Paul Benko

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW II

PAUL BENKO

MARCH 20, 1991

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MARCH 20, 1991, Interview of PAUL BENKO

MS. BENDAYAN: I'm Sandra Bendayan. I am here interviewing Paul Benko for the Oral History Project of San Francisco.

Today is March 20th, and this is interview part two, and I'm here with the second Denise Leiteel.

And we left off with the year 1943. Your mother has been jailed, and just at the point where she is released from jail.

MR. BENKO: My mother was released from jail just early in the new year. We went to the station--by we I mean my Aunt Irma and my Uncle Eugene and myself.

And we and some other friends--and it was an incredibly joyous occasion, because I had not seen my mother since my birthday and she had been arrested on my birthday and this is January 1943 and--that we're talking about. And she--no actually that's a correction, that's wrong.

In 1943 I was 14 years old and this happened when I was 12. This happened when I was 12. So it was the year before my bar mitzvah.

Any how, she arrived and we were overjoyed and we had saved food various ways to greet her and to make a party for her when she arrived.

And she was very thin and very good spirits that she was released, and I was never told by her what happened but I know that she had been beaten severely, and my aunt told me that inadvertantly, but at least she was released.

And we--things during the war were going very badly at the time. We were in great shortage of food, increasing repression by the authorities. Jews could hold fewer and fewer jobs, could do fewer things.

The Jewish community I think I mentioned before organized in a sense of helping each other. A lot of people were thrown out of work. They tried to find other sources of income, other jobs, other kinds of businesses which is very very difficult in wartime, and the community literally taxed itself.

The community has no tax collection power though, so what came in was really generous, because everybody felt the squeeze due to the inflation during the war and so on.

And I know my father was involved with the Jewish community, involved with the tax planning and how much people should give and so on, and he wasn't much involved before the war. He did participate in this.

And there was also a great many rumors flying around about what was happening to our relatives. We had relatives in Czechoslavakia, we had relatives in Vienna, we had relatives in Budapest on my father's side of the family, mostly. My mother's side of the family was mostly in Transylvania.

I mentioned that Transylvania was divided into the northern part, that belonged to Hungary, and the southern part was retained by Rumania.

We lived just a few miles from the border. My uncle lived on the other side and occasionally we got smuggled

letters. There was no way of writing directly, certainly not about matters that--things that mattered to the family.

I'm not sure if I talked about my mother's smuggling attempt.

MS. BENDAYAN: It doesn't matter if it is or not.

MR. BENKO: During this period of time everybody was trying to guess whether it would be better for Jews to be on the Hungarian side or on the Rumanian side, and the general consensus of opinion was that the Hungarians were more civilized, that they would probably be less savage than the Rumanians who were considered quote less civilized; and ironically everybody was wrong.

The facts were that the degree of organized repression was much greater on the Hungarian side than on the Rumanian side, and the anti-Jewish laws were much more extensive. The enforcement was much more thorough.

The Rumanians, whatever else happened since, were rather easy-going lot. They were a place where things were very corrupt, but virtually nothing was impossible, including getting people out of the country.

I mean, you know, that even under the horrible Ceausescu, they sold people out but they didn't kill people. The Hungarians didn't sell them, they killed them and that's what happened.

So my mother whose older brother lived in town called (*JERISH), which is near a town called (*TURE-IS-DAW) in Rumania, I mean that's where they were born and raised, well he remained there to operate what had been the family store

and at one time they had a mill. He still lived there with his wife and two daughters.

And my mother made arrangements for a guy to guide the family across the border. There were people who were being smugled back and forth. It is not an unusual event in Europe for people to be smuggled and there are always the Gypsies, you know the Gypsies have crossed European borders without the benefit of passports or visas or other documentation for centuries.

Well, this man was not a Gypsy, but it turned out that this man was an informer and so my mother was arrested and accused and she was fined and all she was really trying to do was rescue her brother. And I didn't know anything about it.

Let me say that as the war starts, people begin to be very wary in police states about how much information you give to other people, because if they are arrested they all know they are going to be tortured sooner or later and they are all going to be, and so there is a limited amount of information given because you can't give them information that you don't have.

So I really didn't even know that my mother had been arrested and I was living with my father at the time, I think I told you that when the Hungarians started I moved to my father's house and then I went to school one day and one of my classmates taunted me that my mother was a felon and we got in the usual fight and got in front of the principal and all that as you might expect, and then I thought that he was lying and he was just bating me, and it turned out that it

was true. She was not convicted as a felon; for some misdemeanor. She paid a fine. But we were terrified because during wartime any minor offense could lead to incarceration and so on.

MS. BENDAYAN: What was the charge that she was charged with?

MR. BENKO: Smuggling. Smuggling. And I think the lawyer managed to convince them that they were smuggling some goods and not the rest, but they weren't goods involved and I I sort of came at my mother very righteously, you know as twelve year olds are apt to be, and then she told me. I was sad and very ashamed that I did that.

Our life during this years as I mentioned became increasingly restricted. At this time I was going to a Catholic school run by the (*PEER-IST) order, I think I mentioned it in the other tape, and half the faculty was pro-Nazi. Younger priests were pro-Nazi and the older priests tended to be anti-Nazi and the principal was definitely anti-Nazi.

In 1943 was our worst year in the sense that we went for a year without meat from *(PESA to PESA) I remember my grandmother saved this breast of a duck. I mean it hung dried in the corner wrapped in something and she used to make these fake meats and fake things and padded on it was kind of a fake hamburger mounted on the breast of this duck, which got served and reserved and reserved.

And all the coffee was always used many times. And part of the reason we survived was because my father was wise

enough to buy cigarettes, because he had gone through the first World War. And after the First World War when all currency blew up, you could go out in the countryside with cigarettes and buy all that you wanted.

As I said from 1943 was the worst, and by end of 1943, by early 1944 every aspect of the war made its mark on us. There were bombings. There were constant overflights. The supplies to the partisans in Yugoslavia flights went through Rumania.

There were sometimes just single or a couple of planes going through, and I don't know what their reconnaissance missions or whatever, and then bombing started seriously.

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They bombed the railway station and they bombed other industrial sites, and the bombing by and large was confined to the industrial district. It was not in the populated district.

And we listened to the radio in Europe. Most Americans don't know, but they used to announce the bombing runs in advance. They used to say if you can leave the following towns, they are on the scorecard. We would say Well, how can you leave? But some people could leave. We couldn't leave. But it was announced.

MS. BENDAYAN: How could these people leave? Did they have relatives?

MR. BENKO: If they went to the countryside to relatives, and European visits to relatives are not specific affairs. You know people come and stay a while and they move on. It is very much more of an easy-going life. And in

country homes, especially if it is more like a compound rather than one little house, it is not unusual for people to come and so on. Some people had hard times in the 30's and another family would move in and they would be around a while. It didn't happen to us, but it happened to a lot of people I knew, so it wasn't so unusual for them to go.

The difficulty was to get a permit to leave. Now, if you were not Jewish, it was no problem. If you were Jewish, that was another problem. Then you had to find a friendly policeman who would recommend you or what really it boiled down to is you find the guy who accepts the bribe, and there is always a guy who accepts the bribe.

Eastern Europeans take very cynical views of government, because most of the government that they're exposed to is totally, utterly corrupt.

Everything goes by bribes. It goes by family relationships. It goes by influence. And there is no such thing as hard and fast rules.

They do have lawyers, but the lawyer's power depends not only on the lawyer's skill, but the lawyer's connections. So it's a very, very different aspect of government that you see.

If you have a store, you will need a permit for every time you turn around. And the permit may or may not be granted. And they are very, very arbitrary. And the store can be closed because you didn't sweep your front porch a couple of times. Every storekeeper is responsible for cleaning in front of their stores. There is no street

sweeping per se of the whole sidewalk. And if they don't, then the policeman can issue a ticket, and if they get--or the policeman can close it.

Now, you have to appeal and go to court to get that closing off, so it is a situation that is fraught with--it is an invitation to bribery and corruption.

MS. BENDAYAN: Is this some of the differences between Hungary and Rumania?

MR. BENKO: No, they both do it. The Rumanians do it openly, the Hungarians do it hiddenly.

MS. BENDAYAN: Well, you were saying how Rumanians--

MR. BENKO: But the Rumanians in all my experience were--they made life possible, even if there was an impossible rule they made life possible.

The Hungarians would pass an impossible rule and even if it tripped them, it worked against them, they would enforce it. There were idiotic rules. For example, under the Nazis you weren't supposed to use certain medicines. And a good doctor--and they would audit the prescriptions--would prescribe, you know, chamomile tea for infections and all that. Well, chamomile tea is wonderful to put you to sleep, make you feel better and all this, but if you have a serious infection and you expect chamomile tea--you better take up residence in a good hospital where they can give you emergency care fast.

So what the physicians would do is write out a prescription for two things, one a prescription for the real drug which you would take to a pharmacy that they dealt with

confidentiality, and another prescription, a front pharmacy which dealt in these fake Nazi drugs and so that there was a record that he visited, he treated, he wrote a prescription, and that they filled them, but the real thing went on through the other drug store.

This kind of subterfuge went on at every level. People were given a certain amount of ration of food, but they couldn't possibly live on the ration of food and so the black market was in existence.

I was utterly surprised when I came to New York in 1945 and there were just the last ends, I guess rationing really went out but there were some few restrictions and people described their hardships over here, and it was amusing to see what they called a hardship. I mean their ration of butter was ten times ours and their rations of meat were ridiculously high, and you know. . .

MS. BENDAYAN: Do you remember what your rations were?

MR. BENKO: No, I don't remember now but I remember at one time that we got a chunk of butter that was equivalent to about an eighth of a pound for two weeks; but most of the time the butter wasn't there. The failure of the rationing system is the moment they gave you the ration, the commodity disappeared. And if you ever read The Good Soldier (*SWIKE) there is a wonderful story in Good Soldier (*SWIKE) where they arrived at an Italian train station, when it was--what they were told they were going to get a ration of Swiss cheese, and instead of it they got a propaganda booklet. Well that is about it. That characterizes the distribution

system.

The whole wartime distribution system existed mainly by people knowing each other and long established relationships, not by any proper governmental organization.

Well, in the beginning of the war we had all bought as much food as we possibly can, canned food of various kinds and dried food, and we couldn't have lived on the rations ever. There was still a lot of food left when we were deported.

Well, in the spring of 1944, I was still, I was now in the fifth year of gymnasium and I was going to the Catholic school. The process which I described of things getting rougher on Jews increases, there. There anti-Jewish movies--for example there is a famous movie called (*JOOD-SOOS) which was a famous German anti-Jewish propaganda movie and many others are going on. I was never quite fully accepted by my playmates in the Catholic school, because I did come in you know unusual in the middle of the fall when I first went there, and you know half the teachers were very nice and the other half were very, very rough and very discriminatory.

But the, it's not quite as obvious as you might seem, because the classrooms in Europe are so rigidly run, there is relatively little time for kids to interact. They have the break between classes. The morning break was let's say between 10:00 and 10:15, and so there is the school is over at 1:00 o'clock and then you go home latest at 2:00 o'clock, then you eat lunch at home. So there wasn't a great deal of

interaction in school, except incidental.

There was no free time, and the formality of the classroom is such--but around Christmas time I remember the Christmas of 1943, I was very touched because there was a class Christmas party in school. It is the first party I think that we had. The previous Christmas we didn't have a party. And it was the only time at that Christmas party that I felt I was a member of the class and everybody was friendly and very pleasant and there wasn't this exclusion in any way. But after Christmas things went back to the previous way.

There were, you know, pick up soccer games for example in the neighborhood, kids that I had played with for years; and I wasn't invited any more. There was a shunning on the streets.

Or if we would meet in the store or we were all distant and this was also--we started--wearing yellow armbands or stars started in '42. Actually, they first--we had to wear yellow armbands on Saturdays and during the military training period. The kids go to school six days a week there, not five, so on Saturday was the premilitary training and so other kids went on premilitary training. We who were regarded politically unreliable. They didn't call us that, but anyhow they had some other term for us. We were supposed to do useful work like sweeping the hallways and such. We weren't supposed to be in the classroom because they were warm, the hallway was cold.

And then on break we would go to the classrooms, but we had to wear the yellow armband. And wearing the yellow

armband immediately set you aside, even people who knew you all the time--that experiment, that was done at Stanford really this was the beginning of that, it does work.

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So later on the yellow armband during the day was replaced with a yellow star for everybody and then came the restricted hours and then you couldn't go to certain places and mostly the restrictions on the hours made very difficult to get food, because all food sources involved foodlines and you couldn't be caught out.

Previously what we would do was go to--like to people--like my father knew a baker, in fact he owned part of a bakery and then we would go to this bakery and we could get some extra bread.

And I would wear a big rain coat and have straps under the raincoat and I would go with a maid, but the maid wouldn't carry the bread, because then they would see and they ask her do you have the tickets for that bread and so on, but they probably wouldn't examine me.

So first time--later on we had no maid, I went by myself. And we, these are large loaves of bread, they are 10, 15 pound loaves of bread, and we just make straps and they held it under my big rubber rain coat and smuggled it in.

Well, if you have a curfew of 7:00 o'clock you can't do that, so we would go by back roads sometimes and still get it.

MS. BENDAYAN: How did this fit in with the rationing system though?

MR. BENKO: It didn't. It didn't. This is bread that was unrationed.

In other words, what bakers do is that they have an allotment based on the number of coupons they collect. Then they go to Gypsies and they buy the Gypsies' coupons because Gypsies not only can't read the coupons, but they don't deal with the coupons. So they get extra flour and then they skim some off.

So in all black markets what people do is they skim and with that skim they bake bread and that skim is ten times the bread or a hundred times the price of the other bread and you pay the price and you get the bread. It's very difficult. And you know part of it was that the Jewish community collected money so poor Jews could also get bread.

MS. BENDAYAN: Were you getting official ration cards at the time at all?

MR. BENKO: Yes--no, we didn't get ration cards, we got ration sheets by commodities. That was one of the other stupid things that you would have one for potatoes, one for bread, one for this and one for meat and that and they would say Oh, this is good for so many times but everybody knew unless you knew the butcher, you would only smell meat, you wouldn't get any meat.

And there were also a great many problems because some people would only get kosher meat, so how can you get kosher meat--and the kosher meat was very restricted, so there were a great many difficulties.

There were a great many difficulties with the Jewish

hospital running. There was a Jewish hospital in my hometown and the Jewish hospital was built because of the questionable care in the other hospital and so--and there were a lot of non-Jews who preferred to go to the Jewish hospital because they knew that one was watched, but under the, in the anti-Jewish laws they couldn't, that was one of the interesting things is that people complained that they couldn't go where they wanted to, but the political repression was such that they didn't respond to that.

So, in as I mentioned 1944, we also--I should tell you we had a radio, it was a Phillips radio which my father bought at the beginning of the war, which was the best radio of its kind, and it had a very advanced design. I mean we listened to Yokohama symphonies all the time on a short wave every Sunday. I remember they used to have a concert.

And we could listen to other stations. We certainly heard the British Broadcasting System, the British and the Voice of America Broadcasts through the British stations, so we got updates on what was happening in the war. You know the headlines would say one thing and we knew what was coming through there.

And we would listen and you know hidden in a room and put pillows around the radio so people couldn't hear.

They unfortunally had a very recognizable call signal. It was the opening of the Fifth Simphony, that Ta Ta Ta Dum, and that goes through walls like mad. Somebody who is a little security sensitive might have told them use Over the Rainbow or something for a theme song.

But we did hear, and I don't know if I told you about that incident. I had a German teacher at this Catholic school and he couldn't find the wave length of the station so he sent me to his room to get something and he said By the way, I've been trying to listen to Radio London. He says Where do you get it? Sometimes they would move the wave length because they jammed too much, and Where do you get it. I said I don't know anything about Radio London.

He said I know you don't know anything about Radio London. I have a book in my room and my radio is on and you go bring me my book and if I should get Radio London after you are done, I won't be mad.

So I went to his room and I put it on the station and I went away, so that way there are no witnesses that I know where Radio London is.

So well in the spring of 1944 things were with getting bad. We knew that Stalingrad had not fallen and that the German Army around Stalingrad, we knew that by then and we also knew that the Russions were counter attacking. We knew from the paper we'd got, it's called a (*SWEITZER ILLUSTRATE) and it was very crudely censored. I don't know if I mentioned this before,

The censoring--really the censorship is enormously thorough, in terms of items, but it's very clumsy. So for example they claim they sunk--the Royal Oak was a famous war ship, British war ship; they sunk it three times. So the coordination in the propaganda divisions wasn't too good.

So we knew by then that somebody was lying, and there

used to be a joke about the war in Africa which says What is the difference between a clock and Rummell? The clock goes forward and says tick tock, and Rummell goes backward and it says tactic.

Any how, this is sort of the humor of the gallows that was coming out.

But we could still listen to the radio and hear what was going. We knew things were going badly on the Russian front, *(RUSTOFF) was another place where the Russians were--the Germans were stopped.

We noticed that the German commanders were replaced, and we were smart enough to know that it wasn't old age that you replace commanders for and they always praise them, but nevertheless they were removed.

The rationing increased. The number of Germans wounded in town increased. The Germans had often kept the wounded in occupied countries rather than bringing them back to Germany to break the morale. Of course it broke the morale of the Hungarians seeing--and there was a teaching hospital in my hometown that's surrounded by a high iron picket fence which is a traditional high kind of fence of the Austro-Hungarians, and they put sheets around this fence so you couldn't see in through this fence and all. And naturally as kids are apt to do, if there is a fence and it has got posts on it, first thing you cover something up the kids climb up and take a look and that is when we looked in that is the first time we saw people without arms and legs and then we realized that this was a quadraplegic/amputee

hospital.

In '44 my father was getting very worried because there was literally less and less for him to do. The factory designated him as an economically important Jew. The Germans had a description called (*VERBOTIN LUDEN) and the Hungarians followed the same script and he had been involved in mostly buying supplies overseas. He was involved in the import and export aspect of the factory before the war and he had to buy not only leather, this was a shoe and leather factory, he not only had to buy shoe and leather, but the materials for tanning.

Now leather tanning materials come or came in the '30's from Argentina. There is a tree called the *(KREE-BRAU-YO) tree, whose bark is very rich in tannin and that's what they use for making it.

And then the other kind of tanning which is with chromium is another kind, but it is not useable for all purposes. It is a *(KREE-BRAU-YO) that you need.

8 So the Germans found a brush in North Africa that was supposed to replace this *(KREE-BRAU-YO) which none of it could get in Europe because of the Allied blockade.

So, my father came home one day and announced that he had concluded his most significant business deal in his entire lifetime. I mean before he had bought maybe a ship load of something or other, but this was an entire convoy of small boats. But nevertheless in terms of amount, it was a huge amount of money, and this was going to come from North Africa to Southern Italy and he said laughingly and I won't

see a drop of it.

I said What do you mean? He says--oh, I am sure he didn't tell me why, but he was absolutely sure that after concluding this deal they are going to let him sail all the way to Italy because that way they will use up the fuel and then they will bomb it in the Italian harbor and that is exactly what happened.

Well, before that, the chief engineer of the factory had been sent to the Russian front for picking mines. The chief engineer of the factories was Jewish and they used to pick up people in random raids, pick them up and ship them off to pick mines in front of troups.

But, he was captured by the Russians early and we suspect that that is why when the Allied raids came, they didn't bomb any empty warehouses, they only bombed the full ones. And they didn't bomb the unused parts of the factory, they only bombed the used parts of the factory. So they were informed, and I don't know whether by these people, what to lookout for.

I don't know whether it was serendipity or not, but they waited and--the Allies waited and the boats came from Africa, went to Italy, southern Italy and they bombed the ships in the harbor. And of course the ships sank. The shrub could not be recovered because the seawater leeched out all the materials that are used for tanning.

And in the spring of 1944, the factory had a big celebration for "old time employees" and one of those people honored was my father. And we went to this big celebration

and there were marches and speeches and all that and about maybe three weeks later he came home ashen faced that day and said I don't have a job anymore. So I think he was protected by one of the people in the factory who was now running the factory on behalf of the government and I think the pressure came on. The guy didn't want to protect him any more or couldn't take the chance and so said we're going to be deported.

MS. BENDAYAN: Was that automatic that one was deported?

MR. BENKO: Yes.

I should tell you that in the summer of 1944, early spring of 1944, the population of *(CO-LUGE) was herded--not early spring, in the early summer, very early, summer--well May, end of April, May, they herded the population of *(CO-LUGE) into the brick factory. There is a brick factory in *(CO-LUGE) and the brick factory has a lot of sheds where bricks are out to dry, so these are open sheds and they are open or four sheds--all they have is a cover on top and this was a huge yard, but Jews got notices that whatever you can carry, you can carry. And that was literally enforced. That is you could not carry somebody else's. A child had to carry its own. An old woman had to carry her own. And in some cases they had to walk a long distance just to get to the truck or bus or not carriage but one of these wagons to carry their stuff. It was unspeakable cruelty. And and nobody protested. Nobody raised a finger. No policeman, no man, woman or child. As soon as the announcement and those

announcement came, people started appearing at our door and say Why don't you give me your books or your library? You won't have any use for it.

MS. BENDAYAN: What was the punishment for not carrying your own wares or breaking those rules?

MR. BENKO: They just take it away. They just literally take it away and throw it away. Right on the spot.

So you know if you picked up somebody else's, they say give it back.

And we went later and the only thing that my father could arrange that a guy in a horse driven carriage came--it was one of these open things, so my grandmother carried it only from our door to the carriage, and it was going down and she carried her things.

And when my father got fired, he had a nervous breakdown. He couldn't function. And so I started organizing the house and I got--we had certain kinds of warm clothing and we had certain kinds boots. We had boots with hobnails on it, because it saves wearing on the sole and we had good warm clothing, and I even got--my father's father was once in the Austro-Hungarian Navy and he had a sailor's knife, but a small version of a sailor's knife. It is called a *(BRITOLLA). And I carried that knife with me and it was wonderful because eventually I sold it for two loaves of bread.

We--you know I tried to figure out, was it you carry--and people do become irrational. My grandmother wanted to carry all her pictures.

Well, you know, there is no point in taking pictures and she wanted to carry the linen she had embroidered as a young woman.

And you know instead we needed blankets and we needed clothes that would last and choose the best shoes and scuff them up so they won't look new. We always did that during the war, because if German soldiers walk by and see a new pair of shoes "I want that" and that is it.

MS. BENDAYAN: So the whole burden is on you now.

MR. BENKO: Yes.

And I essentially organized that. There were some people who helped us who brought food to the house. They didn't say anything. They just came, we opened the door, they hand something in our hand and they would go away. One of them was my father's girlfriend. One of them was a woman who had worked for him when he was head of the correspondence section, and one other old lady who was a family friend.

They came. The bell would ring, we would open the door. They just hand it to us and they run away.

The shocking thing was that neighbors who--people that we knew, you know whose weddings and funerals we were at and whom we thought of as friends and we would have Sunday afternoon get togethers, would come and say Why don't you give me your desk? You know you will never need that credenza. I like those books. How about that painting? And I couldn't believe none of them ever said--oh, there wasn't a compassionate word on their lips. They all turned the other way.

We lived in an apartment house that's L-shaped and we lived on the second floor in the corner apartment where the small and long legs of the L meet, and there was a walkway both ways and people used to be in this courtyard and there was a garden behind this and they usually were people out there and the police came and every door was closed, every window was shuttered, every curtain was down, and there was a local policeman and a *(JARDARM), Hungarian *(JARDARM) and they took us to the house of detention. By the time we were arrested most, not most but all of the people in the brick factory had already been sent, so this was after they had left that we were arrested and sent.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did you know about where they were going and what the conditions were? The ones in the brick factory, what had you known?

MR. BENKO: We heard rumors about concentration camps before. We knew--we had some relatives from Czechoslavakia who were sent to Theresienstadt. We went for a period of time--we went every day to the train station because we had heard that there were train loads of Jews who were trying to get out of Czechoslavakia and Poland, and we didn't know when they would come, so we would stay there day after day, twenty-four hour days. They would shift--people in shifts would wait by and if the train arrived and we would look around and if they are refugee Jews in it they got the food and bedding. Because of--some them ran, literally caught the train with the clothes on their backs. But we never found our relatives.

We had one communication that they were coming through and we went for about two or three weeks.

MS. BENDAYAN: Were you harassed by the government officials for going to train stations?

MR. BENKO: No, they just looked askance but they didn't interfere too much there. They just said Well, what are you? Why do you want to do that? And that sort. But then they would go away. They didn't make a big issue out of it.

But we knew that--we had heard about the concentration camps. We had heard rumors about gassing. We wouldn't believe it. We didn't want to believe it.

We had heard about pogroms. There was a pogrom in Rumania a couple of years before, when the Iron Guard which was a Rumania Nazi party took over. They were pogroms in Rumania and these were described by (*SHY-ER-WER) in his book by the way, and then they ran amok and they hung Jews on meat hooks in the slaughter house in Bucharest. But after that things subsided.

We did not get a sense though that anybody was concerned in our area with what happened to us. And in a way I think it is because of that that at the end of the war I wasn't homesick, and I lost the sense of homesickness until years later I lived in Berkeley and then I enlisted in the army and when I was in the army, the army was bussing us across the Bay Bridge and I looked over and I discovered that I was homesick. And I can't say that I was home--I was

homesick for friends. I was homesick for the feeling of the sense of belonging, but I was not homesick for my hometown.

MS. BENDAYAN: I can see why.

MR. BENKO: Well, we went to this house of detention and there are a number of families there, it was very polyglot.

One was a chemical engineer from the factory of my father, his name was Gruenwald and his daughter's name was Betty and she was my first girlfriend and she is--the--in the house of detention men and women were separated. This house of detention is like a county jail where they hold people before trial.

And we flooded their facilities--there were maybe 20 families all together, and among these were--was one guy who was a waiter who was not married and he had been a waiter and he had been a boxer, he had done various things in his life which is very atypical to the other kind of life that we had and this guy was the great organizer. He knew how to deal with jailkeepers. He knew how you traded. He knew how if you wanted for example some water and you didn't have water, well a naive person would say that I have some money, get me some water and then they would hand the money over to get the water. He says uh-huh. What you do is you get the water first, then you hand the money over.

And there were all kinds of little tricks, how to make comfortable beds when there is no bed. How to operate in the underworld, in other words.

MS. BENDAYAN: Collaborate more on those things?

MR. BENKO: He would show us how to make beds with very little material.

He would show us how--when--eventually they took our socks away when we were in the camps, how to fold a sock so it doesn't rub your foot. There is an art to folding it up and over so that when you walk you don't get a bad blister. And he would show us how to disable a cable or a wire so that you don't get electricuted. You look for insulators of a proper kind.

He--I don't remember other tricks now, but there were parts of things of how a convict behaves.

One of the things you learn is never to blab or to talk and you never give more information than is asked for. You learn that if you want something, where it is available, not by asking the head of whatever but by somebody you--who you have some contact with.

And we learned to write very small and conserve paper and to conceal pencils and things of this sort which you know we never thought that anybody would ever take away.

And so in those days--the other thing is that he just made jokes and these are people who had never been near a jail in their lives, they had never been in these and they were in tragic states because they had lost the power to care for their families. The men were just devastated. The women were in shock and very fearful, but the functioning of men was more impaired.

I don't know whether women dealt with their fears more before than the men did or not. It could be that they were

more familiar with fear and with a lack of power over their situation. But the men who prided themselves in being good providers and makers of home and reliable people--

MS. BENDAYAN: And protectors.

MR. BENKO: Yes. Not--when they couldn't furnish food for their families, they felt personally devastated regardless of what the conditions were. That was a devastating line.

MS. BENDAYAN: How did your father feel through all that--

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MR. BENKO: Very badly, very badly.

MS. BENDAYAN: --to the detention center?

MR. BENKO: Yes, we got there but he wasn't doing very well.

And a part of it that my father's skill in life was he was a very good advance planner. His description what would happen after the war turned out--he didn't live to see it, but it turned out to be remarkably accurate.

And, ironically, I have a relative who now still lives--now he's 93, he lives in Palm Springs. He's a retired barber for the Paramount Studios and he has been there for many years. He came to visit us just around the time the depression started before--I'm sorry, before the crash of the market. He was visiting and at dinner my father said he says Look, you'd better save your money put your money whatever it is because that market is going to crash. And he was very accurate. He was very surprised. He brought me my baby clothes so--my mother was pregnant so it was '29. And I

think my father's tendency to look far into the future worked against him. And it works against all adults in situations like this, against their survival because the projection is darker and the darker projection destroys hope and destroying hope is counter to survival. So I think that--

MS. BENDAYAN: He saw a negative.

MR. BENKO: He saw there was no way out of this he couldn't see.

In a long-term sense he was sure the Allies were going to win. He said it is only a matter of time. But it didn't help boost him enough to survive.

Well, he was born in 1896 so in, he was 49 in '45 when he died. So he was 48 years old when he went in the camps.

But I was fortunate in that he and I were together and my grandmother was in on the women's side when we were here. My mother had already been deported because you know I told you they were divorced so my mother had been deported by the time we went to the camps.

MS. BENDAYAN: When was she deported?

MR. BENKO: A month, six weeks before we were.

MS. BENDAYAN: Do you know what the situation was--

MR. BENKO: No.

MS. BENDAYAN: --when she got deported?

MR. BENKO: No. All the Jews except those that were industrially excused. . .

MS. BENDAYAN: She didn't have an excuse?

MR. BENKO: No, no. Very few did.

MS. BENDAYAN: Do you know where she was deported to?

MR. BENKO: Oh yes. Yes, well, I will come to that when I--we were in this house of detention and we were beginning to wonder what will happen to us, whether we will go to Hungarian camp or a German camp or such. We were there for about two weeks, two or three weeks or so and they suddenly came one day and said--and the food wasn't bad and we were not starved there, it wasn't great but there was adequate amount of food--and told us to get--pack up all of our belongings and we were taken and placed on a--in a boxcar, in a train. We were put on the train and just one boxcar full of people and this time they were probably about maybe 65, 70 people in one European boxcar. That's pretty tight. But that's the most luxurious boxcar ride I ever had. After that they were much more crowded.

We were sent from there and we stopped in Budapest. Budapest, now this is 1944, in Budapest we were taken off--again taken to the house of detention. It is called a (*TO-LONS). And at the house of detention we were, we were visited by the, by a representative of the joint group and this was from him we heard rumors about a Swedish guy who was giving passports all over and I didn't believe it. I thought--during the war there are all kinds of rumors about you know Messiahs from the sky and paratroopers that liberated all the Jews and all of these and they are wishful thinking. It helps to keep up the spirits because you retell the story and you feel a little better; but I didn't believe it existed. And, of course that was the famous Swedish businessman--

MS. BENDAYAN: Wallenburg.

MR. BENKO: Wallenburg, right. And it was Wallenburg.

Well, the man from Joint tried to get us food, he tried to get us medicine. He tried to find reasons for us not to be deported. He tried to interview some health--if we had some other passports, if we had access to visas, every kind of possible excuse. He tried his very best.

And then we said goodbye to him. We were placed on a train and moved to northeastern Hungary to a little town called (*SOOM-MAT-FALL-VA), that there is another town that sounds like it, but (*SOOM-MA-TAI) is a big city and this is just a little town that had a textile mill in it and we were--the camps were located in these abandoned textile mills. The textile mills are built with the sloping roof and then a very sharp roof. It's like the Bow house version of factories, where there are skylights.

Well, these were set up and next to our group was a fence and on the other side of it were Yugoslavian partisan families that were deported, I mean men, women and children on the other side of this fence. The Jews were on this side and the partisans were on the other side. We found this out--let me say that when we got there there were a whole bunch of other people there also, so they were all Jews and so it was obviously a collecting point, but the camp was guarded by Hungarians at that time and so we thought this was a good sign maybe we are in a Hungarian camp, maybe we'll stay there.

Well, the set up there was actually the same as the

German concentration camps in the sense that the three tiered bunks were--but men and women were together, men and women were not separated at this time and we were involved in work there and we unloaded trains and did all kinds of work and then we sabotage the train. Well what we did, we were supposed to carry sacks of flour. A sack of flour is 80 kilograms, that's 196 pounds. And so anybody you know that was male that could walk was recruited for this and we did it and then we took razor blades and we would pick up the sack and make a cut in the bottom and then carry it and as we carried it pretty soon we were walking in flour. And well they took a dim view of this and made an example of us, tied us up and hung us by the arms and what not and we all passed out.

Of course it didn't change anything, but we did other kinds of things afterwards. We--so, in this place our spirits were still good and the exercise, the sabotage exercise certainly lifted our spirits.

And I mentioned the Yugoslavs because you know in a camp giving food is giving life and it becomes abundantly clear pretty soon after you get there and these people--there was somebody in the crowd and I don't know who spoke some Serbian or some Slavic language, we found out that these guys were Serbians and they found out who we were. They had much more supply--they were agricultural workers I guess and they had a big bread baking facility and they would go and they would throw bread over the fence, well, you know for going near the fence you can be shot for throwing something over

the fence. You expected machine guns to open up, but they sit there and wait until the guard looks the other way and shoom, a loaf would come throwing over and people shared the loaves. That was another thing, this was not during the harder time, during the harder time that probably wouldn't have happened, but we have to remember all of it. And they did share loaves of bread. We would cut one loaf into three pieces so three families would get bread.

Then I remember having a nightmare one day that the Germans are taking over and sure as hell the next morning there were SS guards all around.

MS. BENDAYAN: How was your father during all this?

MR. BENKO: He was doing much better by this time. I think he had adapted better. He--the exercise helped. He--we were more organized in the sense that we would help people who needed help and there were some things to do and there was work to do instead of just sitting around and waiting for something to happen.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did he carry the sacks also?

MR. BENKO: Yes, he did. It was very, very hard but he did carry them. And my father was a slight person and he--well, I am the tallest. He was probably maybe 5'1" and he was more slender in build than I, and I am sure it was very, very hard for him. I was much smaller at the time too and grew up a lot after the war.

MS. BENDAYAN: You must have been about 14?

MR. BENKO: This is 1944, I was 15. This is just before I--my birthday is in August so this is in June, June

of 1945--1944. We had heard the invasion had happened and the official word was they were all drowned instantly and we knew yes next report we're going to hear is that they are drowning them around Paris. You know we had our own jokes.

MS. BENDAYAN: Do you remember what your food rations were? It was under the Hungarians.

MR. BENKO: Under the Hungarians, yes, we had coffee and bread in the morning. We had real heavy stew usually for lunch and we got bread and some cold cut or something at night. I mean they weren't generous but a hell of a lot more than what they were under the Germans. We never had that dried vegetable soup that the Germans gave us.

So when the SS took over, they came and they were guards on the roofs and there were guards all over and the--they fired at the camp nearby because somebody opened the door or something, so we knew that they were trigger happy and touchy. And then they herded us in the cattle cars. They told us to pick up our belongings and they were extremely rough, extremely bruital. People were getting beaten bloody at any opportunity. And we got in the cattle cars and they, we were really packed in probably eighty or more in one cattle car and it was very very difficult and then we started the journey to Auschwitz. We went--I think it was three days from there to Auschwitz, it is not a great distance, but these are not high priority trains in the wartime, in--we stopped in Vienna and I know it is Vienna because my father had been in Vienna. My grandmother was born in Vienna and my father had been in Vienna many times.

So we lifted him up and he looked out the barred window. He knew we were--he knew which train station we were and in Vienna the train stopped, they cracked the doors open. The guards were gone and this guy I mentioned to you, the ex-waiter, the guy who had been a boxer, the guy who had been--there was he and there was another guy who had also been a waiter and been around and he said--he and the other guy said to me Let's run.

We looked and we looked and the guards were all assembled on the other side and the door was cracked and I knew I couldn't run. And I am glad I didn't, because I couldn't have lived with the idea of leaving my father behind.

But that's not just me, almost everybody whoever had an opportunity to run felt they were abandoning their families. And that's why a lot of people didn't run. One person could have been saved but a group couldn't have.

MS. BENDAYAN: Only if you were solitary would you feel free to--

MR. BENKO: Yes. If you were solitary you could feel free to run; if you had no attachment.

And my father wanted me to run. And my grandmother was already fading, she was having a very hard time and the truth is I was not fond of my grandmother, my grandmother and my mother never got along and she never had a kind thing to say. I thought that my father would be left with his mother dying and me abandoning him, so I didn't run.

After Vienna, the next place we stopped was Auschwitz

and we came in the train station, it is exactly as depicted in the various documentaries and we got off and we were herded off and by the Nazis and--the SS soldiers rather and also we met the first guy--have you heard the term Canada Commandos?

MS. BENDAYAN: Yes.

MR. BENKO: The first Canada Commandos were there and the ones I've heard are very cruel Canada Commandos and they were, there were some, they were terrible and the Canada Commandos, they were going through the material and they would talk to us as they were going through the material and they said Shut up, don't make noise. Stand in line. Don't move. If they come near you just don't move. And whatever they give you eat, don't turn your nose up. Don't be smart ass. Eat whatever they give you. You won't live if you don't eat. You just won't live. So you are not going to get better food. The foot smells awful. It tastes awful. It was very good advice. It was absolutely true. People didn't eat for two, three weeks and then they died.

MS. BENDAYAN: Why would the other Canada people be cruel?

MR. BENKO: Oh, I don't know why people are cruel, but some people are cruel because it's their way of distancing from those who are about to die.

MS. BENDAYAN: I see.

MR. BENKO: Although many Canada Commandos were then put to death, they didn't last all the way through--maybe the last ones lasted, but periodically they would be picked up

and sent away.

So, we got off the train and in a distance of maybe a good third of a good city block, maybe longer, greater distance, really in the distance and sat what we later on found to be Mengele and he sat in a chair and he went like this and like this, you know people approaching in a single file in this line, this is for the gas chamber, this is to survive.

The guards walking along would--I noticed that they tended to separate if they saw father and child. In other words, I mean Mengele would select one this way and one this way if he thought it was father and child, whereas if they were not, then you know he would go by. Supposedly they were selected for their abilities to do work and you're supposed to run up to a point and then stop. And the idea some people didn't run thinking that they would be compassionate and give them a lighter duty or something, well this--it was just the opposite. If they didn't run fast enough, they would go to the other side. And the women and children were all going to that side. So I lucked out for the moment I saw that I didn't stand close to my father and all of our materials were left on the train. They said Oh, you will come and get them later. But by that time we knew later--there is no such a thing as later.

MS. BENDAYAN: They had dogs also?

MR. BENKO: They had dogs, yes, but I didn't see them actually leave the handlers' hands. There were dogs there but not a huge number. And the Canada people said you are

going to see (*GINER LOGGER). You probably will hear that term, it was (*LOGGER) in (*BERKA-NEER), (*SI-GINER *LOGGER) because the Gypsies had been there and a lot of the Hungarian Jews were there and the Gypsies were gassed and then the others were gassed before, some went on, but most of them were gassed and so we arrived at the camp in (*BER KE NOW).

MS. BENDAYAN: You passed obviously by being (inaudible) with no clothes on I presume?

MR. BENKO: No, we had clothes on. When we--the selection was done just as we came off the train. We still had our clothes on and they--after that we went to the showers and it was a relief because we had been there three days without anything. We didn't know enough to be afraid of the showers. We saw the crematorium in the distance and we heard rumors that that was, we referred to it as the soap factories.

So we got to the--they took us to the showers and the mandatory haircutting and I managed to save my knife, the *(BRITOLLA), I held it in my hand. They searched us all over but I held it in my hand like and we went through.

MS. BENDAYAN: They didn't see it.

MR. BENKO: They didn't make you open your hands. Like this, I went like this. I had that with me and I also managed to keep my boots, they didn't--I don't know whether we side-stepped at some point, but they--or whether they didn't give us shoes, I don't remember that, but I had good shoes for quite a while and that was a great savior there.

Then they gave us the--we went through the showers.

We got the striped pajama uniform, the rags for the socks and this guy showed us--he didn't run away by the way.

MS. BENDAYAN: He didn't--

MR. BENKO: He didn't run away. And I don't--I often wondered why he didn't run away and I think he felt we depended on him. And we did. So I never even knew his last name.

MS. BENDAYAN: Such generosity.

MR. BENKO: Yes. And he had a great spirit that would just take you out of depression.

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Well, we got to I said Auschwitz. The specific camp that I was in was really (*BER-KE-NOW) and (*LA-GIRIE) is in (BER-KE-NOW), adjoins it.

When we got there, shortly afterwards we learned the drill which was if you wake up in the morning about 4:30 or 5:00 o'clock, you fall outside, I mean you're chased outside of the barracks. The barracks that I slept in didn't have the three tiered arrangement in Auschwitz, they were all bare. They actually were stables. They were calvary stables because they had a lower channel in the center where you stepped down where they used to sweep out the stuff from the stables and we slept litterly on the floor.

They gave us one blanket, I think we got one blanket each and we were packed so tight that we all slept on one side. Then in the middle of the night one or two people would get up, they would first tell the guard they are getting up and they would get up and then everybody would turn on their other side like response and then lie down

again.

There was really not very much to do. We went on various kinds of work details and we tried to make inquiries about who is in and who is not there and I got a note, the only written piece of paper I ever got during the camp that my aunt would meet me at a certain spot and I went there and my aunt was there, my mother's sister Erma, I have her picture here. She was at the time alive and she seemed okay. What I found out later that by that time my mother was dead.

MS. BENDAYAN: Was she.

MR. BENKO: Yes, my mother died in there shortly after they got to Auschwitz, and my aunt never told me and I think the reason she didn't tell me was not to destroy my hope.

MS. BENDAYAN: Yes.

MR. BENKO: And I never saw her again.

She had been there long enough that her hair was beginning to grow out and my aunt had kinky hair I remember, that kinky hair. She was a very beautiful woman. She looked like the Swedish movie star Ingrid Bergman. She looked like Ingrid Berman with kinky hair. She was the youngest of the sisters.

MS. BENDAYAN: How did she manage to get that note to you?

MR. BENKO: It went from people to people and people talked to each other.

MS. BENDAYAN: You didn't have to bribe somebody?

MR. BENKO: No, no. It was probably thrown across--she probably saw somebody in the camp whom she knew

and attached the note to a rock and threw it across the barbed wire and then people pick it up and we didn't have anything to bribe with any more. The only thing I had left was the knife.

MS. BENDAYAN: Was your father with you then?

MR. BENKO: Yes. My father was with me in (*BER-KE-NOW) and then now is the fall of '44, we got there close to the High Holidays, I think just after the High Holidays and we met the people who had cleaned up the Wausau ghetto, so we heard the whole story of the Wausau ghetto of who returned. We hadn't heard anything about it before.

We learned some of the, how you live in the camp and you have to stand at attention because they count you twice a day. They line you up. If you bat an eyelash you are killed. So you learn to--even after the war my aunt used to remark that she said You don't bat your eyelashes very often, blink. I said No. And I said You can do this to me all you want. I don't blink when you do that (waving hand). That's a reaction you learn because they used to test you that way and then beat you to death for blinking while you were at attention.

As I said, the work wasn't terrible. It was just make work, kind of carry the sod from one place to another. There wasn't really very much going on. We heard that *(BRUGE-NA) is near-by. *(BRUGE-NA) is the artificial rubber factory and that used people up like mad. *(JOHN STUNER) who you may know of, he worked at *(BRUGE-NA) at one time.

MS. BENDAYAN: Why do you think you had such a light

time of work duties?

MR. BENKO: They didn't know what to do with us. I think they were overloaded with us. The front was moving toward the West. We were deported from Hungary; we found out later on the insistence of the Hungarian Nazis. The Germans didn't know what to do with us. They were--the camps were overfilled, they taxed their facilities, they just didn't know. And frankly convict labor is not a reliable source of labor, as they may have discovered. You have to watch everything they do, because the moment you don't watch, they will sabotage passively or actively; they will sabotage. And we did too.

If they laid out a road, the roads never wound up where it was laid out. You know it was shifted you know centimeter a day, but you have enough days you move it.

And nothing that was ever ordered was ever carried out the way it was intended to; whether we work for very short time in a little plant indoors and we destroyed it.

We used to carry sand in our mouth. Take a piece of paper and you put sand in it and you roll it up and stick it in your mouth under gums here and they search you, they search you every where and you open up your mouth and you look--well, it's pressed against the lip, then when you are inside in the factorory you chew on that and the sand mixes with your saliva and you spit in the bearing. You don't need a lot of sand to ruin a bearing. And we had engineers with us, you know. In our free time all we did was plot how to ruin the place. And we learned if we had narrows gauge

railroads sooner or later if there was a curve we would dig out the ground on the curve and eventually it would pitch over and if there was an exposed electrical line, sure enough there would be some water seeping there sooner or later. And whatever else we could do, we did.

MS. BENDAYAN: Were there reprisals for these things?

MR. BENKO: Sometimes if they caught you, but very often they didn't catch you and there weren't then. If they caught you there certainly would be reprisals. But we didn't do it heroically. We didn't do it for heros. We wanted to destroy it. We didn't want to leave traces. We were the innocent.

MS. BENDAYAN: Were you tattooed?

MR. BENKO: No, I am not tattooed. When I didn't get a number when I left Auschwitz, my reference number is in Dachau and it's interesting that--well, any how I was mentioned I was in (*BER-KE-NOW). From (*BER-KE-NOW) we were sent to a, in learly October to a camped in Bavaria. It was a four day trip and we got no food, no water for four days. There must have been big air raids because when we came to Munich. In Munich train station there we could spill smell the smoke in the air. We knew they had been bombed.

And the only water we got was from the snow that we caught with our hats through the bars. There are people running all around.

Years later in '72 my wife and I, we were in Europe and we had to take the train through the train station and I remember the part that was missing then and it is still

missing.

Well, when we were sent down that was the worse trip that I ever took. There were hundreds of people who died, and they were in the car with us. There was no food. There were incredible conditions, terrible guards and we got to a place in Bavaria called *(KAFERICK) and *(KAFERICK) was one of these small work camps and we slept in these huts they are really not huts, they are dug-outs. And then you only build a roof at the ground level, a little roof and you dig out the ground under it and you step down so they look almost like air raid shelters and then there is a shell.

Fortunately during the winter they are very warm because they are insulated in the ground, not very warm but warmer than being out in the absolute cold.

And we worked around there for a while and that. The guards were not particularly bad in this camp, but then we were sent to a camp nearby. The name of that was (*KOUF-BOREN) and that is the worse labor camp I was ever in.

We started with 800 people in November or early November and by Christmas time there were only 200 left. I mean the death rates were horrendous. The guards were incredibly brutal. There was a German prisoner commandant as well as the guards and they were incredibly cruel. They beat everybody at the drop of a hat. On Christmas Eve they amused themselves by flooding the basement of their central building with cold water and having us take a bath in this ice cold water. A lot of people didn't survive that.

We were in a big--one great big barracks and I

remember they had a guy there who sang every night. He was a cantor, but he knew--he had a repertoire of others songs and they--so this was the great amusement of the guards. And they killed him. You know usually entertainers were saved. They were just incredibly inhuman.

MS. BENDAYAN: Kill him because he was singing?

MR. BENKO: No, they just killed him random killing. There were--I saw--people mentioned *(MUSAL-MEN) to you?

MS. BENDAYAN: Yes.

MR. BENKO: That's where I saw more *(MUSAL-MEN) than ever before in my life or since.

*(MUSAL-MEN) are people who have given up lives and you can see it in their face and you know they are going to die. That--that camp was horrendous, and my father was beaten there very severely, because he took a cement sack and cut arm holes and neck holes, we all did that, but some--I mean I had one too, but some guard saw him and decided that was terrible and he was beaten black and blue. And you know when you are nutritionally deprived the wounds don't heal.

And any how in (*KOUF-BOREN) was the worse. We heard rumors that they did so badly, that we didn't do any our duties there, that we never built or did anything useful, that they--they were going to close the camp down and supposedly the prisoner commander of the camp was executed for killing too many people too soon.

But that's a rumor. I can't verify that. I don't know.

We also knew that the--that things were changing

because a lot of the guards became crippled air forcemen. And (*HYME-VARE) people. No SS any more. Means they were running short of guards.

And they got toward the end, the end--by this I mean in January, late December, January 1945, they got the same soup we got except they got more of it. The food that I got in the camps--that was never in one of the good camps, I have talked to people who were in camps where they got more food, but I never made it to a camp--I never made it to a camp where there was a theatre or poetry reading. Toward the end of the war there weren't any.

MS. BENDAYAN: How was the food like in this camp?

MR. BENKO: The same as others. In the morning you got up and got sock soup we called it, because it looked like something you washed your socks in. And then for lunch you would get dried, *(DUGEN) you call it, dried vegetable soup, either dried cabbage or dried carrot soup.

Occasionally there are potatoes. Those are things the people fight to the death about literally and prisoners position themselves in the food line so that they would get the thicker soup and they would pick food servers, whether he's a mixer or non-mixer, meaning whether he takes his ladel and mixes the food or whether he doesn't. So you have to know all these delicate--

MS. BENDAYAN: Yes.

MR. BENKO: --shadings in order to survive.

And if you have a friend there he will give you big chunks of potatoes, and if you don't have a friend you just

get the soup. So that is what we got.

And at night we got a piece of bread, of varying thickness, and that was also luck of the draw in a sense. And sometimes a piece of green meat, canned meat about maybe an inch cube or something of that dimension or the equivalent of a pat of butter, it was margarine, that was it.

Caloric intake, it ran somewhere between 650 to 800 calories--that is what we estimated at--we would get.

MS. BENDAYAN: You I imagine were emaciated then.

MR. BENKO: Yes, when I was liberated I was 65 pounds and when I was liberated I--after I worked for the American military government as an interpreter and I worked in the war criminals' camp and then I met my adopted parents and by the time I met my adopted parents that must have been well let's see, I was liberated May 1st and I met them in July so around early July, so in that period of time I gained considerable weight. But I went the other--they were with the USO show. And I remember my adopted mother giving me her shirts and they fit perfectly and two weeks later I couldn't get into them. I literally couldn't even bring the buttons this far. So I gained weight probably fast.

But the--

MS. BENDAYAN: What were the other conditions like, toilets and washing?

MR. BENKO: The toilets--there are no toilets. In the camps at best you have holes cut in the ground, cement holes and this, the washing facilities are usually a pipe that is perforated. The only question is when you get to them

sometimes they turn on the water, sometime they don't.

And toilet paper becomes a treasured commodity because paper is very hard to find, very hard to get. Almost any ordinary thing, a pencil, a piece of paper, a rag, is a treasured possession. And a knife is a treasured possession because sometimes the food is given out, especially bread is given out as one bread and then you have to divide it. And I became good at cutting, because other prisoners would bring their stuff over there so I would cut it equally for two, because I had a knife too, but that really wasn't the reason. Prisoners get spoons officiallly issued, so the prisoners usually sit around and hone spoons to make a sharp edge on one. And everybody tries to have a utensile for getting the food in, but it's hard to keep one because other prisoners steal it. There are problems about living under these conditions.

MS. BENDAYAN: What about organizing?

MR. BENKO: There wasn't a great organization. After the war there was organization.

MS. BENDAYAN: I mean organizing as in used among the prisoners as getting things.

MR. BENKO: Oh, well organizing is an individual enterprise and it usually runs in groups. People get something and then they pass it on.

When we occasionally worked for farmers then we could get, dig potatoes or get something like that. That occured. But we really didn't have access to a great deal.

I have known prisoners who were in different commands

who were in better positions to get things. There are some people who do share very nice. You know the prisoner world is an accented exaggeration of the real world. There are people who share because they couldn't bear not to, and there are people who don't share because they won't share ever. They will only share if their lives depended on it, on sharing.

And there are groups that imposed rules and there is a rule among prisoners that stealing food is a capital crime and I have been in places they hang a little thread by the bed if they think you stole, in other words you're supposed to hang yourself. I didn't see many of those, but I've seen some.

The older wiser prisoners sometimes are kind to new prisoners, inform them. And there are other older and wiser prisoners who exploit them. But most of the prisoners' survival, most of the survival that I have seen is due to the action of others. But it is not evident.

For example, when I finally got to Dachau from this awful camp they shipped us to Dachau on January 10, 1945. My father was there. He was very weak and we were sent to the showers and this was after he had been beaten so severely I recall, and we were in the showers. It was the only warm place I had experienced in months, physically warm. The only other warm place was when we crowded around in beds very, very tightly and we were sitting on the floor of the shower and he couldn't get up. He couldn't get up on his feet. His feet were swollen and that is a great danger signal for

prisoners when you get edema. In most cases it's--you know now it is a reversible condition, but for prisoners that was a mark that something is going wrong, and the tissues--essentially the water can't be moved out of the tissues, and it means heart failure is going to come pretty soon because you're pumping harder and harder and harder to supply a need that you can never supply. It means the kidneys aren't eliminating because the material is in the tissue and not in the blood circulation.

And people have legs that are swollen huge and you press in on it and a hole is left in the leg.

He was, his wasn't quite as bad, but it was bad. And he couldn't stand up. He could not stand up. And I wasn't strong enough to hold him up and they came with whips and chased us off and that's the last time I saw my father.

MS. BENDAYAN: How bitter.

MR. BENKO: Yes. In a way I think that survivors have a problem that they never buried their parents. So and yet we were swept away with the whips and we were sent--we were taken to barracks in Dachau and I became ill with typhoid, non-typhoid actually it is (*FLET-I-FUSE) which is a viral disease, it is not the bacterial typhoid. And what saved me was that--you go in a coma and you usually die of dehydration, but my other friends who I was with gave me water so I survived. And they took my jacket and stood in line and drew my rations for me so you know they shared the rations and that was fine with them, but they brought me the water and that sock soup at morning and at night.

MS. BENDAYAN: How did they get your rations with just your jacket?

MR. BENKO: My number is on the jacket.

MS. BENDAYAN: They don't care if a body is in the jacket?

MR. BENKO: No, no. You can go through the line twice because they record the number. The same person can go twice. It doesn't matter as long as--if you have a different number you can go through again, unless it is a very short line, they remember your face. Most of the time they don't look at your face. They copy down the number.

So I got my number with my father and we stood apart from each other so that we wouldn't have sequential numbers and I still have this total confusion, I don't know who is whom.

And the two numbers, the numbers are 112300 and 112114 and I still don't know which one is whom. But we thought that if it was sequential and they would see one old and one young then they would assume it was father and son and they would split us deliberately. They did it like that.

MS. BENDAYAN: An added torture?

MR. BENKO: Yes. Yes.

Well, if you go up to a family you know what they did, is say pick up the child you want saved. And the child goes on the train and the other one doesn't. That was something they also did.

MS. BENDAYAN: Had there been any medical care anywhere along the way?

MR. BENKO: Yes, there was. There was, but it was very difficult to get, and it was you know laying on the hands and chamomile tea and this sort of thing and very minimal care. There were some physicians with us and some were very compassionate and some were very gruff, but they really had nothing to give.

When I got to Dachau it did happen--it did happen. The ironic thing, there was a hospital in Dachau as I said. With the (*FLET-I-FUSE) typhus that I had I didn't land in the hospital. When I got scabies, I landed in the hospital.

Well you know scabies is not exactly a life-threatening disease, but prisoners feared diseases that had diarrhea.

Now, the SS always took the sign of diarrhea as you are on your way out, so you have to conceal it and it was my luck that I wound up on a ward where the orderly who took care of the ward was a French Moroccan and this was a black Moroccan who had been captured by the Germans and he could speak French to me and so he helped me conceal the fact that I had diarrhea and he smuggled me charcoal and so I essentially was saved by that. You know the scabies went away, and then I landed in the hospital because I had a broken bone and my toe--my toe was swollen. I couldn't walk on it, so I couldn't conceal it any more. People avoided hospitals because the chances were high that you don't come out of hospitals.

MS. BENDAYAN: How did you break the toe?

MR. BENKO: My shoes when to pot and I got wooden

shoes. My shoes didn't--I think somebody wanted my shoes. I just realize my shoes didn't go to pot. Any how, my shoes were taken away some place along the line, I don't remember now, I will have to think about it. Because I had very good shoes.

And it wasn't that long a time but I was in these wooden shoes and I had to run sometimes in wooden shoes. These wooden shoes don't have a hinge. It's one solid thing and I must have had--what happened is I broke a toe and there was internal bleeding and there was a huge bump on my foot, so they took me in the hospital and I put my foot up on a chair and no anesthetic and and they cut the foot open and removed this lump.

Later on I did have it repaired in New York at Mt. Sinai, but they operated. And I'm trying to remember if they gave me anything to keep from screaming. I don't know whether they did or not. But they operated on it and so that was also done in the dispensary, in the infirmary at Dachau.

And I should also say that in Dachau I met Danish students who had been arrested because of the student riots and they were the only people who shared food packages. The Danish students were--they were the most, the greatest affirmation that there is really a sane world out there. Because prisoners don't share packages. The survival is so precious. The French prisoners got packages, the Belgin packages. A lot of prisoners got packages, but those who were just there because they were Jews did not.

Now, if you were a French Jew arrested with the Army

or part of the Army and they didn't identify you then you would get the package, but if you were not, you would not get a package. And the French had a certain package but the Danes had wonderful packages and the Danes came and whoever was around they shared it with and there was never a point no matter how brutally they were treated that they ever treated anybody else brutally. They could not be dehumanized.

MS. BENDAYAN: Why do you think that was?

MR. BENKO: I don't know. I don't know. I think that their fundamental orientation. . . .

(BRIEF PAUSE)

MS. BENDAYAN: Just a question about your school, the Catholics gymnaseum. How many other Jewish students were there?

MR. BENKO: Three.

MS. BENDAYAN: Oh.

MR. BENKO: They instituted a numerous (*KLUAZES) under the Hungarians that only so many Jews could be admitted to schools, and I think it was three percent but I'm not certain about that figure.

At the time I went to the Catholic gymnasium. They were just organizing the Jewish gymnasium. This was under the Hungarians. The Hungarians took over part of Transylvania where I lived and the--so my father debated it and he thought that in the Jewish gymnasium I would see an all Jewish world and I would not be prepared for a world that is not all Jewish, and so he wanted me to go to the Catholic gymnasium. And the Catholic gymnasium was headed by a man by

the name of Karl Yanos was an ordained minister Ph.D. in philosophy, taught math and philosophy. And it is not really a gymnasium, so it covered the breadth of what would be covered from the fifth grade of school through Junior College. That's what a gymnasium really covers. And in fact Karl Yanos had gone to school in United States and he turned out to be a very, very courageous man, a very high integrity. I think on the other part of the tape I told you about him, that in front of the German authorities and such at a graduation he made a great speech appealing to the principles of Christianity and asking the students to dedicate themselves to the principles of Christ. And when you look there were a bunch of flags on one side which were the church flags and then the Nazi flags on the other side. It was clearly--I thought he would be shot on the spot, and he wasn't. But he was certainly a very principled man.

Some of my teachers were very antisematic. Some of my teachers were very supportive and very nice. Mostly the older ones were pro-Allies and such. The younger teachers were nationalistic Hungarians who were thrown in there with the Nazis and they thought this would lead to the greater glory of Hungary.

MS. BENDAYAN: Were there other Catholic students who stood by you or did most of them shun you after a certain amount of time?

MR. BENKO: No, they did shun me. It is the teachers, it was--the division was clear. There wasn't much division among the students.

MS. BENDAYAN: My only question was on the day that you were arrested and taken to the detention center, did you know that they were coming that day?

MR. BENKO: They came, they came a couple of days before and they said be ready and then they came in the morning and I said my father made some arrangement that actually they hired this open carriage so we could get there, put our stuff in there and take it in.

I remember thinking that we did hear that where we were going and I knew that those people there would probably need some things and I remember taking in coffee and taking extra sugar and taking other things because they were running low already and thinking in terms of blankets and warm clothes, and I remember making sure that we had sewing kits and you know all the silly things you need to survive; taking extra soap which is always a hard to get commodity.

And we took Maria Theresa coins. Marie Theresa coins are little gold coins. They are used as a way of saving in Europe today. Go behind the iron curtain you can buy Maria Theresa coins. They are small gold coins. That is how people withstood the tremendous currency fluctuations.

We took several of those. The other advantage is that they are not large coins, so you can in other words carry--you can buy things in small elements which is very important. You can't exchange--nobody can give you change. You give one--you may be buying a loaf of bread for $200 or its equivalent there, I don't remember what the figure was but that's the scope of the dimension of the costs of between

a loaf of bread and the value of a Maria Theresa coin.

MS. BENDAYAN: I was thinking how did you as a young boy know all these details of soap and so on and the necessities of a home that you would have to take with you?

MR. BENKO: Well, I wasn't brought up all that sheltered and I did learn--I learned to cook from my mother, she liked to cook. She always taught me cooking. And my mother designed clothes so I knew how to operate a sewing machine. Unfortunately I forgot, I didn't do it for so long. But I knew about the necessity.

During the war you learn a great deal about necessity of lives because you're constantly looking for things that you ordinarily need and you take for granted. It is a kind of education in what you really need, what one needs to survive. And that's how we learned. And probably watching other refugees go by, they were always carrying blankets and clothes and--that's. . .

MS. BENDAYAN: Maybe you discussed this on the other tape. Did you ever discuss going into hiding with your father?

MR. BENKO: Yes, but you know that was really a romantic notion, because there was no place to hide. There was no supportive population to go to. The only existing underground that existed was for smuggling Jews out of the country to go to Israel, that was one underground. The other underground was the Red Underground and that was destroyed. So there were no undergrounds.

So you could buy your way out of the country if you

had the connections and so on, and we were too late for that. By that time--

MS. BENDAYAN: I think that is about it.

When you were in one of the labor camps you said you had a nightmare about the Germans coming in and then they came in the next day. Did you ever have any more kind of dreams or premonitions that you felt like. . .

MR. BENKO: From time to time I think we did, but it wasn't the dependable occurrence; let me put it that way.

MS. BENDAYAN: Uh-hum.

MR. BENKO: It wasn't--we all looked for these things. We thought that we'd have a hint. It was tried many times. I can't say it is--there are people who felt that through intense prayer for example they would lift themselves to a spiritual state where they would disassociate themselves from their immediate surroundings, and I don't know whether they succeeded or not.

There are people who retained their faith and people who lost their fate both. There is no unequivocal way of saying--it's very hard to predict how people will act under these situations long term. Although we always like signs as a prisoner, you begin to learn to estimate whether you're dealing with a killer or not. And that is an assessment that surviving prisoners probably made better than non-surviving prisoners. But I don't have, you know, data.

There are people who at the first glance tell you you stay away from them. And it is a--I was with a group of survivors, we used to meet periodically and I mentioned it

once and everybody had these knowing smiles on their faces that you do learn the true killers from those who are passing sadists.

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MS. BENDAYAN: Anything else?

While you're speaking of it, I was going to ask how was it for you say from a religious point of view.

MR. BENKO: I was never very religious. Part of the reason being that my mother when through a great crisis of faith when her mother died.

My grandfather, whom I never knew, he died before I was born, remarried then and my mother was very, very{ close| clothes} to her own birth mother and never got along for a day with my grandfather's second wife and she--I think she took it as a personal affront of God to her that her mother died. And she did not, she could not make peace about it.

I was bar mitzvahed and she came to my bar mitzvah. And she was also very, very critical of people who professed faith and practiced none of it; not in the sense of not keeping the rituals, but in their personal conduct.

When she was orphaned--eventually she and two sisters and a brother--were orphaned when my grandfather died and I don't know, I think my grandmother died shortly before that or--and they had a younger sister who was a teenager and the others--and apparently the other people whom she had sort of expected a great deal of support and help from were not forthcoming at all, and she was absolutely appalled that people were this way. So she was in a sense anti-religious. But she wasn't anti-religious in the sense that she wanted to

keep all of religion from me, but she kept it in a limited region.

Now her social conduct permeated her life though. She was very active in causes of various kind. She got in trouble first because she was trying to organize an orphanage and she was very socially conscious and very socially aware and that part of Judaism she liked very much. But the ritual she felt very distant from.

My father was more observant in that sense. My grandmother actually kept a kosher household. She insisted on it.

After my parents divorced he lived with his mother and so there was a kosher household in the house, but as not unusual in certain European we also had certain (*TRAFE) dishes so when he wanted something of the thing we trotted out the (*TRAFE) dishes. But in the camps I did not have a crisis of faith. I didn't expect to be saved miraculously. I wished it, but I didn't expect it.

MS. BENDAYAN: So it didn't really make an enormous difference in your religious point of view.

MR. BENKO: No, no it didn't. It didn't. Occasionally we used to joke about it if we have a revolt can these guys stop (*DOVENING) while we get the guns? But that was part of our fantacies, you know.

MS. BENDAYAN: I want to ask you if you were sick at all, other than your broken toe and your illness in Dachau, had you had been sick anywhere along the way?

MR. BENKO: Yes, I had diarrhea from time to time.

Everybody gets that. And then I ate charcoal and tried to do the best we could, stay away from eating for a while, which was probably not wise.

But after the war I found out after I was liberated that I did have a spot on my lung so I was--I had TB as well. I do have the spot on my lung. And then I had this toe you know that was repaired finally at Mount Sinai in New York. And I have some scars on my side from being kicked and rifle butted.

MS. BENDAYAN: That was the next thing I was going to ask you was whether you too were beaten.

MR. BENKO: Yes. That was many times, you know so many times that I--and it doesn't stand out as a single event. When I was rifle butted and kicked that was the worst, but otherwise it was on and off. It was not an unusual phenomenon. After a while you sort of try to not stay at the edge of the crowd and things like that. But--

MS. BENDAYAN: It sounds like it was particularly brutal in that camp you were in just before Dachau.

MR. BENKO: In (*KOUF-BOREN) it was. It was brutal. And these old guys who released the SS, they were trying to act out--they were all sixty year old and such, you know, rejects from the first world war and they were particularly cruel. But they were, they knew that they were losing the war and we were their local victims.

MS. BENDAYAN: I kind of have a point of view, but I was wondering how you went forward as a person who joined with others in the camp situation to survive or took a

position of being more alone or--

MR. BENKO: Well, as I said first, I was very lucky that I was always with my father until January and then I was in a group from the original group that came from my hometown. We were gradually diluted and disbursed, but I always had my father. There were sometimes two or three others whom I knew slightly, so when I got to (*KOUF-BOREN) I don't think I knew anybody there, but in Dachau I met some people and so. . . .

(END OF TAPE ONE)

(COMMENCEMENT OF TAPE TWO)

MS. BENDAYAN: You were speaking on being associated with a group or--

MR. BENKO: Most of the time as I said I was with my father and that was a great stimulating support for both of us, because we could talk about thousands of things and prisoners spend a lot of time talking about food and they did but we talked about many other things, about what kind of world it was going to be like or whether a thing is worth doing and was significant in life, what was it that he would have liked to have done and what it is that I would like to do.

We talked about histories and politics and various things, art and music. He liked music very much. He played the piano and occasionally he would hum tunes and remind me of things. And that was wonderful.

And as I said, most places I knew one or two people when we moved in a group. Then when I was liberated I was, I

had been with a group of guys in Dachau who were--also came from Transylvania, not exactly my own town but we all spoke the same language and that was a supportive group and I don't remember their names now.

They--we were liberated together and we traveled together because I spoke English and they didn't and I translated for them.

A number of them went back and then we broke up because we went in different directions and I got a job as an interpreter and they wanted to go back and I didn't want to go back. By that time I knew my father died. I had heard from other prisoners that my mother died and I decided not to go back.

I figured everything had been stolen and they all thought that they would get back their family holdings and I don't know whether they did or didn't, but I didn't want to go east and I went west.

MS. BENDAYAN: You said you had a question--

MS. LEITZEL: Yes, what was your actual feeling about your chances of survival in the camps.

MR. BENKO: Children really don't think in those terms, even young teenagers. The advantage of being young is that you don't think of perpetual Monday. The Mondays will always come and the weekend will be over and you will have to go to work and so on. The advantage of being young is that a negative event doesn't really change your basic optimistic outlook. And I think that contributes to survival a great deal. It's positive.

People who are adults tend to see every negative act projected over time in the future and that detracts from their ability to withstand hardship and to survive.

I think that probably people who have very strong faith in some positive power, I think that does help them survive because they have an unshakeable positive attitude, an optimistic attitude. There is no doubt that an optimistic attitude is better survival than a pessimistic attitude, and that is sort of known I think by people who work with others, except it is not formalized.

MS. BENDAYAN: You talked about different prisoner situations where people were kind and sharing in terrible situations.

MR. BENKO: Well, for example when people--prisoners march, you know in groups, in most the groups that I was in the weak ones march in the middle because the two outside people can then pick them up and everybody becomes weak sooner or later and picking people up, literally making him walk just a few steps sometimes means they don't fall down, that the guard after--they won't beat them to death or shoot them or whatever. And you did see those things.

And there were corpses piled on each other and you see somebody moving and you pull them out and they may survive and that does happen. You just have to have enough people who are strong enough to do that also.

There are cruel things that happened. There's inconsideration to put it mildly between prisoner to prisoner and there are appeals to compassion and they work, sometimes

they don't always work but they certainly do work sometimes.

Knowing there are some guards that if you scream when they beat you are encouraged by the scream, and there are other guards who will stop because of the scream. That's why you have to make an assessment about what kind of person is beating you. It is a terrible judgment to make, but you have to make that judgment.

MS. BENDAYAN: That was one of the things too I wanted to ask you was whether you experienced kindness in whatever form you want to explain it from guards or--

MR. BENKO: Yes, there were some guards who would give you a crust of bread or give you some left over and such, who would be nicer to kids for example than adults, and others who were not. Yes, there were.

I haven't seen guards rescuing prisoners. I've seen American guards of prisoners rescuing others. I've seen, you know, people who put themselves at least somewhat at risk to help somebody who is down whom they are really guarding, but I didn't see that among the guards that I encountered.

But I know other prisoners have, but it was not my experience.

MS. BENDAYAN: Well, perhaps we should just end here and. . .

MR. BENKO: Okay.

MS. BENDAYAN: And begin next time with the move from (*KOUF-BOREN) to Dachau. Start there.

MR. BENKO: Okay, sure.

MS. BENDAYAN: Well, again, thank you very much.

MR. BENKO: You are welcome. Great.

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# ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## INTERVIEW III

PAUL BENKO

MAY 22, 1991

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MAY 22, 1991

MS. BENDAYAN: I would really like to have what you are saying on the tape.

MR. BENKO: Well, as far as talking about the Holocaust to people: When I first met American soldiers, when I was liberated, there were some GI's who happened to have gone by a camp or seen a camp or liberated a camp, but the ones I encountered mostly had been through military battles and they were quite experienced and I also--there were some new ones who had never been in battle, just been sent over. But it didn't make any difference, they were so petrified with the horror of what went on, that they were choked with emotion and it was very difficult for the teller to watch the pain.

And the people--when I met civilians, when I came to the United States, it was really harder on the listeners than the tellers, because the tellers knew that they were out of it and for the listeners it was a reliving an experience which they feared in their minds.

And there was an enormous amount of guilt in everybody who had never been in the camps. And I think it is a misfiring of some psychological mechanism, it is a misfiring of empathy and of compassion, of a sense of duty, of a sense of community and belonging that Jews who came from Europe had, because they lived in communities where there were strong ties. Even if they were distant ties, distant locations, there were still strong ties.

And most came from fairly large families; not unusual for them to have three, four brothers and so on, and all families were decimated.

So sitting around the table they started counting who is not here, and it was very difficult for them to do that. And they lived with the knowledge not even then--I think they were convinced that had they done something more we would be alive.

So it was difficult to bring up these topics and talk about them. It was easier to talk to younger people whose minds had never conjured these images and to them it was a horror, but it wasn't the horror that they carried in their hearts for years, that they feared and then confronted with the reality of a survivor.

And so a lot of people didn't talk about it or if you talked about it you talked about it in the sense that Yes, I was in the camps, and not detailing into great detail about what happened and so on. And they knew--and so many people were lost.

There was also a sense of suspicion among some that survivors survived because they, it was a kind of "survival of the fittest" and the feeling of survivors is a sense that "Why me?" Because so many wonderful people died. Why? Why me? And that was difficult to articulate. Some still do. And it was a very painful dilemma.

There is also the fear of--let me say going through a camp is not a trust-inspiring process.

First of all, the ordinary relations that exist in

what I would call healthy communities tend to form some relations at least that unquestionably fall in the trust category, and there are others that are more distant or more formal. And then there are those people that we quote distrust.

So the world goes from a trust and no trust category and the effect of the concentration camp is you have to make a fast decision whom you can trust and whom you can't ever trust.

The chances are that the people you can't trust can really cost you your life in terms of another prisoner may be a prisoner who steals or a prisoner who will steal your food or your clothing or your mess kit, a pen.

If you have a kit--you don't have mess kits, actually a bowl of some kind, and you have that bowl to get your food in. You don't have the bowl, you don't get food. So stealing a bowl is as good as stealing your life.

And I'm sure you've heard convicts say that they don't have to see policemen's badges to know that there is a policeman in their presence. And life in Eastern Europe tended to develop that kind of sensitivity.

I know. I remember riding a bus in New York and suddenly feeling uncomfortable and I would look around and I knew who the cop was.

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MS. BENDAYAN: Can you describe in any details of what the clues for you--

MR. BENKO: It is a very cold, appraising glance. It is a very keen observation, never staring. You know. It is

not somebody who really stares, but they glance and you know that this, this glance photographs you side and front and compared you and it is a very cold and appraising glance and it is not obvious, but nevertheless it is there. And there are such things as eyes of killers.

Now, I sometimes see those eyes and I don't think they are killers, but these people are ruthless competitors and part of survival is if you face these you must act fast and you must act rapidly, either get out of the way or be prepared for the worst. And you, survivors, tend to estimate that very rapidly. You knew which guards were just murderers and which (*COPOS) were just murderers. And you didn't go near them because they could explode at any time.

MS. BENDAYAN: What did you do when you ever ran into a fellow prisoner who you might feel was in that category?

MR. BENKO: I put as much distance between that prisoner and myself, never turn my back on them. I never hid anything so they could see it.

For example, prisoners would hang a piece of bread wrapped in something on a nail on a wall. In some prison barracks you can hang whole bread ration there and nobody will touch it. Other places you don't. You just look around and you get a sense of that. And they will steal food, and stealing food is equivalent of stealing life.

There are places where they would leave just a string on somebody's bed because they stole food; it meant they should go hang themselves.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did you ever have any instance where

you had to defend yourself against somebody (unintelligible)?

MR. BENKO: No, I was very lucky. I was mostly in places--I was lucky because until--as I mentioned until January 10, 1945, I was with my father, so I was near, next to somebody whom I could trust completely, and we learned to cut bread very, very accurately so we would both get the same amount. My father would always do it. I kept telling him I don't want to live knowing that I took your bread.

And often prisoners who--if they issued a ration of bread to two prisoners and they would want that bread cut or they had transacted some business, people will sell bread for a knife or a cup or whatever, then they would come over and we would cut the bread in two for them, because I had that knife for a long time that I--that was my grandfather's knife.

MS. BENDAYAN: Yes.

MR. BENKO: I smuggled it through.

MS. BENDAYAN: Were you also trusted to be cutting their meat?

MR. BENKO: Yes, yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: What would happen in the instance of say the string is put and the person doesn't kill themself?

MR. BENKO: They would usually be strangled at night.

MS. BENDAYAN: Someone is designated to do this?

MR. BENKO: No, more than one person, two or three would. The prisoners were too weak.

MS. BENDAYAN: It took two or three?

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did it imply some kind of, you know, loose organization?

MR. BENKO: Oh, yes. Yes, it's--it doesn't come about as a decision, it is an accepted rule that everybody is entitled to survive without taking advantage of the survival rights of others. And it is implied. No one hands you a rulebook.

Usually when you get to a new camp someone there--generally someone will tell you what is going on, but again in who you go to or who you ask, that is a big decision because if you go to a killer you are going to die. So that is part of survival.

But the other part of survival, and I want to emphasize that very strongly, is you would be surprised how many people pick you up when you are falling down without knowing you, or carrying you.

I was talking to a class in high school and I remembered an event when we were first in the Hungarian concentration camp, and these Yugoslav families had been repatriated down from Yugoslavia to northwestern Hungary. They just saw we were hungry. They don't know where we came from. They didn't know anything. They just saw we were hungry and we were--there were kids and adults and so on and they just started throwing bread over the fence. Nobody offered them money. Nobody offered them jewels. Nobody offered them a wedding ring. Nobody offered them anything.

And you know in remembering the horror which was so horrendous, we have to remember that there were others.

There were--in current discussions of Holocaust survivors, there is one school of thought which says that there is
4 something terrible in all of us and we must guard against this and therefore putting it very prosaic, that there is a Hitler in all of us and we are all capable of being a Hitler and so on.

And I really don't believe that, and I'll tell you why I don't believe that.

I think that there are people certainly who have these enormous drives or drives of a greater or lesser degree to dominate others increasingly, and the more dominant they are, the more dominant they want to be. So once you enter this it is a self-propelled tendency. It is a self-stimulating tendency.

But if you take a look at the troups during the second World War, one of the best kept secrets about troups is very few people fire their rifles.

Then by the time the Korean War came along, the Army did special studies. They would take a whole rifle company off the front lines and check who really fired their rifles, and it turns out very few of them did.

And different--in fact in modern armies and those armies are--these armies are converted into killers, before these were citizen armies, these were citizens who were armed who would fire essentially in self-defense. But these were not programmed massage manipulated deliberate killers, and that is what contemporary soldiers are trained to be is kill with higher efficiency. But they have to be converted to

that, but that is not something that they bring to.

Now, if you take the situation in a concentration camp, there were many people who would not do some things and they paid for it with their lives, and they knew they were going to pay for it with their lives.

And there were many others who helped under the most dire of circumstances when it cost them.

When you are barely standing and you help somebody else walk, you're barely walking and you're on the edge of that precipice also--and they did it and that told me something, that this is not an even distribution of the tendency to dominate.

If all you are interested is in survival, then you don't help anybody. You save every bit of strength. You are helpful to yourself and no one else. But that is not what happened.

And if a group of people get together, even if they fight in private, when they are faced with a purpose, namely survival, you will see them reaching toward each other. They may not be nice to each other or pleasant, but they reach toward each other. And I think we underestimate that tendency in man.

MS. BENDAYAN: That's a good point.

MR. BENKO: I think just as especially in contemporary life one finds that criticism is better remembered by most people than legitimate praise. We suspect legitimate praise. We do not suspect legitimate criticism, or what we consider legitimate criticism.

MS. BENDAYAN: A lot along those lines, I know in previous interviews you talked about the inspiration of I believe the Danish people.

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: And, of course, I know obviously great sustenance to you was having your father with you--

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: --as long as you did.

And I can see you have a very good sense of humor.

MR. BENKO: I have to.

MS. BENDAYAN: So along those lines, was your sense of humor still functioning in the camps?

MR. BENKO: Oh, yes. I am sorry I didn't tell you about that.

I remember an instance for example when we were in Bavaria. I think we were in (*CUL-FER-RING), in (*CUL-FER-RING) camp.

We went to work, and as we went to work we crossed a little river and there was a bridge on this river and there was a railing on the bridge and during lunchtime we were resting and we were eating and one of the guards took his hat off and the wind blew the guard's hat in the water. This caused a solid five hours of mirth. All you had to say was "The hat" and 200 people would be laughing.

There were all kinds of jokes. A lot of it is humor of the gallows, but certainly humor survived.

MS. BENDAYAN: What kind of humor of the gallows?

MR. BENKO: Well, I don't remember jokes very well.

MS. BENDAYAN: If you remember; if not--

MR. BENKO: I remember one joke, but actually that comes from the era before.

Oh, yes, the joke is that a very religious Jew is stopped on the street by a Gestapo man and marched into the restaurant and the guy orders a pork steak and a big dinner for him. He takes out his gun and points it to him and says "Eat it." And the guy says "I can't, you know, it is pork."

He says "I have a gun."

He says "Well, in that case, it is permitted for me to eat."

Then he starts eating.

Of course and the joke is told in the context that there hasn't been any food for three years and he hasn't seen a piece of meat in probably four and so on, and so he's eating away and the SS man relaxes and puts the gun down and he looks up, he said "Would you mind holding the gun until I finish the plate?" So--

MS. BENDAYAN: Jewish law.

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: So in a positive realm, what other kinds of things sustained you?

MR. BENKO: Well, we had a lot of discussions about--endless talks about food. It is a terrible thing, the hungrier people get, the more they talk about food. Elaborate dinners we planned, elaborate dinners we ate, elaborate restaurants. People had been to all around the world. It was a fairly mixed group. Like my father had been

in London and he had been in Paris and been in Vienna, Budapest and a number of German cities, though he didn't go to Germany very often, relatively little. I know he had a friend in Homburg.

But my father had an agreement with his boss that--everybody considered English cooking--on the Continent--to be abysmal, and so for every day he had to do business in London he got a day in Paris to rectify the diet when he traveled for this company.

So they would go through the elaborate meals and he had eaten at Maxims and other places and there was an awful lot of talk about this.

There was also a lot of talk about what the world will be like after the war.

And you remember talking to me about that and they had various debates about where the borders would be, and I must say that they guessed on the borders pretty well except that they thought that Germany would be broken in individual states and that there would be a demilitarized zone through the center of Europe, because they felt that the Russians would never trust the West, the West would never trust the Russians. So there would be a demilitarized zone between the two.

And they thought that--I don't know if you recall the Morganthal plan. We knew about--Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morganthal was the proponent of this plan. He was Secretary of Treasury under Roosevelt. I believe he was of a very influential family.

Morganthal's plan for Germany was to convert an Iberian company and they will never make another piece of steel, and everytime they need a piece of steel they will have to buy it from somebody else, and essentially destroy the German industry this way and so on. Well, that didn't work out. I don't know how realistic it was. But they thought that that is what the Allies would do.

They didn't think that--they thought all the small countries in the East would fall under Russian influence. Just as they thought it it did happen.

They thought that western countries would tend to fuse, would tend to merge their currency because it would help reconstruction so much more there. It is amazing what visions--and these were--some were engineers and some were--my father was an economist. They viewed a much more united Europe.

And we thought that--and nobody could ever muster an army, that was a draft army. You'd only have volunteer armies or armies of mercenaries essentially again, because after the second World War nobody was fool enough to go in the army unless they were, you know, highly paid.

Those were the kinds of fantacies we discussed.

MS. BENDAYAN: Were there any fantacies of any sorts of vengeance or justice or--

MR. BENKO: Yes, yes. Certainly, they were. They were. But the truth is that there were reprisals in the very early part after liberation. And in my experience, my personal experience right at the end of the, after I was

liberated, I went to work in a displaced persons camp. I don't know--

MS. BENDAYAN: We are not in the chronology yet.

MR. BENKO: I went to work in a displaced camp and the displaced persons camp was located in a town called (*PAR-TON-GEER-SHEN), where the 1906 Olympics were held. It is a great resort. It is a ski resort, summer resort, has casinos and all that.

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And just outside it was a German military camp and that's where the displaced person camp was placed and the displaced person camp was later moved and a war criminals camp was established at the same site and I worked there also. I worked as an interpreter in both cases.

Well, right when we were liberated, we were too weak to really take reprisals because in order to fire a gun it would have knocked our shoulders off, and we didn't have weapons for that matter.

But by the time I had been in this displaced persons camp for a while and then there was the war criminals' camp there, when we were interrogating people in the war criminals' camp, I remember interrogating what we--the way the prisoners are handled, prisoners are handled here--the most difficult thing to do after a war is to identify that the person you think you have is the person that you have, because the tremendous amount of forged papers, forged identities. So we got a list of prisoners and we have to identify are these the people we have.

Among these was a general, a (*VER-MARK) general who

was Hitler's aid, (*VER-MARK) aid. And all kinds of SS men and Tito who was the (*QUIZLING) of Czechoslovakia, Tito was an ordained priest, Catholic priest, and he was relieved of his sacraments by Pope Nuncio and then the Americans removed his protection and he was treated like other prisoners. Until then he was an ordained priest and was handled with kid gloves.

And I interrogated prisoners and sometimes a prisoner--well at this time I should tell you I was obviously an ex-concentration camp inmate. I didn't have a uniform on, I had civilian clothes on. My face was still pretty thin and the bones were still showing. I probably was five foot three and probably weighed about maybe 95 pounds or so, but I had recovered my ability to walk and so you couldn't tell the walk. Usually you can tell a prisoner--ex-prisoner by the shuffled walk, because it is only the tendons that hold everything together and prisoners don't have a spring in their walks at all, starving prisoners that is.

And I remember that this, this Hitler's adjutant told me that he doesn't want to talk to Jews, and I took a riding crop and I hit him across the face. And I said Come with me. And I made him do what they used to do to us and you stand at attention facing the sun, and it's an excruciating thing.

And then he stood at attention there. He went to show what a good soldier you are. And I told him You are going to stand there until you fall.

And the American GI's gave me a rifle and said What? You want to shoot him? No one here is going to stop you.

And I said No, no. I don't want to live with the knowledge that I killed somebody. And interrogated him again afterwards and he gave me a snide remark and called me a dirty Jew, and I picked up a stick and I broke it on him. And I thought I would feel better at the end of it, and I didn't.

And I realized that I couldn't get even ever. And at the end of the war when I was liberated, if someone would have given me a machine gun I probably would have fired without thinking. But that told me that I can't ever get even.

At the end of the war I wanted my parents and while I had a lot of anger and a lot of hostility, I also knew that nothing, absolutely nothing could bring them back. And there was no getting even. There was no satisfaction in it.

So I think it was the beginning for me that helped me distance myself from Europe.

As I think I've said before, I never regretted leaving. I was looking to leave right then. It is true that before the war my father's idea was that I become an engineer and go to Cypress. It was very easy getting British citizenship by moving--not to Cypress, to Malta. Malta is a malaria-infested colony and the British used to use a lot of foreign engineers there who worked in Malta Naval shipyards. And if you stayed in Malta I think for two years, you became a British citizen and you can go to where you want to get. And a lot of people got out of Europe that way, bypassing quota problems and such.

MS. BENDAYAN: But how did you deal with your rage, even as you knew you weren't going to exact satisfaction?

MR. BENKO: I think my rage--I think that helped me diffuse my rage, and time helped diffuse my rage.

I was in a rage at times when I was a teenager in New York, but my rage was because I felt like a fish out of water. I didn't belong to teenagers and I really didn't relate to teenagers very well.

After my experiences--I mean these teenagers, their problem was will they get a ticket to the next Frank Sinatra concert, or will they get a date, or will they get a new pair of shoes, or you know all the kinds of things that teenagers worry about very legitimately. And it really affected my son very negatively, because I could not understand his concerns as a teenager. I couldn't understand. I thought that he was living in a world that was incredibly secure, that he never had to worry about his food or his clothing. And I wanted that--I didn't bring him up with the sense of survival that I was brought up in, that we prepared for the worst, then you won't be disapponted, but I thought that he somehow would automatically gain a depth of understanding of life and proportions which is really irrational on my part. Teenagers don't have that and can't be expected to have that. But I certainly wasn't understanding of his problems and his moodiness and that I thought they were just trivial things.

MS. BENDAYAN: Well, you were robbed of a childhood in many ways.

MR. BENKO: Yes, yes. I--my experiences were--well,

let me say that my childhood wasn't so happy. I have never craved to be another age besides myself. I think the benefit of having grown up in Europe was that wrinkles aren't a sin. And I remember as a young kid looking at French movie stars who were wrinkled as a matter of fact and thinking that they were incredibly beautiful. So I didn't have this kind of background.

And to me my childhood--my parents were divorced and I went back and forth. It wasn't all that happy that I wanted to go back to it. I can't point--some people say I was happiest between 13 and 15 or 15 and 17, 18 and 19. That certainly wasn't my experience.

MS. BENDAYAN: No.

MR. BENKO: And so I didn't feel robbed in the sense--I felt robbed from the ties of friendship and belonging. I did have a very hard time feeling part of it. I didn't know where that started or stopped. Because everytime I was part of something when I was a teenager then I was kicked out either because I was Jewish over, there and here I obviously didn't fit in. And kids were really very nice when I came to this country, but I was really a weird duck.

MS. BENDAYAN: That is kind of what I was meaning. You had to become an adult almost instantly probably when--

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: When you were moved out of your home and couldn't even continue with your childhood.

MR. BENKO: Yes.

I probably became more of an adult when my father had

his nervous breakdown, when he lost his job and then we went to the camps and then I knew that I had to protect him more because there was no one else. And we certainly protected each other, and I'm sure it has a lot to do with my survival.

MS. BENDAYAN: Well, maybe there is more of the positive things too that we could land on as we go along.

I was thinking of some of the terrible negative ones too.

MR. BENKO: Well--

MS. BENDAYAN: Of suicide, insanity.

MR. BENKO: The (*MOO-SA-LUM) ones you learned. It is all those literary expressions marked by death or the light went out of their eyes are really true. There are people who self-condemn themselves.

Now, as far as suicides are concerned, actually there are very, very few. There are very, very few.

I think I was protected by it because I was so young and I didn't project to the future.

I think my father was protected from it because it wouldn't have occurred to him to abandon me anymore than I would have abandoned him.

You know in one transport in going from my hometown to the Hungarian camp there was a point where they left the door open. The guards all went for some instruction and there was a clear shot. And there was one guy in our group who had been--this guy would have been a prize fighter and a waiter who was sort of moving on the edge of the underworld and the kind of sort of semi-legitimate character and he was

absolutely an inspiring leader in our hours of need, when all the legitimate members of society were really falling apart because their world fell apart.

But he knew want to do. He knew how to bargain with the guards. He knew how to tie a rope. Well, he knew all kinds of things. And he says Let's go. And he asked me first, because two people can boost fences higher than a single person. And I was, I wasn't tall, but I was strong enough. And I couldn't even think of leaving my father, to abandon him. And I was--and I'm sure he felt the same way.

MS. BENDAYAN: I remember now.

MR. BENKO: There is good and bad in that because it is very--my father's wisdom was it matters how you survive and it matters what you do. And that may be a positive aspect of a terrible encounter, that you face what a lot of people face in terms of life's crises is a resonating question that was present in their minds, probably since they were teenagers, and they never faced. And I was just forced to making an earlier decision.

MS. BENDAYAN: In this regard, you talked about that terrible moment when I think you were--you and your father were in the shower.

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: And I believe you said (unintelligible) your father and he couldn't get up.

MR. BENKO: My father had been beaten before that and he was weak and he couldn't get up, and they were coming with the whips and drove us off and I--I probably had never felt

more powerless in my life. And I know I was walking backward because I didn't want to turn my back on my father.

MS. BENDAYAN: And the human terror of feeling that humiliation of being helpless, even though you know there is nothing you can do.

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: But still you feel humiliated.

MR. BENKO: Yes.

Let me say to me humiliation is to be found wanting in your deepest values. By yourself. And in that sense it was a humiliation. It wasn't the powerlessness, because I have never been particularly interested in power. I didn't choose my jobs that way. When I was with boys at the end of the war who survived and I was the only one who spoke English, I suddenly had power over these kids and to me that power brought such a crushing responsibility. I felt their survival was in my hands. I made the bad decision, they wouldn't live. I would live, but they wouldn't live. And that probably influenced me not to ever seek such a position again.

MS. BENDAYAN: What do you mean by that you made the decision?

MR. BENKO: If I asked for the wrong medicine for them, if I asked--if I didn't see to it that they had blankets, if I didn't see to it that they had this water because I knew more, and one of the things that was instilled in me was--with knowledge comes obligation and that the more you know, the more you are obliged to do. And that, you

know, during the war we helped people because we were in a position to help people. It was our duty to help people. And that was a very, very important value in my mind.

So when my--I'm sure I believed the same thing when my father was lying on the floor and couldn't get up. I was humiliated because I couldn't find anybody to pick him up and I wasn't strong enough to pick him up.

I remember pulling on his arm, and I remember I first thought when the war ended when I met this American soldier who was listening to the radio, it was May 1st, everybody thinks it is May 8, actually May 1st was when the hostilities stopped officially in Europe. They started--signed it May 7. It is celebrated here May 8.

But the very first thought is Where is my father? Well, as we had been together for so long, I told you that I--at the time I thought my mother was still in the camp some place, later on I found out that she was dead by the time I got to Auschwitz, it is just my aunt didn't tell me.

Well, I will say from time to time I look at my daughter and I, I am--I bitterly resent the fact that my parents never got to see their grandchildren. I think they both would have enjoyed them very much.

MS. BENDAYAN: And vice versa.

MR. BENKO: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, I'm sure that you know my father would have done okay here, and I'm sure my mother would have thrived here. And I have absolutely no doubt that she would be involved in 10,000 organizations. She would march in everything that you can imagine, and that she would

run ten shops on the side.

But I think that both my father and my mother would have liked it here more. And ironically they were better adapted to this country, because both in their own way were--had distanced themselves from the culture that they came from, much more so than many other people who came here.

MS. BENDAYAN: And a sorrow that your children didn't enjoy them.

MR. BENKO: Yes.

There was a time when Holidays were painful for me as a child, because I had to divide my attention between my father and my mother. And when I was going to college I hated Holidays, because all my friends would go home and I didn't have a place to go to.

But when eventually I had a family, I would look up and I would say Where is the other part?

My first wife had her parents and they would come and visit on occasion. And my present wife's parents and two brothers are around and their families. I sort of feel like a one winged bird.

MS. BENDAYAN: So that is when you have quite the longing.

MR. BENKO: There was a sense, yes, that I didn't know which family I belonged in. And although my aunt's family was very nice, still I did miss my parents.

And there are those little holidays when my daughter has a concert or I do wish then that they would be there to enjoy her.

I think that the loss of family is the most devastating loss, and it is strange to me that when children are taught history they are so carefully taught to remove history from themselves. That it becomes ever so remote. It is as if it happened to someone else in a remote world. And I think that particularly the parts of history that focus on conflict, wars and such, which unfortunately turns out to be the way history is taught about 90 percent of it, it didn't need to be that way. This is distanced as if it is somebody else.

When I was going to graduate school and my son and I were living together in Davis and he would turn on the TV and as I was cooking in the afternoon that is about the news hour between 5:00 and 6:00 and then show these--and they would show the Viet Cong and others and I used to turn around to him and say those are mothers and fathers, remember those are mothers and fathers. As kid are apt to do, they are enthralled with the excitement of war, and I kept repeating those are mothers and fathers. And I think that should be taught in history books.

MS. BENDAYAN: Very good point.

MR. BENKO: The other thing that should be taught is that humans have done something else besides shoot and kill each other.

All of my students in bacteriology I polled for the last twenty years. There is one student who knew the name of Weizmann. One in twenty years. And that was a relative of a (*POE-DOCK), (HEINE POE-DOCK). She was taking the course.

But the others didn't know who Weizmann was or what he contributed besides his political contribution, besides his political contribution. Some may have known, but no one knew he did something else also and he's a strange person because his scientific work and his political work were involved.

But I regret that I can't look at human activities in a much more positive light. When you look at history of great ideas--most of the long term murderers aren't there.

MS. BENDAYAN: That's true.

MR. BENKO: And yet I regret that children are taught this. And it happens to my daughter too and happened to my son and so on. And I think if there is something that to (UNINTELLIGIBLE) people, such a thing as a goodness in man, it needs as much tending as their physical health. And it needs enriching.

And there is a very strong tendency in the social sciences, and I have become aware of it since I participate in a Holocaust course, to denigrate man. To think that there is such a horribly efficient critique of every human activity that people forget that there were visionaries. That there were people who created the possibility of human survival under conditions no one ever imagined, and people who discovered fertilizer made it possible for other people to live. People who talked about food preservations extended the life of societies. People who discovered a nail made possible to--and I've tried many times to find out who invented the nail and the board. The inventor cannot be named.

MS. BENDAYAN: Maybe it's so ancient.

MR. BENKO: Why is it that Babylonian kings' names we know, and I bet they were glorified murderers.

MS. BENDAYAN: Right.

MR. BENKO: And incredible tax collectors and all this.

But I would like to find out the name of the man who planned the first city and what was in his mind or her mind, what went on in creation. Why is it that buildings are built the way they are built? And I think that would put children in a different frame of mind.

I know my competitiveness and such, but why can't we complete in these ways.

MS. BENDAYAN: I hope you do that.

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MR. BENKO: I hope so.

(Brief Interruption)

MR. BENKO: As an individual and as a generic unit of that society, I have a hard time dealing with this generic notion, but I must admit that there is some commonality and experience. I think that the long term non-healing aspect--my opinion is that some of the long term non-healing aspects are general to society as a whole and have little to do with the Holocaust.

It is hard to separate those because there is no good control data. We can't muster people, whether people who had trauma before the Holocaust entered the Holocaust and had less or people who didn't have came from good backgrounds and

did well afterwards.

(BREAK TAKEN)

MR. BENKO: In my opinion, as I said and this is a superficial opinion from--based on survivors that I have known and various discussions that I have had with them, I think there are some problems which pre-dated the Holocaust and followed after the Holocaust. There are adaptations to life or our way of adapting to life, by our meaning Holocaust survivors, changed partially because of our experience. But it was also influenced by previous exposures and life's history, our genetics, our families, our environment, the level of interaction with the world, all of which varied all over the landscape.

I think that it influenced me personally for example that I chose certain kinds of jobs. I chose specialities. It never occurred to me for example to go into a field where I couldn't earn a living anywhere in the world. I didn't even seriously consider it. I mean to me for example the idea--I'm interested in law for example as a way of reason or as an intellectual pursuit, but I wouldn't be a lawyer for thirty seconds because I know that lawyers are made by laws and the moment you cross a border you are no longer a lawyer.

I'm a food technologist anywhere in the world. I'm a bacteriologist anywhere in the world. I know how to talk the language, and I can earn a living. And that is something that is true my father started, but the Holocaust emphasized that when you went you are left on your own. It's only what is between your ears that is going to carry you on and

nothing else.

I chose to work in food probably because I was deprived of food. When I was given alternatives in research projects, I never chose working on ornamental plants because I know people can live without ornamental plants. I have friends who are in microbiology, worked on ornamental plants or some people who worked on other things that seemed--and I tended to go for something that is widely used. And some people view that as a sign of insecurity and in their system maybe it is. For me it is adaptiveness. I learned how to adapt.

And I don't want to bet on systems that I really consider very temporary, so I--when I came to this country I was always amused when people said what do you want to be, as if there was a direct connection with what I want to be and what I am going to be.

Now, you know that exists much more so here, but somehow it reminded me of a cork being tossed in an ocean, which is what I was, which is what I felt like, and they thought they were on a road in which they were guiding their own car. I thought that it was a huge illusion that they were going to only go down the roads that they choose. But I didn't want to confront them about them, but I didn't for a moment believe that I was master of my fate. As it turns out, I was probably more a master of my fate than I estimated, but my experience was such of being tossed around like a cork that I wanted to make sure that this cork floats.

I'm sorry, what?

MS. BENDAYAN: I was wondering when you were talking about when you came back and teenagers were worrying about what movie they were going to see and so on and the gulf between your experience and your reality and there is--

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: And I was wondering how did you make that work for you? What or where didn't it work or where did you make it work or--

MR. BENKO: I discovered when I went to high school in Los Angeles, I went from Fairfax High School from November '45--the end of November '45 until early February, so there was a Christmas vacation in there and then I went back to school and then I went to New York, so in that period of time--well, first of all this was an era where the social life was the central role of the high school and I couldn't believe that because going to school in Europe first of all it is not fun, no one expects it to be fun. It is nothing--you are expected to do an awful lot of hard work because doing well in school meant a future. You don't go to gymnasium if you are going to be a ditchdigger unless you go in business somehow. So your life is marked.

And the other thing is you carry a little book in which they write every infraction and every grade and so on and when you graduate or when you take the baccalaureate exam from gymnasium, people look at it and some crime you committed in what is the equivalent of the fifth grade here or first year gymnasium there, can keep us from a job or a school or so on.

So school is much more in earnest than it is here. If I characterize the American system I would say there are many accesses to goals in America, much more than people actually take advantage of, and in Europe the access is very narrow, very limited. I don't know how it is now, but at the time it was if you didn't stay on the straight and narrow, you would never get back on the straight and narrow.

So, this notion of school being fun actually made me suspicious and alarming, maybe this was not the real thing. This must be a joke.

Then I noticed that I had been out of school for about a year and a half, the equivalent of a year and a half, and I was ahead in math.

I learned English by talking English and by hearing English, and I really didn't write English very well so--Romanian is a romance language and the spelling is very phonetic and Hungarian is not quite as phonetic but still more phonetic than English. And spelling is enough to drive you nuts. In other words there are some--actually it is like (*GA-NOOK) in German, but it is difficult--it was difficult for me to learn to write. That was a little difficult.

But as far as history and math was concerned, I kept wondering where were these guys. I was afraid when I was liberated that I had forgotten to write because in all the time I was in the camps I never had pencil and paper. I got one note once from my aunt and that was it and scratched in the sand. And I discovered a person that could write. I had forgotten how to write, but I was mostly an interpreter in

terms of translating spoken words rapidly. That was my job both when I worked for the DP camp, when I worked for military government, when I worked for the war criminals camp.

So it was when I--I went from, you know, having been in Paris and all that, so here I was in high school in Los Angeles. The girls were wearing men's white shirts because they were very hard to get then, and they had to have a lot of signatures. And I didn't know what these signatures meant or if they had any meaning at all.

And there were all kinds of in words and slangs which puzzled me. They--in my normal development I was very interested in athletics as a kid and I played soccer and I was in gymnastics. You know gymnastics is not exactly big in this country, and at the time soccer was unknown or dead or played by a few Europeans in terms of adults who were recent inmmigrants. And so there wasn't much interaction at this level.

12 And in Europe people my age talked politics and nobody in America talked politics in 1945. I mean there was no either local, state or national. It is a very trivial kind of politics. So I didn't have much to talk about with other kids, so I kept quiet and went alone. Sometimes I really felt like a fish out of water.

I didn't understand girls at all, because I was going out with girls in Paris who were going to college and these were high school girls and they were always dressed very dramatically and very provocatively, but they are obviously

incredibly innocent and they are very, very confusing. So I didn't have many friends, although people were very nice to me and they invited me to their homes.

And it is also true I didn't have a car, so my mobility was limited. But I did catch rides with others and I would say and the kids were very accepting and very good natured. They went out of their way to show me things at Fairfax High School.

But their social life was seldom interrupted by studies, and there was dance every day at noon and the most difficult thing in high school was that every morning when you got to school you had to walk a mile and run a mile. In those days physical education was very much emphasized in all California schools which I am sorry to say it isn't and you ought to take a look at the difference in physical performance. It was an absolute. You couldn't get out of it no matter what.

Well, unknown to me at the time I had a bone chip in my foot which was later repaired at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, which I should make a mental note I have to talk about that, because they were a model of compassion. They were a hospital--what a hospital should be in the most modern sense of the word.

MS. BENDAYAN: Do you want to talk about that now?

MR. BENKO: Sure.

When I got to New York to my aunt's house, she discovered that after walking a few blocks I limped. My foot was sore. So I was going to high school--then I was in high

school in New York. I was at one of the three or four schools you take an exam to get into. I got there because the high school I would have gone to my neighborhood high school my aunt told me they had thrown the teacher out the second story window already. So this was as I said 1946. They had some problems.

So I took the exam and I was admitted to (*STIVERSON) High School, and they were also very understanding because on the exam they gave inches and miles, and I just crossed it out. I said the international units recognized are centimeter, and the second--and so forth. As far as this problem is concerned, I said one inch equals one centimeter and they accepted my answers based on that.

And I got in there and the high school is--it was an all boy's high school which we all regretted, but the teachers were incredibly well trained. They all had masters degrees in their fields, not in education, and the best known student in the school was a guy who solved very difficult problems in mathematics and also one in physics. And the next best one was probably the head of the physics club who had also gotten the prize in physics.

The student who--that they would talk about who came up with an original solution to a difficult homework problem, they were ordinary homework problems and then there were always one or two killer problems, and whoever solved those it would be known that that's the guy who solved it and the school was aimed toward scientists and engineers, but social sciences were extremely well taught.

We had a year of history, one taught by an admitted strong leftist, and the other one was a strong rightist, and we sat in class according to political parties from left to right.

There was a--the science was very well taught and not by rote at all, and they were enormously tolerant of individual students' idiosyncrasies. When I got--in the same week that I got there they were talking about the fundamental structure of the atom, and the instructor put down the old theory of the atom in the old golf ball in the center and little circles around it. A student jumped up and went in a tirade at the top of his lungs which he said You think we are idiots, you have contempt for us. You think we don't know that what you just put on the board is wrong and it is outdated and I will not be insulted with that. And with that he marched out and slammed the door.

I thought that the class would be executed. We would be hung by our thumbs outside the window. That we would never darken the door of another educational institution, because that is what would have happened in Europe. This is mass insurrection. And the teacher who was known as the undertaker among the students, and I was told that the first day because he always wore black suit, white shirt and black tie, but taught physics very well said Well, that is one opinion. This is the fact that--how we start out later on, we will go to the next one. Then he turned around and went on with the lecture.

I said Gee, how tolerant.

And they were tolerant and they made every effort to help students learn, but they are very high standards of performance so just doing your homework meant that you were just getting along. What they expected was the homework was original, that you would come up with an original question in class, that you read more than the textbook in both science and non-science courses, and that you were prepared to debate any issue that comes up.

They had very little tolerance for discussion. You got one warning. If you disrupted the class then you would be sent back to your district school.

The school had Blacks and Puerto Ricans in it and I kept wondering why they talked about white schools, because this was not an all white school and this school is down in the lower--well, it's on 14th between 13th and 14th Street, off First, First and Second Avenue. So it is close to the lower East Side.

A lot of the kids came out of the lower East Side slums, and this was their way out.

They had a wonderful spirit of inquiry and the least known people were the football players. They had a football team, but it appeared once. The school is in the middle of the block and the gym is subterranean literally and it has a running track that is elevated above the gym floor. So it an atypical high school after the experience in Los Angeles which was very typical.

When I had this problem with my foot, I went to my advisor. I said I have to go, you know what do I do about

the sort of thing. He says We have a special fund. We match in the first visit to the doctor from this fund and I remember that this is 19--as I said 1946 and a visit to the doctor at that time was $20.

I earned fifty cents an hour working at a pharmacy around the corner from where I lived, and my aunt and uncle were not well off, he was essentially disabled with asthma and they had three kids. So they had--they paid $10 and I paid that $10 and we got to a very fancy Park Avenue specialist in orthopedic surgery. His name was Doctor Albert (*SHINE), who took one look at my--actually I went to another physician whom I knew from my hometown, his name was Doctor Frank Gruber. Doctor Frank Gruber, may he rest in peace, was from my hometown, came from a poor family. The community brought him a scholorship to go to college, and what the scholorship consisted was he stayed in one place and he ate different meals every day in different people's houses.

Doctor Frank Gruber graduated from there, went to France to go to medical school. He was a student of Madam Curie, came back, established his office there off the main square, and in his office all people were welcome, including poor people.

You know peasants when they came in from the country stink, and nice patients don't like that. But he said that didn't make any difference. In his office everybody was well treated.

Eventually when I went to New York Doctor Frank Gruber was in New York. I went to him with my problem. My aunt

took me to him to examine. When I was okay he found a spot on my lung. I had tuberculosis that apparently was arrested, and he also found this and he said I think this is called (*FRY BERRY'S) disease.

Anyhow, when they went to the specialist, Doctor Albert (*SHINE) and he said that's remarkable, most internists don't even know the disease exists. But he called it correctly and what happened was when I was wearing wooden shoes I developed a bone chip. Well actually I knew something happened, because while I was at Dachau I was in the hospital there and they operated on it to remove a blood clot without anesthetic and I knew something was there and that was--so he repaired it and when I went to Mount Sinai
14 Hospital, here my aunt was with limited income and three kids of her own and she took me on.

The social worker interviewed me very, very sensitively and told me that I would be a patient in the hospital and they had wards--well they had mostly--fairly it was an old fashioned hospital and if you look at the hospital you would think that they are ward patients, but the people the way they were treated they were not like people think of as ward patients. Everybody in the nursing staff and the medical staff were very good, and I was there for about a week because they kept having emergencies and my operation was scheduled and an emergency came in and they would take the emergency first. And I had first rate care and they repaired--I did very well, but it is the school that facilitated the whole process because they knew all the

social agencies that could take care of this. And I was not an exception. There were other kids who came from the slums and they had this fund and they didn't make any big deal out of it. You know Mount Sinai Hospital was--I happened to know about them because I have a distant relative who did a history of the hospital as part of a thesis in sociology. If you would take a look at the American Nobel Prize winners, they were all invited to the staff seminars of Mount Sinai Hospital. And Doctor (*BAYLOR)--there is a test for Scarlet Fever called the Schick test, well Doctor (*BAYLOR) Schick practices at Mount Sinai Hospital and there are very--they are very socially aware, very dedicated to their work and they do first rate science, in addition really first rate science. And there are hospitals that do some of those things, but very few who do all three.

MS. BENDAYAN: An inspiration.

MR. BENKO: Yes. Yes, they were.

So they are right--they were on the edge of Harlem then. They probably are the middle of Harlem now.

So they have had lots of poor patients and lots of--and I can say that they certainly didn't discriminate or ever treat the "paying" and "non-paying" patients differently.

MS. BENDAYAN: Maybe I'll just start here to kind of introduce ourselves again and give a date, which is I'm Sandra Bendayan interviewing Paul Benko. This is tape No. 3.

And would you introduce yourself as our second?

MS. ZATKIN: I'm Tanya Zatkin

MS. BENDAYAN: And some of the things you have been talking about may crop up again if that's okay.

Basically in the chronology where we left off before, was that we were going to start with you leaving (*KOUF-BOREN).

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: Let's start right there.

MR. BENKO: (*KOUF-BOREN) was the worst camp I have ever been in. We got to (*KOUF-BOREN) in October, by late October. It was 800 people got there. By the end of December there were only 200 left. The guards were brutal, the work was terrible and the camp commander was--both the German SS camp commander and the prisoner camp commander was an incredibly brutal German felon who killed a lot of people arbitrarily. That is where I saw more (*MUSEL) men when I came than any others, any other camp that I have been in, including Auschwitz and including Dachau.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did you see people being what you would consider insane, although maybe you would say being a (*MUSEL) man is a little bit in that category or a lot in that category.

MR. BENKO: Being a (*MUSEL) man is more visible in action than in expression, in verbal expression; it is the appearance. They withdraw from life. They literally withdraw from life. Perhaps it is a beginning of death in the camps and that's, that's how they appeared. There was a tremendous amount of--number of people killed for any excuse possible. One incident I remember is that Christmas Eve they

flooded the basement of a building. This is a bitter cold of the Bavarian winter. They flooded the basement of a building and had us take a bath in the cold for Christmas. And that killed dozens and dozens of people. They never got out of the cold water.

And they had the habit of dragging. There was a guy there who was a cantor who had been there when we got there who used to sing for the guards, and I remember listening to him singing to the guards and his voice got weaker and weaker and then he became a (*MUSEL) man.

It was sort of a daily event.

A lot of people got frost bite. A lot of people were frozen. A tremendous number of people were killed going or coming from the job, falling down. But guards didn't shoot, they clubbed the people to death. There it was the worst camp that I was in.

There was a doctor there, a prisoner doctor who I don't know whether he was afraid or not, but doctors can issue an--it's called a (*SHOONEN), a slip to spare you so to speak so you get a day of work off, and I guess he must have been afraid for his own life. We felt that he could have issued more slips, because every day that you didn't work you saved a day for your life.

That was the worst camp though.

And then suddenly they came and they closed the camp and they shipped us off to Dachau. That was just after the New Year, so we arrived in Dachau on January 10th--it must have been January 8, because it was a two date journey,

although it is not very far away, and that's when my father died and I described that. He couldn't get up after the showers.

And in Dachau I was by myself and in Dachau we were placed in some barracks.

MS. BENDAYAN: Do you remember the trip?

MR. BENKO: Oh, the trip was incredible. Most of the people couldn't stand any more, but we were so thin that even though we were crowded and we weren't as crowded as before, it didn't seem as crowded, we only had pajama tops and bottoms and it was the Bavarian winter and some people managed to have some blankets and then some people died and then the ones who lived took the blankets from those who died. Most everybody was scared, because we all had diarrhea and I probably didn't tell you that if they detect you have diarrhea, the chances are pretty good they will kill you because they think it is an irreversible process, and it is not always. Sometimes it is but it is not always, so when we got to Dachau we were all trying to conceal our diarrhea as much as possible.

MS. BENDAYAN: How was that possible to do?

MR. BENKO: Well, you tried to hold back until you get to a bathroom and to go to the bathroom when there is no guard there, a guard going by or such. And the other thing is we would dig out coals from the ashes, of course we were under the impression charcoal helps this process. Well, charcoal does but not that kind of charcoal. But it probably had it's effect in terms of a placebo effect.

When we got to Dachau we were mixed in with other prisoners, that is when we saw not Germans but that's when we met the Danes, and the Danish prisoners that I met in Dachau were wonderful. They shared their food and they never shoved or stepped on anybody or no matter what they just wouldn't be dehumanized.

MS. BENDAYAN: Were any of these Danes Jewish?

MR. BENKO: Not that I know of. Not that I know of. If they were, they didn't identify them as such. But they were the most kind, compassionate people. They even shared their tobacco. Prisoners don't share tobacco, because tobacco is currency, but they shared that also.

What happened is I did run into a German clergyman who had been there for many years and I asked him to find out about my father because he had been there so long he knew people in the administration and such. And he is the one who came back and told me that my father had died.

And so then in Dachau I got typhus. Typhus is not the same as typhoid fever. Typhus is a louse borne disease. The organism is carried by a louse called (*ORSIKETSIA). But eventually typhus is both an intestinal and systemic disease.

As a prisoner, what happens is that you pass out. You are in a coma for a while and you become dehydrated and if someone doesn't give you water, you die. So if you don't have friends who will give you preferably boiled water--so my friends took my jacket, stood in line with my number, picked up my food. I couldn't chew, of course, when you are in a coma, and they gave me this food and that's how I survived.

And ironically later on I got scabies which is a minor skin infection and when they discovered that I had scabies then they put me in the hospital in Dachau. Lucky for me in the ward that I was in there was a French Moroccan soldier. He was black. And he could talk to me. The others didn't speak French, so we became friends.

And again he literally saved my life because he helped me. I had diarrhea at the time. They discovered that you have diarrhea, you are dead in the hospital.

So he essentially brought me gruel and allowed me to go to the bathroom without telling the others, and even hid a night pot--a secret night pot. He moved me--there are three tiers of beds in the hospital, so he moved me in an upper back bed where they never checked. They thought there was nobody there. And so I recovered there.

And the scabies was just some ointment and it was silly, but that certainly helped a lot. And then I got back in the barracks and by that time it was the end of March and beginning of April and things were beginning--there were more bombing raids. There was an uneasy tension in the air. We heard various rumors from places that the fronts were going every which way. Germany was caving in.

And then the end of April they suddenly took us and put us on trains and the trains were in the station at Dachau, but these were not cattle cars. This was the first time in all the time that I had been in that we were in passenger cars. In fact upholstered. They weren't even old passenger cars. They were ordinary passenger cars.

And we couldn't believe this, because they would never let prisoners anywhere near. Prisoners quite frankly stink and they are dirty and they don't have latrines. They have these huge buckets which spill sewage all over and around. It's horrible conditions.

But they put us on this train and then we were issued one blanket each and we thought that something is very strange here, because we had never gotten one blanket each, at least not in my experience. Maybe two to one blanket, but never one blanket each.

And then we were given two-thirds of a loaf of bread. That's four times as much bread per person. Two-thirds of a loaf of bread was--I can't tell you what a wealth it was. So we knew that they were trying to get rid of rations.

They also gave us some canned food later on, that came later. It's true when you opened the cans the meat was green, but we ate it just the same. And some of the bread was moldy, but we ate it.

So we knew things were strange and they were--from the train while we were sitting on the train we saw a Red Cross--the train station itself is right across the street from the main entrance to the Dachau headquarters. We saw a Red Cross car pull up, go in. They were in there for a while and then they drove off.

After the war I met a Red Cross nurse who was in this camp in (*GARMIS PARKEN GERCHEN) who was in the that legation. What they were negotiating about was they were going to let the--they got an agreement from the Allies to

let the SS come out unarmed and safe conduct would be guaranteed. They would go to a camp but they would not be killed. No one would shoot at them. And they refused that.

And so we found out later that the American forces that came from the other side who hit the camps first and then the headquarters, they saw what happened in the camp. By that time the SS were coming out with their hands high and they mowed them down because they had seen what happened in the camps.

But anyhow, we were then sent to a little town called (*SAY-FELD) in Bavaria. (*SAY-FELD) is one of those picturesque towns in a little valley, and there is a river right next to (*SAY-FELD) not far from their downtown area and that had a shallow bank of a river.

So up on the high side of the bank they set up machine guns and we were in the desolate part of the river bank. It was kind of rocky. And there is snow now all over Bavaria, even though it is the end of April. They set up as I said these machine gunnists and all of us were told to lie down there.

And we were very apprehensive because we had so much and they set up and we--the machine gunnists and we, they looked very business-like. It was not a proforma. And you know sometimes people set up machine guns and they are just machine guns, but when they put the belt and they load the machine gun, you have to pull it back and load the machine gun. We knew they are getting ready to shoot. It is not just there for show.

So we were told to lie down. We lay down on bank and now we each had individual blanket, so we put two or three blankets below us to insulate us and then we slept like spoons very tightly and pulled blankets over our head and we went to sleep.

17 And then we woke up early in the morning because there was distant artillery fire and the artillery fire was approaching, so artillery--shots usually they triangulate, one side, then the other, then the center. We knew they were probing this area, but that was on the other side of the mountain from us, so we would hear some closer shots and some closer shots and some distant shots. So we looked up and I am not sure what I told you, they were--the guards were carrying these side packs obviously with civilian clothes peeking out of them. Also when they moved us through the town of (*SAY-FELD) to the bank of the river, people were suddenly nice to us. Before that when we were ever in town people literally looked through you. They pretended you are not there. They pretended as if there was nothing on the street.

And they brought out water and they waved and I don't remember giving us food, but they were certainly very much friendlier than they had ever been.

And then I said next morning the guards had run away.

So when I saw the guards had run away, I was with a bunch of guys from my hometown whose names I unfortunately now don't remember, six or seven of them, and I said Let's walk toward the gun fire, because that's where the Americans

are.

So we started walking on the highways and we would hear noises of trucks or tractors or of tanks and we would get off the main road, because one thing all Europeans know is the most dangerous armies are retreationg armies. They are the ones that rape and pillage and murder and they will do anything.

So we didn't want to be on the main road hitting retreating German armies.

So in the hills in Bavaria there are these little shacks where sheep are taken in during snow storms, so we would stay in these at night and then again walk down--walk along the highway and get off the highway if we heard any approaching tanks or trucks or such.

Well, we were in one of these sheds when I looked out between the cracks and I saw a US tank go by and I could recognize it because it had a white star on it and I think I told you during the war we used to get not a German but is a Swiss magazine called (*SLIZER ILLUSTRATE) which was censored and I discovered how to--with isopropyl alcohol you can remove the censoring ink and so we read about General (*VERT POWELL) surrendered at (*STALINGRAD SENIOR) in Germany. They said he had committed suicide.

Well, the films are still shown, I have seen it on KQED where he surrendered. So we knew what American tanks looked like from the pictures, and they are not--they had a star on their side and I knew the shape of American helmets and what they looked like and I've since seen pictures of GI

fatigues.

When I saw the American helmet we went down on the highway and we started walking along the highway and the highway was pretty well littered because American troups would open one package of K rations, take out the crackers and throw away the whole thing and then--or take out the cigarettes and throw away the rest.

Well, the danger in this is that some of those rations are very rich, so we--at first when we found the rations without any sign on it, I didn't want to pick them up because I figured that the Germans were throwing out the poisoned food and they had done all kinds of dirty tricks like that.

MS. BENDAYAN: They had done that already, thrown out poison food?

MR. BENKO: No, the Germans--I felt they were capable of any deceptions, because they threw out for example toys that were bombs. They did that in Poland; you know attractive little devices, and people would blowup.

MS. BENDAYAN: Anywhere? Just on a city street they would do it?

MR. BENKO: No, usually in the countryside they would, in occupied countries. At least that is what I had heard, and that there were explosive devices. That don't fool with something you don't know about.

So, as we were walking along here we ran into an American detachment and I asked, you know, where is there a camp or what is going on. He said Keep on going. He says We are not allowed to talk to you to help you, we have to move

on. And they moved on down the line. And that is when I ran into an American black medical detachment. It was headed by a black officer. He stopped and he started talking to us.

I spoke English and I translated for the rest and he said, he took out the K rations, all of them, and lined them up and told us what to eat and what not to eat.

K rations have things like cheese and bacon in them. It's wonderful for a soldier because it's compact and very high energy and it is poison for us because we haven't had any fat of any kind in years, minimal margarine.

MS. BENDAYAN: Why is it difficult to digest that in starvation?

MR. BENKO: The reason is that in starvation the system digests itself. In starvation the body shuts down the synthesis of all of--many of, not all but many of the normal digestive functions in order to preserve those as an energy source.

So what had previously been something to be used to enable you to digest the food is--now it is burned to carbon dioxide water so you have less of the enzymes. When you eat less of the food, you make less of certain enzymes, not all but certain enzymes. So this is why the longer you are on a low diet, the lower your entire metabolic level is because this is the body's way of responding to lack of demand. You don't provide extra energy when there is no demand for it and that is what starvation signals to the body.

So, you can't--the enzymes, the fat and the bile frankly which you also need are very low production levels.

So, eating high fat food means that you are going to to go into all kinds of difficulty. You can't digest it. Then the bacteria take over and that you causes enormous infections in the body. The immune system is impared because you have been starved for so long.

So a lot of prisoners died at the end of the war due to their overeating. But they weren't overeating in their terms, because they were just grabbing for food.

So there were these packages of dry cereal in this, compressed oat flakes. All you have to do is throw in hot water and it became sort of a gruel.

And there were crackers there. He told us we could eat those. And some powdered milk and powdered eggs--in fact there were some powdered eggs. And he was absolutely wonderful.

Then his men--you know GI's get two blankets, they don't get an infinite number of blankets. You get two blankets and they gave one of their two blankets to us, wonderful wool blankets that saved our lives absolutely. He didn't order them. He didn't ask them. They each got a blanket and gave it to us.

I talked to him, and I was walking bent over because I had severe pains on the side of my chest and he listened to my chest. He said you have pneumonia. And so I asked him for (*PROTO-SELL). (*PROTO-SELL) is a European name for sulfa drugs. And he knew what I was talking about immediately and he told me in America we call them sulfa drugs. Here are some. And he gave me instructions how to

take it and drink water with it and all the other things.

He was absolutely wonderful to us. When we parted I asked him What is your name, some day I'm going to look you up. Because I knew I wasn't going to stay in Europe.

And his answer was By the time you come to America you won't want to talk to me. And I didn't know what he meant. It is only later on that I learned what he meant.

So to this day I don't know who my benefactor was.

We were walking down the road here and again staying off the main roads and then we hit a town called (*METAL-VALD). (*METAL-VALD) is very famous, famous violin makers and you look in the German textbook they always use (*METAL-VALD) as an illustration because they always have these frescos on the outside of their houses.

We got to (*METAL-VALD) and the people in (*METAL-VALD) didn't know what to do with us, because they were afraid that here come the prisoners from one side, here come the retreating German soldiers from the other side. They were afraid the prisoners would go on a rampage and tear the town apart, which was ridiculous because one look at these prisoners, they couldn't run. They could barely walk. But they did open up there on the city gym.

MS. BENDAYAN: How many were there of you at this point?

MR. BENKO: There were stragglers, mostly stragglers of prisoners. There were probably a couple of hundred. They were maybe three--four hundred down at the bank of the river, but groups formed.

And there were some prisoners who argued after the guards ran away, some prisoners said we shouldn't move, the guards just went away for breakfast. They are going to come back. We shouldn't move or they will shoot us.

I said The guards are gone, I'm gone.

Some of them were afraid to lose the security. They had been prisoners for so long, they were prisoners of themselves. And that does occur in prison. But I wanted to get out of there the moment we could, and there were other kids we knew who stayed, so it wasn't only young and old division.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did it feel strange to make the decision to just get up and go?

MR. BENKO: Not to me. Not to me. No. I really didn't. I never seriously considered staying.

And the kids that I was with, I was afraid that they would get hurt and I felt overwhelmed with the responsibility of their safety.

MS. BENDAYAN: They were all young people your age?

MR. BENKO: Yes, yes. They all wanted to go home and I was the only one didn't want to go home.

I said No, I'm going to find out about my mother. I found out about my mother. I don't want to go home. I was hoping I would find my mother in the camp, but I wasn't going to go home.

After when I was in my hometown and people came to our house and said give me your furniture and give me your books, you are not going to need them anymore, there was something

in me that was cut.

And once in a while I think of taking my kids back to show them where I grew up, but I don't have that sense of going next door and talking to the people that I knew or that--that was erased.

The first time I felt homesick is when I went in the army from Berkeley and I was riding an army bus across the Bay Bridge and I said Gee I miss Berkeley. But I didn't miss (*CO-LUGE). I didn't. Or if I had an attachment, it was certainly severed.

MS. BENDAYAN: I wanted to ask you a couple of things.

What was daily life in Dachau? Did you work.

MR. BENKO: No, no in Dachau by the time I got there, we were in very crowded, triple bunks, very, very tightly crowded. There was no work. There was just going in and out of the barracks.

They would march us in and out, but there was--I never did a lick of work in Dachau. It was just a warehousing kind of situation.

I met the first 15 year old Russian anti-semanite. These were Russian partisans who had been picked up and then also some Poles, and they asked us in Russian and (*GID) was one of the terms that came out, and it wasn't a friendly gesture.

And I was amazed that to be in a concentration camp with Jews and have another concentration camp call you in some equivalent of a dirty Jew, I thought these Russians after all this communisim is no different than the rest.

But there were a lot of nationalities there.

They did distribute some packages that I told you, the French and the Belgians got packages. The conditions were very crowded.

There was a lot of lice there, no disinfectant of any kind. In fact there was more lice in Dachau than any camp I had been at before. At this stage again--

MS. BENDAYAN: Were there any incidences either at that camp or along the way of sexual abuse, abuse of the inmates or children?

MR. BENKO: Not where I was. I know of other people who were. They tend to pick a very youngish-looking boy for a (*LOU-FER), runner, but either I wasn't attractive enough or I was maybe a little older or something. I was not among those chosen. I didn't see that.

What I saw was an enormous amount of physical abuse. There were occasional times when some, you know, dreaded SS would give half an apple to allow for--or throw it out there and the prisoners would get it and there were occasional things like this, but I didn't see other kinds of things.

Most the things I saw were people being beaten to a pulp. Their arms deliberately broken and deliberately ground and treated in a way to deliberately cause pain and suffering.

And there are people who enjoy watching other people in pain. There are some who are incited by the pleas of a prisoner, because they consider that cowardice and in their code of honor cowardice can only be rewarded with death.

On the other hand, there are others who are excited by the silent prisoner, because they want to get them to the point that the prisoner will plead for his life.

MS. BENDAYAN: Is there something you could get a sensitivity to as you said about murderous people?

MR. BENKO: Well, that's what told me that there are such things as murderous people, and there are people who are so remote from their fellow man that they are quite capable of committing murder and walking away from it.

I don't know how this works long term. I've heard stories of, you know, eventually guards of some of the worst camps going nuts and so on. I don't know what happens afterwards. I suspect--as I said I don't know. I suspect that they eventually carry burdens because they carry a logical conflict if they grew up in any kind of civilization.

But they also may have been so well prepared by the Nazis that once you dehumanize you make this possible. You at the same time justify it. I don't know that.

It is unfortunately possibly to train people for an awful lot of things, including this, and I suspect that they have some selection process and I don't know if it is self-selection or not, but I think people believe, prefer to believe that evil is something that is temporarily changeable and not a human characteristic but somehow like a spirit that strikes someone occasionally and then moves onto some other territory. That I don't believe.

MS. BENDAYAN: What did you believe in?

MR. BENKO: I think there are such things as evil

people. I think you have to recognize them.

I think that we do have to take measures against then. I don't believe in capital punishment, but I do believe in incarceration without return.

And when people step beyond, when people enter into physical violence, I consider them permanently dangerous.

When they transgress beyond a certain level of physical violence, I consider them permanently dangerous, and then you put them away.

I think it would be wonderful if we had some ways of controlling this, but in contemporary terms I think that we are being denied an elementary human right of peace of mind when these people are not put away, and it is a very basic human right.

I think women feel more at risk than men do, but anybody who has been a prisoner feels very much at physical risk in certain situations a little sooner than most other people do.

And I have been in all kinds of places. I have been in Marseilles and in the worst parts of New York. I have never had any trouble. But my warning system is a little more sensitive than most peoples are.

So you know I do look out. I don't tempt fate either. I don't walk perfectly secure, but there are places where I know I am vulnerable and I don't go to without precaution. But I do think that in terms of present terms once you transgress then there is such a thing as losing your rights to inflict terror in others. And I would unhesitatingly

dismiss them from society.

MS. BENDAYAN: In the case of the German guards and the (*GUESTS), there has certainly be intimation that there was lots of alcohol drugs other than--

MR. BENKO: I didn't see--alcohol yes, I have seen lots of alcohol. Lots of alcohol, yes, but I didn't see drug use. But I was never intimitately involved with the guards. I was never intimately involved with the guards.

I wasn't a (*LOU-FER). I was never chosen for any you know special position.

At the end of the war I met an American couple, that is how I came to this country, and they kept telling me sit down, write a book. I said It is a dull book, because there are a couple of million people who have the same story. I said Who is going to buy this? I thought that nobody would be interested in the story because so many of us had gone through this and there was nothing unusually remarkable about my experience. There were other experiences. . .

MS. BENDAYAN: Well, in fact everyone does have their own experiences.

MR. BENKO: Yes, yes, you do. But I thought that what two million stories of human abuse and I--anyhow, I didn't.

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MS. BENDAYAN: More than that. But you were talking before about the life in Dachau and no work. How did you spend the day?

MR. BENKO: Just milled around waiting for food to be served. And we would talk about how soon the war would end. We knew things were--because there is a difference in the

behavior of the guards. We noticed that the guards ate the same food we ate.

When we were in the last, in (*KOUF-BOREN), the guards and we got the same food, except they got more of the potatoes and more of the vegetables and we got more of the soupy part of the liquid part of the soup, but they were eating the same thing. So we knew that they were on very short rations.

MS. BENDAYAN: What were your rations then?

MR. BENKO: The rations stayed pretty much the same. The quality--the bread changed. In the morning you got--we used to call it sock soup because it is the same color as if you rinsed dirty socks out. Some people called it coffee, some people called it tea. We said you don't have to worry, you can name it anything you want, it tastes the same. That was humor.

And then they would serve dried, it's called (*DURE-GUM), it's dried vegetable soup, either carrot or cabbage. Sometimes you got lucky it would be potato. Once in a blue moon there would be microscopic amounts of cooked meat in it.

And a slice of bread, not always, but a slice of bread.

And at night you would get a slice of bread and a little bit of margarine, about the size of margarine that is served here you know with one of the little squares about an inch and a quarter square and about a half inch thick. That was it. Or a piece of sausage that was a little thicker than

that, about an inch and a half in diameter.

The only fresh food we ever got were potatoes which we dug out of the ground when we worked for a farmer, and he beat us because of that. And we ate those potatoes raw and that was it.

And a little bit of food from the Danish when we were in Dachau, canned food of some kind, I don't know what it was. Maybe it was spam like, but I am not certain. I don't remember that.

I remember them giving to us--and something like a cracker and a little tiny bit of chocolate from a chocolate bar which was incredible. We savored that chocolate like--it is a good thing they don't give us more, because we couldn't have handled more than a taste either.

But that was it. And every noon there would be jockeying for position. First you have to estimate what kind of the guy who distributes the food, is he a top dipper or bottom dipper. If he is a bottom dipper then you have to get--then you can go early, you will still get quite a bit. But if you go just a little bit then you'll still get quite a bit of the bottom.

If he's a top dipper, you go out to the end of the line and stay out at the end of the line as much as possible, because you would get most of the food at the end. There were strategic plans of this kind.

MS. BENDAYAN: What about toilet facilities?

MR. BENKO: The toilets were long latrines. They are slabs of seats that were with a hole cut in, and you sort of

squat on this. The toilet facilities were there. The problem was to conceal when you had diarrhea, because a (*COPPO) could go by and then they start watching you and then picking you out if you had diarrhea. And you spent a lot of time . . . . .

(TAPE ENDS)

(TAPE TWO COMMENCES)

MR. BENKO: You have to lift up the seam and that is where the lice hide.

MS. BENDAYAN: In the clothing?

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: Not on your body?

MR. BENKO: They get on the body too. You get this--there is a very unusual sensation of the louse moving on your body. It is a very, very light sensation and it's as if something is thrashing in a small spot, and that's what a louse movement feels like.

And the squashing the louse is usually how you get disease, because it is in the fecal matter of the louse and you rub that in the skin and that's how you get sick. So you know animals groom each other, prisoners sit around and groom their clothing that way.

MS. BENDAYAN: You spent a lot of your days doing that?

MR. BENKO: Yes, doing that and just walking around and staying out of the way of guards and work details. They come around for work details. You find something else to do or you look as if you are on a work detail. You start

pulling weeds or something so they think you are on somebody else's work detail. You avoid work like the plaque because--

MS. BENDAYAN: I was going--

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MS. BENDAYAN: That aspect was more relaxed there.

MR. BENKO: Yes, this is again the end of the war. They don't know what to do. They have no places to send you. There is no factory to send you to. The railroads are tied up or bombed. The system is now screeching to a halt.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did you have trouble with rats?

MR. BENKO: No. No, I don't remember seeing rats there. I don't even remember seeing rat droppings there. I don't think there was enough food left.

MS. BENDAYAN: Were people dying rapidly at this point also?

MR. BENKO: Yes. Well, every day we would be taking bodies out and--yes. People died during the night and they would be taken out in the morning. Every day the death wagon went by.

MS. BENDAYAN: And how did they dispose of the bodies?

MR. BENKO: I don't know, never got out of camp. I suspect they were burned at Dachau I'm sure. But in Dachau I was simply in the camp, then we were marched out to the railroad station. So I never got any other view and then I haven't been back.

MS. BENDAYAN: What about the level of brutalities and guards and (*COPOS)?

MR. BENKO: It was less in Dachau when--at the time I

got there, and the worse was (*KOUF-BOREN). *(KAFERICK) was okay, it wasn't particularly brutal. (*BER-KE-NOW) was terrible. Next was--as I say worse was (*KOUF-BOREN) and Dachau was catch as catch can in relative terms.

MS. BENDAYAN: Do you think it is because it was getting late in the war as you say?

MR. BENKO: And there were a lot of prisoners there at the last. The more prisoners, the less their chance of getting hit, because they only have so many guards and there was really not very much to do. I don't ever remember going on a work detail. I said in Dachau I remember going on stupid work details. We knew it was make-work in (*BER-KE-NOW), but not in Dachau.

MS. BENDAYAN: How about the sleeping conditions in the beds? They were so crowded--

MR. BENKO: It was always very crowded, but by that time that's what you would expect.

The least crowded conditions were in *(KAFERICK), where in *(KAFERICK) we were essentially in the underground, you dig out in the ground and you put a little small kind of roof and then you cover the roof with dirt and grass grows over the whole thing so you can't tell very much from the over flight, except the entrance to this.

The advantage of this is it is very well insulated, so it is relatively warm in there.

We did have sort of a pot bellied stove in the center of this thing, so if you are in a good location, in other words if you were in a good barracks where they would allow

everybody to crowd around. The nasty barracks where there are killers they won't let you get near the stove, they take you bodily and throw you back. So that's the luck of the draw.

MS. BENDAYAN: How about your bed?

MR. BENKO: I was in a relatively good barrick, so we all crowded around and took turns when I was in, keeping warm that is.

And people who seemed in more dire straights they made sort of a special place for.

When I was in (*BER-KE-NOW) the way people kept warm--early in the morning they throw you out of the barracks about 5:00 or so, very bitter cold outside. Everybody stands tightly in a human stove, just pressed together. And then they break-up so that the outside people can come to the inside, so you keep forming and reforming, forming and reforming, and that's how one keeps warm.

MS. BENDAYAN: You made reference to having a clot removed I believe you said in Dachau.

MR. BENKO: In Dachau, right. I could hardly walk with this and I had a clot in my foot, so I went to the dispensary and they looked at it and they said Okay, we are going to remove it. And they marched me in, put my foot up on the table. I sit on the other and this French Moroccan guy was there and I don't know whether it was an inmate doctor or just an inmate who was there. I suspect he was a doctor, because he sewed it up okay and he cut in, made about an inch and a half cut and removed this clot and sewed it up

again and it didn't become infected. So it was okay. And then I went back to the barracks.

MS. BENDAYAN: It was some form of medical--

MR. BENKO: Oh, yes.

There was this--and there were people in the hospital with, you know, various diseases. But there was very limited things that they could do.

I was hoping that the knife hadn't been used before and such, so that was all right.

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Well, by the time as I said I got to Dachau, it was the end. I don't know what happened with the prisoners who were liberated right there, I haven't met anybody who was liberated at Dachau but I met soldiers there and I remember one guy saying I saw them come out and I just pulled the trigger, and I didn't care. I feel bad about it now. But he did say I just, I saw that and I said these guys did it and he was sitting in a tank, you know.

MS. BENDAYAN: What about your fellow prisoners? Were they up to vengence also?

MR. BENKO: They would have, but they were so weak and then they--I remember one incident wherein a German comes in in a prisoner uniform, tries to hide among the prisoners. The prisoners tried to hit him. You know, a prisoner's reactions are so slow that it's like watching slow motion cameras in action, and he wasn't harmed a bit. He was merely trapped by the number of bodies. And GI's used to set on the side and march by and they would watch for the bobbing head, and they say because prisoners shuffle they don't bounce and

then they pick them out and all they have to do is take off his clothes and you say Oh, I can't see your ribs. What did you get to eat?

MS. BENDAYAN: How much did you weigh?

MR. BENKO: 65 pounds when I was liberated.

MS. BENDAYAN: What about your health in general? Do you feel like you had any long-term health problems?

MR. BENKO: Yes. I had--well TB which I got. I had this on my foot. I was beaten with rifle butts on the side of my hip here. I have scars there.

I think that you know I've had two open heart bypass surgeries, one in '75 and one in '83, and I don't know whether that's directly or indirectly connected. The stress probably didn't help. The diet probably reduced my arterial clogging. It is the only good thing that came from these studies was you showed in the severely starved prisoners the arterial clogging decreases, but this is not a good way to treat heart disease yet.

MS. BENDAYAN: No, so the arterial clogging for the time of the starvation--

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: Or the future?

MR. BENKO: No. I suspect for the future it increases because the area is prepared, that is what I suspect, because there is an area there already. And then that is initiated. But what initiates the area is still not really completely proven.

I think that my most severe loss is the loss of my

loved ones, and it is not just a person, it is a connection and a sense of isolation and loneliness which is difficult at times, and I think the loved ones of survivors are left with an absolutely hopeless task because people who love each other would always like to make the world good for each other and in many ways that can be done, but you can't restore dead people and you can't restore those wrenched ties.

MS. BENDAYAN: And unnaturally wrenched.

MR. BENKO: Yes. I think the sudden losses are never really well-borne, but it was a little early and I had no idea that what happened to me would affect my children and may even affect my grandchildren. I thought that to put a stop, and I think it has, certainly the only--if I think of any good thing that come out of the Holocaust, I can think of only one, the State of Israel, and that's the only good thing that came out of the Holocaust. The other things were simply losses.

I don't know that we have learned an awful lot yet, but I thought that there would be more tolerance and at least regard for people's lives, and the traditional reactions that I see in this world contradict that.

I don't know whether--I think there is a very strong evidence that there is no such a thing as inherited memory. I think what this points to, supposedly we inherit what we learn in history at some subconscious level and this is the evidence that the learning level here is zero.

So we are left with the burden of passing it on by the traditional cultural methods to change the values, because in

all of those things that we call inherited, it leads to the knee jerk xenophobic reaction. I should say also that you know as a result of this, had there been no Holocaust I would have still left Europe.

MS. BENDAYAN: You feel certain?

MR. BENKO: So yes, yes. I could see no way of--I could only see adapting under stressful conditions. Under forced conditions I could have stayed and I could have--but I wanted to live like a human being. I was not satisfied living like a subject. I didn't want to live by influence.

When I grew up the way you got places or did things, you worked hard but then either with the money or the brains or the influence you had to have a connection to the powerful. I wanted to have rights on my own. I didn't want to have rights because my father knew somebody or I knew somebody or I had a connection.

I wanted to have a house that is not built on quagmire. I didn't want to live--I wasn't willing to work with the ambivalence of my existence every day for the rest of my life. I probably wouldn't have put it in those words, but that is how I look at it now.

I went to get out of Europe in 1945 and if you would have asked me in 1945 why did I want to leave Europe, I would have said because nobody really wants me here and I'm tired of holding the door.

I dearly hoped that my kids would never face that.

I remember an instance when my son was terrorized by somebody on a bus when I was in Davis and I literally saw

red. I saw my life before my eyes. And I went to the principal of the school and he was going to give me a standard song and dance and I told him, I said Now listen, I went to school in my elementary school and my gymnasium in the fear of my life every day. That is not going to happen to my son, and you are going to see to it or you are going to have to deal with me and I'm a very tough cookie. And I hit his table and things jumped on it. I said That is not the way children should grow up. It is your job to catch the bully right now, because we didn't do it in time in Europe and there was nobody to do it for me, but I am here for my son.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did he--

MR. BENKO: Oh, yes, he read me right, because I am very persistent. And I went to the parents and I explained to them just exactly how I felt, and they also knew that I wouldn't go away. But I wish that those issues wouldn't arise.

Well, after the war I went to work as I told you first in the displaced person camps and then--

MS. BENDAYAN: That was Seefeld? Is that the name of the town?

MR. BENKO: Seefeld, the town that where the guards ran away was Seefeld S-E-E-F-E-L-D, and the town that we encountered Germans in was (*MITTEN-VALD) where they took us in the gymnasium and gave us some food and allowed us to sleep there, which was very nice because it was very much warmer than out in the snow.

And then we left (*MITTEN-VALD) and walked toward--we had heard that they were setting up a camp in (*GARMIS-PARTIK-KERKEN). We walked in that direction and then an American major came along on one of those jeeps. I don't know if you are familiar with second World War jeeps with the big pole in front. The pole was made to cut wires. The Germans used to put wires in the middle of the town. People drove with jeeps with the windshield down because they often broke, so as they were driving the wires would cut-off. So to counteract those wires, they welded this big piece of steel in front of the Jeep and it is an angle iron that faces forward and pitches a little forward, so he put us all in his Jeep, seven of us all together and I sat in front holding onto that thing for dear life, and he drove us into the (*GARMIS-PARTIK-KERKEN) Prisoner Displaced Camp. It wasn't a prison camp, displaced persons camp.

And we got there and next morning bright and early I went to the commander's office and I said I can speak languages, I want a job as an interpreter. And I got a job right away. There was another applicant there who was a Ph.D. actually, but he couldn't speak rapidly. He read very well, and they needed instant translation. So I got the job.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did you have a medical examination early on?

MR. BENKO: No. I was still in these clothes and then I got some throw-away clothes, the (*UN-RAH) people were there and they gave us some clothes and we got some clothes here and there.

So we went through delousing. They deloused up the whole camp. We were in DDT up to our eyebrows. And DDT is awful now, but we also have to remember how many millions of lives were saved that would have died because there were no vaccinations, there weren't enough antibiotics. They would have died at the end of the war.

But they used to literally surround the village, put the DDT sprayers--you know they look--they had a nozzle like a gas nozzle, a nozzle on a gas pump and these air compressors going boo-boo-boo and they grab you by your shirt and before you know it they stick this down the front and they twirl you around, stick it down the back and you're in this cloud, and then they propel you on the other side.

I saw an American production line in action, and man, woman and child, mayor, lieutenant, colonel. I have seen GI's grab--a colonel steps out of the car, Sorry, sir. Everybody comes sputtering with this white dust all over. But it stopped epidemics and you can draw lines where those epidemics stopped.

MS. BENDAYAN: So that was the medical.

MR. BENKO: Yes, that was.

And then I worked as I said for this war criminals camp. And then there was an opening, a transportation of the military government in town and I heard about it and I tried for that job and I was interpreter there.

MS. BENDAYAN: What about the war criminals job?

MR. BENKO: The war criminals camp we prepared these people. Once they had were processed there was no more job

for me there.

They are interesting to see. They had all kinds of--a woman was a Ph.D. in chemistry, a Ph.D. in philosophy was single and deadly; responsible for 8,000 deaths on experiments. They were unbelievably bad experiences, unbelievably bad, never learned anything from it. You just killed the people.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did you meet any of the former guards that you knew?

MR. BENKO: No. They scattered. These were higher level people.

We also had a famous German film star there and there was a women's section there also, but I worked mostly in the men's section.

There was the American agent who came from Czechoslavakia, his name was Carl Friedman. I don't know what he did. It turns out my adopted parents met him before I had met them.

MS. BENDAYAN: Oh.

MR. BENKO: And we sure prepared terrific dossiers on people, because we knew the name of their high school teacher, we knew which high school they went to, we knew which parties they were in, which section of the party they were in, what time they were where; even got some idiosyncrasies of various schools so they said which school they went to, we said okay, who was the math teacher. You could check it out. There was a considerable bit of information they were not innocent.

MS. BENDAYAN: So you said you were interrogating?

MR. BENKO: I interrogated people and that was for a period about three weeks or so, three or four weeks and then I got this job with the military government and I used to go out a lot with GI's, in fact I lived in a house that GI's lived in, I lived in the loft so to speak, and I went to a USO show and at this USO show I ran into a member of the USO show who was trying to buy a camera from a German and he was spittering in broken Yiddish and then I translated for him. The name of this guy was Harry (*HINES). He was a small bit actor in old cowboy movies, sort of a poor man's version of this character who always had a beard on. God, I can't remember--his name was that character actor in a lot of movies--his name was Harry (*HINES), and Harry (*HINES) introduced me to the people who eventually became my adoptive parents.

And they came from the United States, originally from Minneapolis, Minnesota, and they moved to California in the 30's, and my adopted father's name is Ben Rashall, Ben R-A-S-H-A-L-L, but his professional name was Rochelle.

And my adoptive mother's name was Jane Rochelle and they were known as a dance team of Rochelle and Bee Bee, and they were headliners.

They played at the Paramount in New York and the Strand in New York and other places. They had no children. When they came to Europe with the USO trip they wanted to help somebody, so I ran into them and we started talking and when I met them they--somebody was visiting there, a singer

by the name of Jane Fromen, and Jane Fromen was a very well-known popular singer in the United States, and she was
6 in the crash I think of a PanAm Clipper or such.

Anyhow, she had lost a leg, and even though she had only one leg, she was still a very popular singer and I met her there.

So we started talking, and I went back the next day and they asked me would I like to go to America and I said Let's go.

I did go back and tell the people at the military government that I am leaving, because otherwise they would have had a patrol out looking for me because they thought there might be some people--they were still arresting people, and I worked with the CIC there when I did some interrogation and what not.

So they--ironically the major who was in charge of the military mission in (*GARMIS-PARTIK-KERKEN), his name was Major Heil, H-E-I-L, very nice man. I told him I was going to go.

So I traveled with this USO show. I had was in charge of operating the spotlight was my job, and to bring water to the acrobatics dancer; very nice lady called Nina Nova from Denver, Colorado, who spent her special coupons to buy me new boots. And I was so small I only wore the women's clothing, but I outgrew it within weeks; I changed sizes. But we traveled together from (*GARMIS-PARTIK-KERKEN) through Salsberg, we were in Mozart's town in Salsberg and eventually we traveled together to Paris.

MS. BENDAYAN: People just travel like that no papers, no nothing?

MR. BENKO: Well, if you were traveling with the USO show you just sit with the guys and you go across borders, they don't ask. They think everybody--and they gave me an American uniform.

Now, when I got to Paris there was a Rumanian legation in Paris. The Consul in Paris from Rumania hadn't been in touch with his government in two or three years. He had a flag, he had a house. I think his wife was French. He obviously must have had enough money to last out the war there.

And when we went there with my adoptive father, I told them in advance I said Look, Rumanians are all very rank conscious. He is probably going to call you general. If he calls you general, don't correct him. If he calls you colonel, don't correct him, because they will start at the top and work down to where you say that's what I am. I said Don't correct them.

The USO insignia is a bird, sort of a wide winged bird, I wouldn't call it an Eagle, but I knew that this guy, all he knew about American uniforms is an Eagle is a colonel.

He called my adoptive father a colonel. Well, a colonel was next to God in 1945. I said Don't correct him.

So he didn't have passport forms either. We said That's okay, just type it out. All we need is a stamp and a signature.

So I was officially adopted there at the Rumanian

Embassy. And then with that we could go to the American Embassy which is at (*REGA BREALLE) Number 2, just off the (*PLASS) Concord. And I got to know that place very well.

We went to the American Embassy for the adoption to apply for my visa. And they play an interesting game. They say Sure we'll get you a visa, but you have to have a steamship ticket.

Then you go to the steamship company and they will say Sure we will give you a steamship ticket if you give us a visa. So I got the steamship company to say We will guarantee passage between these two dates and that was good enough.

And then they gave me a visa, and actually my last name is (*BANKU) with two dots over the O in Hungarian, but at the American Embassy they didn't have an umlaut on the typewriter and they asked whether I really wanted that, then I would have to wait and go to the other building or see if they can find--I said never mind. I became Benko as of then.

I didn't want to change my name, my adoptive parents would have, because I said I'll never find my aunt because she knows what my--so she will be looking. And as it turned out--but really they were very nice, but they helped me get in the country. It was understood that I was going to be on my own when I got here, but they were very generous and they arranged for me for a place to stay in Paris.

They found out for example that--then the Rothschilds, the much maligned Rothschilds, they do a lot of good too and they were in a block long roominghouse which they owned, the

name of the street is Rue Guy Patin G-U-Y P-A-T-I-N, Guy is the first name Patin is the last name, some French hero. I looked it up once, but I forgot what Mr. Guy Patin did.

It is right where Boulevard Best runs into Boulevard Magenta, and they run in at right angles and this street connects at a triangle right near the (*BAR-BES SHOE-CHES-SHOE) Subway Station. And that's where I lived after my adoptive parents went back to the United States.

My papers hadn't come through. I had to wait in Paris until my papers came through.

Meanwhile, they had to go back to work in the US.

MS. BENDAYAN: How did you support yourself?

MR. BENKO: They left me some money to and then I did interpreting for various GI's or GI's wanted to go some place in Paris and I would be their translator. And I got to know Paris. I got to know the Louvre very well.

Every day I used to go to the American Embassy to find out whether my Visa arrived and they say No and I have the day to myself, or I would go out with people and there were a lot of interesting people in Paris. The American composer by the name of Mark (*BLIT-STONE) was there. He was just a GI writing music. And I go with GI's sometime to classes at the Sorbonne and I go to concerts. I lived like a GI loose on the town in Paris.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did you go out with young women too?

MR. BENKO: Oh, yes, and that is why it was difficult to go to high school after that. I had unlimited hours.

And I lived--when my adoptive parents were living in

Paris I lived in the subburb called (*SHA-TOO-CRO-SY), and (*SHA-TOO-CRO-SY) was the headquarters of the USO and I saw every act of vaudeville that ever existed between 1930 and 1945 at the USO in Paris, and there were some big stars that came through.

There was a huge dining hall that was presided over by an American Sergeant who ran it like a very strict cafeteria. Any way, I remember telling him some very well-known star put her tie on, she couldn't have her breakfast without her tie on in his diningroom. But they were very generous with food.

My adoptive father would sit down and he would take something like a half of a quarter pound of butter mixed in my cereal, and I ate incredible amounts. People used to watch me. Because I had you know two bowls of cereal and two servings of eggs and all. I ate an awful lot.

MS. BENDAYAN: Were your teeth okay during all this?

MR. BENKO: No. I had problems with my teeth afterwards, but not immediately then. Mostly I had a sore foot. My foot was sore mostly but that was the most obvious sign that I--my foot would drag after a while.

And I saw a good deal of Paris and then the French were--the French dealt very badly with foreigners is the truth. You know I was brought up as a great admirer of French culture because they sponsored Rumania. My teachers had gone to school in France to what is called (*A MAULLEN). France was very highly thought of, but they treated strangers like dirt. And essentially I had to bribe, myself, to get a police permit to leave France. I literally bribed my way by

giving cigarettes and cigars to the various officials. I got the stamp to leave France, because you had to have a permit that showed you hadn't committed any crimes from the Paris Prefecture of Police. The Paris Prefecture of Police is a lineup, like an old fashioned bank with little teller windows. There are about 25 in a row. There is nobody at 24 windows, and on the 25th window it says (*A-TRAUN-JARE), and the line runs out and around the entire block. And the other guys are sitting with their green shield, you know like old poker dealers doing nothing and the (*A-TRAUN-JARES) are running around, and then they let you through.

Well, that is how I got my permit. My adoptive father was very resourceful in getting me room on the boat. He went to the editor, one of the writers on the Stars and Stripes. He had a lot of friends at the Stars and Stripes which was edited in Paris at the time.

At the time there was a story going around that a general had shipped about three race horses and I don't know what else on a ship going back to the US, and he said Look, either this kid who has been through the war gets a place or I am going to publicize that this guy did it, and we've got the goods, we have the pictures and so on. So I got a place on the boat.

MS. BENDAYAN: So the pressure--

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: You were saying about giving cigars. How did you come by that?

MR. BENKO: My adoptive father. He bought the cigars

at the PX and cigarettes and that's what helped me get the permits to get out.

MS. BENDAYAN: How would you travel if you were going by yourself?

MR. BENKO: I traveled with a document that I got from the Rumanian Consulate.

MS. BENDAYAN: Because the Rochelles had left already.

MR. BENKO: Yes, but I was in Paris. They left from Paris, and so I had my passport from the Rumanian Consulate and then I had my visa from the US and my ticket and they even arranged for me to have fake papers to go from Paris to Bordeaux. I traveled as a captain US, because we had a friend at the USO and the USO had papers with temporary ranks so you could get priority place on a railroad car. So I traveled from Paris to Bordeaux and then caught my ship.

And well it is a historic irony that you probably remember sometimes in American history about the Nelson--it is called the Aldrich Nelson tariff.

MS. BENDAYAN: Yes, I have heard of it.

MR. BENKO: Well, this was an anti-trade measure because it was a trade.

Well, I came over on a ship named the Nelson W. Aldrich. I thought it was ironic to name a trading ship. It was a liberty ship.

So I came to New York and my adoptive parents' agent was supposed to meet me there but he couldn't get there in time, and a man from the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society met me. He met every boat that came from Europe. He was a

wonderful man. His name was Mr. Schwartz.

You know I didn't know him from a hole in the ground, and he just looked at me and he says (*BEE-STA-EED)? I said Yes. So we started talking.

And usually he met people who hardly spoke English and he was very nice. And I told him that I will be picked up, but he already took me to a hotel, arranged for a room for me. And then he said just in case they don't show up, you'll be taken care of.

MS. BENDAYAN: He didn't know that you were coming in particular?

MR. BENKO: No, he didn't know that I was coming. No, his job was to sit there and meet the boats. You know people contribute money for things like (*HIGH-EST) and they never know what they do, and what they did was wonderful, yes.

And anyhow I met my adoptive parents' agent, picked me up then and so next thing I'm riding in his car, next thing I'm in Scarsdale, New York. Of course I didn't know Scarsdale from a hole in the wall. It was a very elegant neighborhood. And we are riding home on the bus and we take the train to Scarsdale and going to this home. My entire assets consist of a suitcase in which there are two wool blankets, there is one shirt, one pair of underware. Everything else I'm wearing. I wasn't going to give up those blankets for anything.

So we're riding on the bus and he says this--I don't remember, he turns around and he introduced me, he said This gentleman here, he is the president--I still don't know NBC

or CBS. I said What's that? And they both--they had a roaring laugh when I said What's that. And I still don't know what I said that is so funny. So I stayed with him for a while.

MS. BENDAYAN: This is the agent?

MR. BENKO: The agent. Turns out the agent originally came from Rumania to this country in the first World War and he now lived in Scarsdale and his name was Smith, Eddie Smith, and he had an office in the Paramount Building just off Times Square, and he had been my adoptive parents' agents for a long time.

MS. BENDAYAN: Where were they?

MR. BENKO: They were playing some place in Chicago or--so I stayed then with a friend of theirs, because they went to show me New York and they gave me some money and they said When you get lost, call us up. So I didn't get lost.

MS. BENDAYAN: Sounds like it must have been a lonely time for you being in a brand new country.

MR. BENKO: Yes, but I was very joyous. Actually I really didn't expect gold on the streets or things like that in New York at all. I really wasn't all that uninformed. I was amazed at--what struck me most was that I had come from some place where everything was war torn and every face that you looked into had the scars of war, and you know friend or foe, it is as if you had been stamped with age and pain and suffering and being dragged down. In Paris--especially in Germany, Paris was a little more cheerful and there were elements of cheer, but people were so bad off in terms of

hunger and the only thing you could buy without ration tickets were bread and tomatoes. I ate so many tomatoe sandwiches. And everyone was trying to sort of primp themselves out of the war mentality.

But Paris was as filthy as New York is now and it was, you know, it had suffered a great deal.

When I arrived in New York, New York was incredibly friendly and it was clean and I remember thinking that news stands, papers in news stands regularly. That was unheard of.

And people actually went in restaurants and ordered things and it was served. And you ordered whatever was served, instead of this is what we have today.

And I used to watch people eat outside (*HORN and HARDER). I couldn't believe there was so much food in one place.

And then people told me long stories about how they suffered during the war, and you know their hardship was that they only got half a pound of butter or something, and that was very strange.

I went to the Hyden Planetarium and some museums in New York, and then I went to California and California was stranger for me. I went across country to California. I took a bus trip. And that's where I first ran into Jim Crow.

The bus lines were on strike, so I went on American Bus Lines that went to Chicago, from Chicago to Indianapolis. Indianapolis is the first place I saw Jim Crows.

I was riding with a black ex-GI who had this emblem

called the Rupture Duck, the symbol that means you are a veteran in the second World War. We had been in some of the same places and we were chatting. I said Well, let's go eat together. And he said We can't. I said You don't want--I assumed he didn't want to eat with me because I was a kid.

He said Oh, no. He says we have to go to separate rooms. And I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it.

And then I got to Los Angeles and I stayed at my adoptive parents' house for a short while and then I got in touch--there was an article about me in the L.A. Times and that is how I got in touch with my aunt. They knew--someone actually distantly related lived in Los Angeles and came to the house and talked to me in Hungarian. I remember he said in Hungarian You look just like Ilus was my mother's name, so I knew he knew me.

MS. BENDAYAN: This was just a wild coincidence?

MR. BENKO: No, there was an article in the L.A. Times and he lived--he was a barber in the Paramount Studios. He had been there since the mid 30's or so, and he read the article. It was in the Sunday L.A. Times. And a lot of people called up from that article and you know wished me happy life, and they were very nice. But he came to the door. He wanted to see me. And so then he told me where my aunt lived. My aunt had moved during the war and therefore she didn't have a telephone. You couldn't get telephones during the second World War. And then I got in touch with my aunt and you know within two weeks I was on my way to New York.

MS. BENDAYAN: What a relief that must have been; extraordinary to have a relative.

MR. BENKO: It was. Well, I knew I had an aunt and it was really, my aunt resembled my mother. When I got off the train in New York she wore an identical shade of a green suit my mother had. I thought for a moment it was my mother, but it wasn't.

My aunt was very good. She had little formal education. She came here in 1928, married her husband. It was an arranged marriage. They came from villages not too far apart. And she had three children: Twin boys and the girl. The girl was a little younger than I and the two boys were about two years younger--no, four years I guess and then I. So they lived--

MS. BENDAYAN: What were their names?

MR. BENKO: Friedman. She was Martha and Louie Friedman were their names and their daughter's name is Charlotte, Charlotte Friedman, it is now Charlotte (*PRITIKAN). She lives in San Fernando Valley now, she is married to her husband (*PRITIKAN). And her two brothers were George and Frank Friedman of whom Frank is alive today. George was murdered in 1969. Still don't know who. But they were a wonderful family, very viable family. They are very crowded in a two bedroom apartment with three teenagers, so the girl had the bedroom, the parents had a bedroom and then the three boys slept in pull-out beds in the livingroom, that is including me. And she just refused to treat me as if I was disabled.

So she told me things about this country. First she told me What I am going to tell you now you won't believe, but I'm going to tell you anyhow. So first of all, education is free. Impossible. You can go to school as far as you want. You can work and go to school. Unheard of in Europe.

MS. BENDAYAN: Why, because you wouldn't have time?

MR. BENKO: Kids don't work in Europe until they are adults. It is not the custom. Only English kids work in Europe, all the others don't. They are really trained to be parasites. And sometimes they get to be middle aged parasites.

Working in Europe--my father one summer he wanted to me to become an engineer so he apprenticed me so I would have the apprentice training because you have to pass the apprentice exam in order to get into the better engineering schools. His friends called up and said Are you short of money? Your son is apprenticed. What is the matter with you? It was a dishonor for a middle class person to wear the blue uniform of a blue collar worker.

But she taught me more about Civil Rights than anybody.

Did I tell you that story when she--

MS. BENDAYAN: We talked--

MR. BENKO: She was a woman who lived in the United States as an American. She came here with a deliberate purpose of adopting a new country. She didn't bring her old culture, and it didn't ware away. She reached and embraced it. And she learned American customs and she knew American

law and what her rights were and she took them very seriously.

The day I arrived, the day after I met her at the railway station and I was still overcome emotionally because she looked so much like my mother, Aunt Martha she takes me home and it is lunchtime and her kids were going to come home for lunch from school to meet me.

We hadn't been in the house maybe five minutes, the doorbell rings. This is a typical New York apartment, long front corridor and then moves off the side.

The doorbell rings, she goes to open it and there was--I could see past her. There was a cop so large he darkened the hallway. And she was about 4 foot 10, small thing, and she says Yes? And he says Is this the residence of Mrs. So and So? And she looks at him What's the matter with your hat? What's the matter with your hat?

I'm looking at this moment, I am looking for a window to climb out of. We are on the fifth floor. I'm thinking of jumping to the next window. I know there's a fire escape there. I wasn't going to get arrested by a cop, whatever. Cops are what I avoided.

So I see he removes his hat and he says May I come in? And she says No. Have you had got a warrant? He says No. Then stay there.

And I was petrified. I thought the earth would open up and swallow us both or we would both be in jail and the key would be thrown. I only knew absolute authority. There is nobody could stop a cop in Rumania and Hungary. And here

was 4 foot 10 telling 6 foot 2, must have been 260 pounds. I mean I remember, you know, that darkened hallway. And she said No, and with that she closed the door and we had lunch.

Now, that to me from then on, I knew that I had rights.

MS. BENDAYAN: What did the policeman want?

MR. BENKO: He was looking for somebody or other. It was--and I knew--

MS. BENDAYAN: Marvelous.

MR. BENKO: She was--yes. She told me everything.

She told me about the government printing office. She knew how to write to the government printing office and get a pamphlet. Says people here throw around money like mad, but you can get the best books on certain subjects here and from the government printing office.

And I had a hard time getting along with kids again, because my cousins were 12 and my other cousin was 15 and a half or so, and our lives had been so different.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did you have any troubles like nightmares or other kinds of things.

MR. BENKO: Oh, yes. Yes, I had a lot.

When I first stayed with my adopted parents they would wake up because I talk in my sleep and I would be talking in my sleep in German and Hungarian and French and English and then I would be screaming and such and then they would wake me up. Yes, I did. But gradually that subsided. Gradually, yes. I had them for a long time, but they do subside.

At times I was depressed. I felt very lonely when I

went to college as I said during Holidays. I felt I didn't fit anywhere. I did have a great sense of loss. It is like you keep looking at what you are missing and that is there.

And once in a while I see my kids, and my parents would be so overjoyed to see them, and I miss them an awful lot. When I had to make decisions I missed the fact that I couldn't consult with somebody that I really really both trusted and regarded highly. I was overprotective of my children because of it. And I tried not to be, but I think I tend to be.

MS. BENDAYAN: (Unintelligible).

MR. BENKO: It was--and as I said, I still feel that I have. I didn't understand my son through a very crucial time of his development. And he's fairly independent, he's very good natured and very kind hearted.

And when he was eight, nine years old, we were living together and I was going to graduate school in Davis and he was dying to have a bike like all the other kids. So graduate stipends being what they are, and I was just divorced, I didn't have much money so I went and bought him a used bike. And as we were walking out of the store he--I would have loved to buy him a new bike and he said to me Don't worry, Daddy, to me it is a new bike. And it touched me. Still does.

MS. BENDAYAN: Well, that is the best of your values that he said that.

MR. BENKO: Yes. But he had a hard time in school I think because he wanted to--he thought that I was very strong

in certain ways so he had to show that he was very strong and I think it cost him an awful lot in his social relationships to be very strong and very rigid.

MS. BENDAYAN: You know these things you say how your (unintelligible) affected in a way that is terrible long term after-effects?

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: Kind of (unintelligible).

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did you talk with your children about the Holocaust and your experiences?

MR. BENKO: I have talked with my son gradually. I didn't tell him a great deal. Above all my son and I were very close and we are close and I knew that if I told it without some gating, without some stepping, he would hate Germans on sight for the rest of his life. And I know that hate is very destructive.

It has its function on a short period of time. I mean it empowers destitute people to do incredible things. But long term it is a powerful negative, and I didn't want him to carry that cross on him.

And my bouts of being very serious and very earnest are probably outgrowths of this, and he saw that anyhow, so I tried to tell him some things gradually. I haven't told him a great deal, but he's certainly aware of it. And I told Eleanor, my daughter, who is 11 gradually a certain amount and I tell her in bits and pieces and actually you know she brought it up, because one day--she is very bright, one day

she said the Holiday came, so where is the other set of grandparents. She was about four. And so I told her that they died during the war. I didn't want to say they were killed, because then a four year old can't handle that.

MS. BENDAYAN: I'm thinking maybe it would be a good idea to stop the formal part now.

MR. BENKO: Oh, my God I didn't--

MS. BENDAYAN: And everybody ask questions and a lot of time for filming of the documents.

MR. BENKO: Yes, I'm sorry.

MS. BENDAYAN: Anybody have any questions you would like to ask?

MS. ZATKIN: No, I don't think so.

MS. BENDAYAN: How but Dan?

Only a few seconds here for the tape to role.

MR. BENKO: Okay.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay, tell us about this picture. Who these people were, and the day it was taken.

MR. BENKO: This was a prewedding photo of my father and mother, taken about 1928, going from--

MS. BENDAYAN: Left to right.

MR. BENKO: Left to right.

This is my aunt. Her name was *IRMA Salamon at the time.

This is my father *RUDOLPH Benko.

This is my mother Ilus Benko, I-L-U-S.

This is Martha Salamon, her sister, older sister. She is the one who came to the United States and lived here and

has three children here.

And this is her brother (*DEE-YURE) who immigrated to Israel after the second World War and passed away there.

MS. BENDAYAN: And here okay.

MR. BENKO: This is again prewedding picture with (*RUDOLPH) Benko, Ilus Benko, Martha Salamon, (*DEE-YURE) Salamon and *IRMA Salamon. By the way that Salamon is spelled S-A-L-A-M-O-N.

This is my mother at age about sixteen dressed to go to school.

MS. BENDAYAN: So what town would this have been taken?

MR. BENKO: This was taken in a village called Gyeres, G-Y-E-R-E-S, in Transylvania.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay, and what about this one?

MR. BENKO: This was a dress-up ball where the two sisters were. This is my mother Ilus and her sister Martha.

This same picture they are about 17 and 15 here and this same picture graced both their homes. It was in my mother's house. I remember it in Europe.

And the same picture was at aunt Martha's house in the United States.

That is my mother and baby Paul. If you take a look at the chrocheted collar on my mother, she made that. And if you take a look at the baby outfit that I am wearing, that was sent by my Aunt Martha from the United States.

MR. BENKO: Paul, same picture as before. That's 1929.

MS. BENDAYAN: I have to let it run for a few seconds. And there?

MR. BENKO: This is about age 2 when my parents lived in a house--villa outside my hometown of *(CO-LUGE) and we had a little cherry orchard behind the house and that's my mother holding me on her shoulders. That must be about 1931.

And that is about the same--no, that looks like a younger picture. That is my mother holding me as a baby.

And this is--

MR. BENKO: Same picture.

MS. BENDAYAN: Same as the earlier shot, same picture of the earlier shot. I got those from my Aunt Martha. She gave me all of these pictures.

I had literally nothing left from Europe when I came to the United States.

MS. BENDAYAN: This?

MR. BENKO: This is me. I'm not sure what age I am. I guess about three or so, two or three, and that's my mother in our backyard where there was a cherry orchard in the back.

And this is the carriage, my summer carriage.

MS. BENDAYAN: The convertible.

MR. BENKO: Yes, right. Now I am guessing again, it is about 1932, '31.

MS. BENDAYAN: And what town?

MR. BENKO: This would still be *(CO-LUGE). Also it's called *(COE-LAR-VARGION) in Hungarian and (*KLOUSENBERG) in German.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MR. BENKO: This is my mother with a new contemporary hairdo.

And that's me. The outfit is made by my mother and the outfit my mother is wearing is also made by my mother. She was very accomplished in dressmaking and suitmaking and designing.

MS. BENDAYAN: This?

MR. BENKO: And this is the diningroom of our house. We had moved from the cottage that you saw in front of the cherry orchard into town.

This is an apartment that we lived in, where in this apartment my Aunt Irma was married.

If you take a look at the table cloth there, that was made by my mother. If you see that chrochet cover of the sideboard, that was made by her too.

MS. BENDAYAN: I just want to get a larger look here.

MR. BENKO: On the left is a stove, that's how the rooms are heated there. They are fairly high ceiling rooms. And that is--I remember that quite well, because that's where my aunt was married in this apartment of ours. She lived with us at the time.

MS. BENDAYAN: This is?

MR. BENKO: This is--over here is the mother-in-law of Irma, whose name I don't know now.

This is my mother and this is a guest at a wedding down here, and the other person is I at a wedding.

MS. BENDAYAN: And this?

MR. BENKO: This is a picture of my--

MS. BENDAYAN: This is your mother?

MR. BENKO: Yes, this is my mother at a bath. These are high salt baths near my hometown, it's called (*SAW-MOOSH-FALLA). This is a resort. It's like the salt and sea. It's very high salt content of water.

This is the same wedding. The people you see here, this is a friend at the wedding and so is this.

The next person is my mother, and the person down here is her brother-in-law here his name was Gombi, with umlauts over the O.

And that's me. That was at a family get together.

MS. BENDAYAN: One more right here.

MR. BENKO: Yes, that's the picture of--it's out of sequence actually. It should be--it is in the backyard of the place where we lived near the cherry orchard, and that's my Aunt Irma holding me.

Oh my, this is the wedding of my mother's brother (*DEE-YURE) who was in the first picture and you can see that this is the bride.

MS. BENDAYAN: This is the one farther over here.

MR. BENKO: This is his bride and this is the bride. The groom unfortunately is not in the picture.

I don't know who this is, but it isn't the groom. He must have been taking the picture. This is her mother. This is Irma over here and her husband is--I'm sorry.

MS. BENDAYAN: It's easier if you look at the photograph rather than the monitor.

MR. BENKO: Okay. There. Okay, it is hard to see

upside down.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MR. BENKO: Okay, and these are various kids at the wedding.

Oh, I know who that is now. That is (*DEE-YURE). I'm sorry, this is Irma's husband right over here standing here and the others are various guests at the wedding, including the fiddler. And you can see I'm wearing the sailor suit over here.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MR. BENKO: And this is essentially--

MS. BENDAYAN: Same thing.

MR. BENKO: This is the same shot. You can see that (*DEE-YURE) was sitting next to the bride before, is now kneeling before her.

Here is the bride and here's her mother and various kids and I don't recognize the rest. They must have been guests at the wedding.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay. And--

MR. BENKO: This--well let's see, this is--we are over here, same sailor suit. This person over here, his name is Otto. He was Salamon. And he immigrated to Israel shortly after his 18th birthday from Rumania. This was in the 30's. He was smuggled across borders to get to Israel, much to the dismay of his father. But he got there and lived happily there and did very well.

This is a summer resort, or rather I went there. I spent my summers with my aunt who has the cross over here.

That is my Aunt Irma and her husband Gombi is there.

And this is the daughter of the host of this party.

This is the host. His name was (*GOR-GEE).

That's Susan and her brother whose name I don't remember. And that's me. And this is the host's mother-in-law sitting there in the corner.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MR. BENKO: This is a picture by our house which was on a hillside at this time. I'm about seven years old here. It is not unusual in Europe during the summer to really cut the hair off completely, and kids sort of vie by who has the more shaven head and I won that competition.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay, let's see. That's mother and son.

MR. BENKO: That's mother and son exactly. If you take a look at mother's sweater, she made it. If you look at son's sweater, she made it.

MS. BENDAYAN: What an amazing woman.

MR. BENKO: Yes.

MR. BENKO: Designed it and made it I should say. I got a new suit and that picture was in honor of the new suit there; about eight or so.

MS. BENDAYAN: Did she make it?

MR. BENKO: No, not this one. But she made others for me.

But those are all--everything you see there, you can see the same sweater, those were taken--I was about eight at the time, same set of pictures. She just sent a whole set.

And my Aunt Martha gave me all of these.

This is a statue in the center of my hometown called (*CO-LUGE). The statute, you can see the figures at the bottom. Those are nobles greeting King Mathias who was a Hungarian king who was supposed to have been born in Transylvania and that's why he is honored in the main town square.

The statue is over a hundred years old and the church behind it is I think about six hundred years old. You can't see the church in the picture unfortunately.

Oh, this is the opera house.

MS. BENDAYAN: In *(CO-LUGE)?

MR. BENKO: Yes. This is the opera house of *(CO-LUGE). You can see it is drawn after French models. It has a carriage entrance, a usual European opera house. I saw my first opera there, Carmen, and enjoyed a lot of concerts there and operettas.

I don't know whether you can see that, but that says "Droguerie". That is a drug store. And the reason we have a picture of that one is my Aunt Irma worked in that drug store. This is in off one of the squares in *(CO-LUGE).

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MS. BENDAYAN: Droguerie is a Romanian word or Romanian slang word, very similar.

MR. BENKO: Yes, if you saw the cobblestone streets, that was a Roman road once. We still use the same street. They were just cobblestoned since then.

This came from a camping trip that Irma and her husband Gombi took.

This is the remains of a Roman tower; the ruins of an old Roman guard tower in Transylvania. They had a lot of these ruins around because the Romans were there for a long time and they have viaducts and these guard towers left.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MR. BENKO: You can see that the war intervened and there are no pictures between 1939 and 1945.

Actually this picture was taken in the fall of 1947. This was my high school graduation picture. I had a little more hair.

MS. BENDAYAN: From (*STIVESON)?

MR. BENKO: Yes.

This is my first year in college in Berkeley. I came to visit my aunt and we are standing in her backyard on South Orange Grove Avenue in Los Angeles.

Again I am in first year college. I am in front of her house South Orange Grove Drive, and that's my cousin Franklin who now lives in Palos Verdes. That's again 1948. Spring of 1948.

This was taken on my first trip in Golden Gate Park with my cousin Charlotte. That's spring of 1948. She took the picture.

This is my aunt's backyard on South Orange Grove Drive in Los Angeles, and as soon as she got out of her New York apartment she grew a lot of plants.

And that's again 1948.

MS. BENDAYAN: And this?

MR. BENKO: That's my Uncle Louie, Louie Friedman who

is my aunt's husband, and we were in front of the Chinese theatre I think in Chinatown in San Francisco. They came for a visit. This is about about 1950.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MR. BENKO: This is Ben and Jane Rochelle who adopted me in Paris and helped me get into the United States. This is their apartment in North Hollywood, though they don't live there any more. She passed away and he's still alive.

They were both dancers, very disciplined dancers, played for a long time with sore backs and hurt joints. They were wonderful people.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MR. BENKO: This is Irving and Dora (*KLEIN) who lived in Los Angeles. Before that they lived in New York. She was my mother's aunt and in a distant way we are related to him also, but they were wonderful to me when I came to the United States. They were very kind.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MR. BENKO: This is a picture of my son at age about three at the Child Development Center in Berkeley, and he holds the saw exactly the same way today. It is amazing how posture is conserved.

That's my son Peter.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MR. BENKO: This is a picture of my son Peter age about eight when he was going to school.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MR. BENKO: This is a picture of my son at his 21st

birthday celebration. He came to visit us in Puerto Rico. I was there as a visiting professor for a year and he came down to see us and we're celebrating his birthday together.

MS. BENDAYAN: This is your wife?

MR. BENKO: That's my wife Sandy, that's right. We haven't introduced her before. Actually I have other pictures of her too.

MS. BENDAYAN: Okay.

MS. BENDAYAN: Any time.

MR. BENKO: This is a 1991 picture of Eleanor, Sandy and myself.

MS. BENDAYAN: How old was Eleanor?

MR. BENKO: 11.

MS. BENDAYAN: You have a handsome family.

MR. BENKO: Thank you. I think so.

MS. BENDAYAN: Yes, I mean all of them. Okay. This is your daughter.

MR. BENKO: Yes, this is my daughter Eleanor Ilus Benko. Her middle name is. . .

(WHEREUPON THE TAPE CONCLUDED)

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