. And everybody was kissing and hugging and crying, and my parents were there, and then he was to collect his remaining fee. He had, I think, \$700 due on delivery. But then he saw in my uncle's hotel room that he had a little transistor radio on the bed, and he never seen a transistor radio. So it's like the old story about getting Manhattan for \$200 in beads. He took the radio for my parents.

Q. HOW DID YOU FIND HIM?

A. I don't know. My uncle did.

Q. AND WHEN WAS THIS, DO YOU KNOW?

A. 1956.

Q. WHEN?

A. I would guess, this was in December. I was already, when this happened, was already in the States. My uncle stayed there, and he got them out.

Q. NOW YOU WENT TO THE STATES WHEN?

A. I came to the States on December 10th.

Q. IN?

A. 1956.

Q. HOW DID YOU GET IN THERE?

SP A. I came via (Hias), Jewish organization. (Hias) got us some sort of a charter flight which was a plane which had to stop every five hours to refuel. It was a long -- I think *SP* it like took thirty hours from Vienna to Camp (Kilmer), New York. And that was a little scary. But I had a bottle of rum. So it kept me company. And my sister and her family had already left the week before, so they waited for me in New York.

Q. WHO WAS IN NEW YORK OR WHEN DID YOU --?

A. (Hias) took us there. And then next day we came to California because that's where my uncle was.

Q. AND HE JOINED YOU LATER WITH YOUR MOTHER?

A. Yes.

Q. AND I WANT TO GO BACK A LITTLE BIT TO THE REVOLUTION BECAUSE I KNOW THAT WAS FOR YOU -- YOU WERE WHAT, 18 AT THE TIME?

A. Yes.

Q. CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE 18 IN THE MIDDLE OF A WAR WITH A TOMMY GUN?

A. It was exciting. It was very much an adventure. It was scary. It brought back a lot of memories of the War, but this time I had a gun. And I wasn't a little boy anymore. It was very confusing. There were people shooting at each other, and nobody could really figure out who was who and why. I had very ambivalent feelings about it because, after all, the Russians were our liberators; and some of these revolutionary characters reminded me very much of the Germans, so it was very confusing. It was a good time to get the hell out of there. I never looked back. That was a very easy decision.

Q. AND THEN WHEN YOU GOT TO AMERICA -- I'M CROSSING CONTINENTS NOW, SO IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD TO THE FIRST 18 YEARS THAT I'M NOT ASKING YOU THAT YOU FEEL WAS IMPORTANT TO THEM?

A. I think it's important to understand that America to us was always the land of dreams, the land of freedom, the land of wealth. It was almost a family myth. After all, my grandfather came here and supposedly got rich. Well, he

should have gotten rich except he went back, the damn romantic fool that he was.

So to come here was sort of the fulfillment of a mission of a providence. It was almost a natural thing to do. Even though I was alone and I was 18 and I didn't know anyone and I didn't have any money, it made sense. So it wasn't a terribly scary experience compared to all the prior scary years. It was more of an exhilarating coming-of-age type of an experience.

It was very different than what I expected. We expected the America of the Sinclair Louis years or the Chicago days, stockyards and the gangsters and the bullets flying around. I found a country very much to my liking immediately. I didn't have any of the regrets that a lot of immigrants have and the doubts. I hit the place running. I thought this was a candy store, from day one. It was very easy for me to become an American. I think I was an American when I was born. I was just born in the wrong place.

Q. WHAT WERE THE EARLY DAYS LIKE? WHAT DID YOU DO?

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A. In America? Well, (Hias), the Jewish agency, got us a little apartment in Hollywood; and we went shopping at the supermarket first night. And we bought some intriguing things. And we brought them home, and we ate them. Someone visited us, and he looked at the can that we used, and he said, "Oh, you already have a cat." It tasted all right. I

mean there was a fish on the can. The usual stories. I had a Murphy bed and I actually ended up in the wall. You know, I thought, "what a strange country."

(S/) (Hias) arranged job interviews for us second day.

I was working on the third day. I worked for engineering firm in Los Angeles that specialized in hiring immigrants who didn't know any better. Paid me a dollar an hour, which was Federal minimum wage. And I thought it was wonderful. I got my first pay check at the end of the week, and it as \$36. And I never saw so much money in my life. So I went to the movies, and I saw Elvis in Love Me Tender. And I thought that was very strange.

It was great. It was great. I never forget, we arrived into Hollywood, and we arrived in Los Angeles. We took a taxi into Hollywood. It was December; and it was sun shining, and the Christmas decorations were on. And the driver, when he heard we were from Hungary, he stopped and bought ice cream for everyone and wouldn't take money from us. Everything I heard was true. It as neat. It as neat.

Q. WHAT ELSE?

A. It's been neat ever since. No, it's been a great life.

Q. WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE ICE CREAM AND ELVIS?

A. I was brought up in the tradition that the way to escape poverty was education. So there was absolutely no

question as to what I should be doing. I should be going to school. After all, I was 18. So I enrolled the first week in Los Angeles State College.

I ended up living in Venice, which is a long ways from Los Angeles. I didn't have a car. I would get up at five o'clock in the morning, take the bus to L.A. State College, go to school for four hours, take the bus downtown where I worked for seven or eight hours, take the bus back to college for night classes, then take the bus back home, arrive around 11:00 or 12:00. So I didn't sleep very much. Whenever I slept was on the bus, but it was okay. I was going to school, and I was in America.

I remember my first exam where I spent at least 80 percent of the time translating the question with my first dictionary and 0 percent of the time in answering it. And I applied for scholarships, and I got one after six months. And I was off to Arizona, University of Arizona. They wanted a real live Hungarian. I was it. I arrived at Tucson, again without any money, without knowing a soul, and had scholarships and worked part time, and in two years, I graduated from college.

Q. WHAT DID YOU STUDY?

A. Electrical engineering. That was the thing to do. Sputnik, you remember. "If you want to make any money, George, you've got to become an engineer." Wrong. But I

worked in engineering for a couple years.

Q. WHERE? DOING WHAT?

A. Semiconductor business for Hughes Aircraft in Newport Beach. And then, strictly by chance, I came across my boss's paycheck stub. It was lying on the desk. I wasn't looking for it. But I discovered that he was only making \$2,000 a year more than I was and had been there for 26 years, and I'd be damned if I was going to do it.

So that day I quit, and then I asked, "Okay now, what do you have to do in this country to make some money?" And everybody said, "Well, you've got to go to Harvard Business School," so off I went. And I did that a couple years, and that was tough.

Q. WHY?

A. Well, Harvard Business School, they sort of tear you apart and put you back together the way they think you should be. And that's very hard, you know, when I got through college in two and a half years without studying. I never studied, and I had very good grades. And at Harvard Business School I worked very hard on my first term paper, and it came back with great big letters on the front saying "imbecile". You know, that gets your attention, you know? Sixty percent of the class is Phi Beta Kappa, so I had to work. But it's okay.

Q. WHEN WAS IT?

A. '61 through '63. And then I've been in the investment business ever since.

Q. WHAT HAPPENED AFTER HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL?

A. I joined Investment Management Company in New York. And then I moved with them to Los Angeles. I worked there for four years and back to New York. I started my own firm, and then I moved out here 20 years ago. And it's been wonderful.

Q. WHAT'S BEEN WONDERFUL.

A. Well, nobody's trying to kill me. I can generally say what's on my mind. I generally get to keep most of the rewards of my work. I made and brought up a couple of lovely girls who seem to like me. I like them. I have essentially all the comforts that I want. I'm doing work which I think is important. And I'm beginning to pay back some of the things I owe to a society that took me in and allowed me to become free. And I think that's wonderful. I mean both the ambition and ability to pay it back.

Q. AND YOU MENTIONED THAT YOU'RE DOING WORK THAT YOU THINK IS IMPORTANT. WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHAT IS SATISFYING FOR YOU?

A. Well, my business is venture capital. I back talented people who have a vision. I give them money. I give them my experience and advice. If we're successful, we create lots of jobs and value, products that and services

that people seem to want. I think that's very satisfying. I'm quite active in community affairs, you know. I'm chairman of KQUD which I think is a wonderful organization, which I think needs my kind of help at this point. And it's history. I give away a lot of money. I make a lot of money. That's very satisfying. So.

Q. WHAT ARE YOUR DAUGHTERS NAMES AND HOW OLD ARE THEY?

A. Gabriel Stephany is 23, and she's here looking for a job. She graduated last year and spent a year with a large advertising company and quit one year to the day, saying, "I want my freedom now. I put in my time." And the younger one is Susanna Georgette, who just graduated from college and is in the process of applying to law school.

Q. WHERE IS SHE?

A. She's living here with her mother, my ex-wife.

Q. GEORGE, WHEN YOU LOOK BACK, WHAT WAS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR YOUR LIFE?

A. No question about it, search for freedom. If you ever -- if anyone ever asks me to define myself, I think I am above all a free man, as free as you can be. And I think without any question the motivation for everything has been search for additional freedom, first for physical freedom and then for freedom from poverty and restrictions. And lately it's freedom from myself, from physical limits, emotional

limits. You know, trying to change myself. But that's the one theme.

Q. DO YOU THINK THE WAR HAD ANY INFLUENCE ON YOU?

A. The War, or specifically the Holocaust, is without question the single most important event of my life. And that's not just my opinion, but it's almost universally agreed by those people who know me well, you know, my friends, my family, my people who have been close to me.

Q. YOU SAID THAT THE KEY MOTIVATION FOR YOUR LIFE WAS "SEARCH FOR FREEDOM." AND THEN YOU SAID THAT INCLUDED "FREEDOM FROM MYSELF," AND THE WAY YOU DESCRIBED THAT WAS PHYSICAL LIMITS. WOULD YOU ELABORATE?

A. If you're not healthy, you're restricted. One of the great dreams that I had was many years ago -- childhood dream -- is to climb Mount Everest. Well, I tried it; and I got up halfway, but I couldn't make it all the way up because I wasn't in good enough physical shape.

Today I spend a lot of time trying to become in better physical shape or at least retain my physical abilities to do things. It's a fight for retaining freedom. It's one aspect of freedom, and similarly, we all have lots of inhibitions -- mental, emotional -- restrictions that we place on ourselves. And I spend a great deal of time trying to free myself from that. Psychoanalysis, reading, meditation music, are some of the tools for that.

Q. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ISSUES FOR YOU?

A. Currently or in the past?

Q. I MEANT BOTH.

A. Well, in the past, being Jewish was certain a big issue. Very ambivalent about it. On one hand, very, very proud of the achievements of the Jewish culture and on the other hand, very much ashamed because it was beaten into me that it was bad to be a Jew. Jews are by definition

^{SP} (yewptermench). There were lots of sexual issues. There were lots of marital problems. Issues between me and my daughters. Most of that has been resolved or partially resolved to my satisfaction.

Q. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THOSE?

A. Which one?

Q. WHERE YOU MENTIONED SEXUAL, MARRIAGE ISSUES --

(rest of question inaudible).

A. I don't know if I want to go into that.

Q. IS THERE ONE AREA THAT YOU WOULD BE?

A. It's pretty personal stuff. I don't feel the necessity for that. I am willing to say that they were probably related to Holocaust experiences, and that it took many years of struggling and psychotherapy to get to the point where I'm comfortable with them. And were the cause of tremendous conflict between myself and my ex-wife, who is not a Jew.

Incidentally, I have never dated a Jewish woman. And I can tell you this much, that it was a great revelation to me that I discovered a few years ago that I never dated a Jewish woman. And I think that I understand the reason for it now. I'm willing to tell you the reason for that. I think it was an unconscious desire on my part to protect my children, children to be. I did not want my children to be Jews because of the danger of being a Jew. And the best way to assure that, is not to have anything to do with Jewish women, right?

Looking back at it now, I think it was a mistake. I wish not so much that I married a Jewish woman, although I have thought about that, but I do wish that I had brought up my children in the Jewish faith in a Jewish tradition. And I regret that I didn't. And I think I understand why. But nevertheless it's one of the few regrets in my life.

Q. AND YOU DIDN'T BECAUSE OF YOUR WANTING TO PROTECT THEM?

A. That was one of the motivations. There were some others also. I mean, obviously, when you're married to a Catholic girl who wants to bring them up Catholic, there's an issue there. I also had some ideas which, looking back, were probably mistaken ideas. But I wanted them to have the freedom to choose. Looking back at it, I don't think you can have the freedom to choose unless you know something about

it. So, next time.

Q. GOING BACK TO THE HOLOCAUST, HOW DID IT INFLUENCE YOU?

A. Well, we'll never know because we don't have a George who was brought up without the Holocaust for comparison purposes; but those people who knew me, know me well, think that it was a very significant influence on my personality. We've already talked about some of the motivations of doing well because you have to prove you are good enough.

I was painfully shy for a long, long time. I was full of inferiority complexes which often manifested themselves in rather unfriendly demeanors. There was a lot of guilt. You've heard of survivor's guilt. Boy, is it ever real.

Q. IN WHAT WAY?

A. It overshadows all your life, you know. It's very difficult to have fun when you're feeling guilty for a living. My daughters for years told me, "Dad, you don't know how to have fun," and they were right. How can you have fun when you remember (Dechmel)? I think I was pretty tough on my daughters. I think that I somehow expected them to continue the warfare. And of course I didn't give them the reasons or the tools for it. There were a lot of things going on then.

But I've had some exposure to other survivors and children of survivors, and I happen to be both. And I know how difficult it is to have a close, loving family life when you're either. Now, imagine if you're both. Took me a long time to learn how to love. Or even accept the possibility of love. And I don't think that's innate. I think that was something that I learned between the ages of four and six. Those are impressionable years, you know.

Q. I NEED TO ASK YOU, YOU HAD CERTAIN SCARY TIMES DURING YOUR YOUTH, THE BAYONET AND THE TOMMY GUN AND THEN IN THE CAMP IN AUSTRIA?

A. And two more times.

Q. WHEN WERE THEY?

A. They were in Budapest. One was an airplane that flew over me and it was shooting its machine gun. And I remember seeing the impact, you know, in a row right above my head, passing. I was walking my mother on the street. And the other one was a bomb which fell next to me, about as far as you are, made a hole in the cement, obviously didn't go off. I remember standing there, and I remember reading USA on it.

Q. NO WONDER YOU WANTED TO COME. I'M SURE YOU'VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT, WHY YOU -- WHAT DO YOU THINK THE BIG PLAN IS?

A. I don't know. I don't spend a lot of time

wondering about that. I won't be the first one to come up with an answer to that point, and I don't think it's an important issue. What is important, however, is to do the best I can with what I have. Cause that's the reason I survived. I'm a very religious person, although much more so today than I ever thought I would be. But the purpose of life is very clear. It's very obvious to me. The purpose is to do the best you can with what you got. So don't worry about why you're alive. It works, believe me. Just do the best you can with what you got, and it all makes sense. At least so far it made sense.

Q. I THINK THAT'S ABOUT IT. I JUST WANTED TO QUESTION BRIEFLY ABOUT, AND YOU TOUCHED ON IT, GOD, OR A HIGHER POWER, OR, YOU KNOW, DO YOU THINK THERE IS SUCH A THING OR --

A. I'm tempted to answer with a quote from Young. "I don't think, I know."

Q. WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

A. This: That there is such a thing. I know there is. And 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?" And I've asked the question many times, and the wisest person I asked 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 a boat or when I'm at the top of a mountain, I know.

Q. IF SOMEBODY WERE TO SAY TO YOU, LIKE ME, FOR INSTANCE, WHO IS GEORGE SARLOW?

A. I already answered the question. He's a free man.

Q. I THINK THAT'S ALL I HAVE TO ASK.

A. Okay. Thank you.

Q. THANK YOU. UNLESS THERE'S ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU WERE THINKING.

A. No, it's been a thorough examination.

Q. "A" PLUS, PLUS.

A. Thank you. It was good for me. It sort of summarized things. Wish my daughters were here.

Q. YOU KNOW, YOU GET A COPY TO GIVE THEM AND TO SHOW THEM AS YOU WANT TO.

A. Well, maybe they'll be ready for it soon. I'm not sure they are yet. But it's getting closer.

Q. YOU KNOW, HAVING COME FROM YOUR GENES I ASSUME THAT THEY WILL ONE DAY ASK YOU TO GO THROUGH THIS EXAMINATION WITH THEM.

A. I hope so. At this point they're very scared. It's something that I try to understand; but I have difficulty understanding, how little interest they have, there in the past. But I think it's basically they're scared.

Q. COULD YOU ENUMERATE ON THAT?

A. When I try to talk to them about subjects that we discussed today, they don't really hear, which is very

disappointing, obviously.

Q. YOU KNOW, JUST FROM MY EXPERIENCE, A LOT OF TIMES CHILDREN OF SURVIVORS SAY THAT TO ME. THE SURVIVORS WILL SAY THE KIDS DON'T WANT TO HEAR, AND THE KIDS WILL SAY, "MY PARENTS NEVER TALK," AND I THINK A LOT OF IT IS ONE PROTECTING THE OTHERS. THE KIDS, WHEN THEY WERE VERY SMALL, GOT THE SENSE THAT THEY SHOULDN'T ASK. AND NOW THAT THEY'RE 23 AND 24, THEY'RE AFRAID TO HURT YOU. I HAVE TO THINK THERE'S A LOT OF FEAR JUST OUT IGNORANCE.

A. Well, maybe the tape will do it.

Q. I THINK IT MIGHT. IT WILL DEFINATELY OPEN IT FOR DISCUSSION. AND IT TAKES THE FEAR OUT OF ASKING, BECAUSE YOU HEAR SOME CONCRETE THINGS.

A. Unfortunately, there's so much that went on, you know, the divorce was difficult on them, they feel certainly loyalty to the other side. But the last word has not been written on.

Q. AND TIME HEALS. SOME TIMES I THINK ONE OF THE THINGS THAT YOU'RE REALLY GIFTED WITH PROBABLY IS PATIENCE AND A LONG VIEW AND YOU'RE SO YOUNG. YOU ARE SO YOUNG. THOSE KIDS WILL HAVE YOU FOR ANOTHER 40 YEARS.

A. I'll take that. That's a nice long life. I'm 52.

Q. YEAH.

A. Fifty-two is beyond the average life expectancies of Hungarians at the time I was born. I think it was like

48. But I guess that doesn't count, right? I'm American.

Q. BUT IF THE USA BOMB DIDN'T GET YOU, THE 48 AGE BRACKET COULDN'T DO IT.

A. That's a good one.

Q. I JUST FEEL YOU HAVE A LOT TO LOOK FORWARD TO, A LOT TO LOOK FORWARD TO. THE HEALING'S JUST BEGINNING FOR YOU.

A. I think you're right. I think it will be okay. I just spent a couple days last week with Susie. We went to Yosemite, we hiked, and we rode horses, and we told some tall tales. I haven't spent much time with her for three or four years, and I think it will be okay. We talked about this problem of me wanting them to have more of a sense of their histories and tradition. And she said, "Well, you know you always made me feel guilty that I don't have it. But you didn't bring me up to have it."

And I think that was point well taken. And I explained to them about why I didn't do it. The first time I told them these revelations about never dating a Jewish woman and why, and she was really surprised. And I told her, "Well, I regret I didn't bring you up that way. Don't feel guilty about it." I just wish I had. And she was very understanding at that point. She said, "Well, you didn't." Maybe it's not too late.

Q. YEAH, I THINK THE MORE YOU TRUST HER WITH YOUR

FEARS ABOUT WHY YOU DID CERTAIN THINGS OR WHY YOU DIDN'T DO CERTAIN THINGS, YOU KNOW, THOSE ARE GEMS TO CHILDREN. BECAUSE I NEVER KNEW WHY MY PARENTS WERE SO CRAZY. IT SCARED ME TO DEATH; AND NOW IT'S TAKEN THAT LONG, 34 YEARS REALLY, TO APPROACH THEM A LITTLE BIT. AND WHEN THEY TELL ME WHY THEY WERE SO CRAZY, I'M VERY GRATEFUL. THEY'RE STILL CRAZY, BUT IT'S NICE TO KNOW.

A. But it's okay to be crazy now.

Q. YEAH.

A. Okay. Well, maybe someday I'll spend a little time with you and you can meet them.

Q. I'D LOVE TO MEET THEM. I WOULD.

A. They're great girls.

Q. I'M SURE THEY ARE. I'M SURE THEY ARE. I'M SURE THEY HAVE A LOT OF YOUR GENES SO, YOU KNOW, EMOTIONALLY THEY MAY BE A LITTLE LATE TO BLOSSOM ALSO.

A. Good point. Hope it doesn't take them to 50.

Q. THEY HAVE TO LISTEN.

A. Okay, I'm pretty tired. Thank you.

Q. GEORGE, THANKS. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.