

PAUL BENKA

DECEMBER 12, 1990 INTERVIEW OF PAUL BENKO

MS. BENDAYAN: I am Sandra Bendayan. I am here with Paul Benko doing an interview for the oral history project in San Francisco. Today is December 12, 1990.

Paul, will you please introduce yourself and give a date and place of birth and your name if it was different than Paul Benko?

A. Yes.

Actually, my name is Paul Benko, but there are two dots over the O in Hungarian pronounced *BEN-KEW, but no one can pronounce that so I am Paul Benko since I got my American passport. That was in 1945.

But, I was born in a town in Transylvania which is in the western province of Rumania called *(CO-LUGE) *cluj* in 1929, August 11, 1929, and I lived in that town until 1944 and 1940--1941, I believe, the Hungarians marched into this part of Rumania so I lived in two countries.

We lived, you know, a middle class life. My father was an executive in a large shoe and leather factory. I went to public schools in Rumania.

Q. What were your parents' names?

A. My father name was *Rudolf Benko and my mother's name *Ilus* *(ILL-LUCHE) Benko. My father was born in Budapest.

My grandmother was born and raised in Vienna and the reason I say that--I had the Hungarian, Rumanian and German at home so by the time I was four I spoke Hungarian and German and then when I went to school I learned Rumanian.

1 Q. Did your family speech Yiddish also?

2 A. No, we didn't speak Yiddish. The reason we
3 didn't speak Yiddish was my grandmother was a German teacher
4 and you know what German teachers felt about Yiddish. The
5 Yiddish I learned was mostly in informal conversations and in
6 jokes.

7 I actually learned more Yiddish in college in the
8 United States than I knew in eastern Europe, because there
9 was this association that really--they looked upon Yiddish as
10 fractured German. And my grandmother being a German teacher
11 was particularly critical of Yiddish, but--

12 Q. Was that your maternal or paternal?

13 A. My paternal grandmother.

14 I never meant my maternal grandparents. They both
15 passed away. They had died--in fact my mother was an orphan.
16 There were three girls in the family and one son and the
17 three girls essentially--she was born in a village near a
18 town called *(TURE-IS-DAW) which still exists today in a town
19 called Guerres in Hungarian, G-U-E-R-E-S, with an accent
20 *(EX-VEE) on the first E.

21 Q. What was her name?

22 A. *Solomon. My mother's name was Solomon and she
23 had two sisters, one called Martha and the other one called
24 Irma.

25 Martha immigrated in 1928 to the United States and my
26 mother and her sisters were very close and her brother,
27 particularly since they lost their parents and they were
28 literally on their own for part of their lives--when my

(1 youngest aunt was still a teenager, so they kept in touch all
2 through--and they were really in close contact.

3 My Aunt Martha made great efforts to get my mother to
4 come to the United States.

5 My parents were divorced when I was about four and
6 that is an unusual event in Europe and so I first stayed with
7 my mother and later on I stayed with my father.

8 Q. Are you an only child?

9 A. Yes. But that is was not an unusual event in
10 Europe. It is much more unusual here but--

11 Q. For an only--

12 A. To be an only child. I had a lot of friends that
13 were essentially only children.

(14 Q. You were raised first with your mother?

15 A. Right. I was raised with my mother and my mother
16 was a dress designer and dressmaker and that is not an
17 exaggeration trying to upgrade it, she really was a trained
18 designer. She could look at somewhat that someone wore and
19 draw the pattern and people would come to our house and she
20 would draw patterns for them and she made clothes also.

21 My mother was also a very good chess player and she
22 practiced--she belonged to a chess club and my father was an
23 economist, he was involved in buying and selling foreign
24 currency for the factory that he worked for in small
25 countries; they had very, very strict currency controls.

26 The people in the United States are unaware of that,
(27 that someone else can tell you how you can spend your own
28 money, but in small countries currency controls are very

1 strict and he worked for a factory where he had to buy such
2 things as English thread and materials from Argentina,
3 tanning material called *(JAW-BRA-CHOE), so he had to go to
4 London at times or to other places and buy currency and
5 transact business that way.

6 He was--he had gone to a commercial type of gymnasium
7 and he actually had some business college training.

8 He had gone--he lived in a small village. My paternal
9 grandfather was, it is an ungraduated graduated engineer and
10 it is an Austro-Hungarian title. It means that someone who
11 by skill and by apprenticeship reached a state where they
12 take an engineering exam so they are called an ungraduated
13 engineer. That is an engineer can practice as an engineer
14 but doesn't have a college degree.

15 Q. A bit unusual now.

16 A. Right, right.

17 And he became the mechanical superintendant of a saw
18 mill in a small town called *(CHEW-CHA) and this, this is
19 where my father grew up and it had great influence on his
20 life because in *(CHEW-CHA) there was a local poet and this
21 guy was a renowned poet and attracted a lot of artists. So
22 my father heard music from early days on and he became a very
23 proficient piano player. My father could read music before
24 he could read words and letters, from early days on, and he
25 became a very proficient piano player.

26 My father would read music before he could read words
27 or letters and there was no other entertainment. My
28 grandfather was enormously fond of music but grew up in a

(1 family too poor to train him in any music, so I basked in my
2 father's rich musical talent because he went to school, he
3 went to school in the near-by town and in order to make money
4 he played in silent movies. So he learned silent movie
5 scores.

6 And I thought everybody had a father that you went
7 home, you asked for a song, he sets down, plays it on the
8 piano and just as I thought everybody's mother could make a
9 suit or knit a sweater or all those things.

10 Q. So did your father remain an active force in your
11 life even after the divorce?

12 A. Yes, we were very close.

(13 I stay with my mother during the week and I visited my
14 father on the weekends and I learned a great deal from my
15 father.

16 Both of my parents contributed to my survival very
17 significantly. My father's contribution was that he stressed
18 language learning, so I got French lessons--well I got those
19 in school too but he taught me French too. He bought books
20 in French that have no Hungarian, German or Romanian words in
21 them, they were only pictures and words so I learned a
22 language without translating which is really the best way to
23 learn languages.

(24 And then when I was about twelve and a half or so he
25 hired, when I was living with him, he hired an English
26 painter who had been caught by the war in Rumania whose name
27 was Mr. *Gallaway and he looked exactly like John Chris
28 *Stanmus, if you remember the head of South Africa with the

(1 white goatee, he looked exactly like him. And he had tobacco
2 stained, very long teeth and he never opened his mouth when
3 he talked. So I learned the King's English first. He spoke
4 German but my father forbade any other language but English.

5 See our lessons consisted of walking, and I was
6 allowed to write down words after a couple of months only but
7 otherwise we walked and talked and we walked and we talked
8 and there used to be parties of kids about my age who all
9 were taking English lessons and if you went to the party they
10 would--you could only speak English. If you didn't speak
11 English they would open the door--you know teenagers would
12 rather somebody out a window than leave a party, so we were
4 13 really motivated to learn English.

(14 But the principal reason for my father insisting on
15 learning English is because he did see the storm coming,
16 though he thought he could weather it, but he said if we lost
17 everything and they would paint the walls brown or red,
18 people who speak languages would always find a place to work
19 where they could earn their living. And his entire approach
20 was to sort of prepare me for survival.

21 As I said, the reason he didn't leave is because he
22 thought he could weather the storm, that he had been there
23 long enough, he had enough connections, he had enough wit and
24 such that he could survive; and of course he didn't.

25 Q. When was it that he started teaching these
26 languages in preparation. . .

(27 A. Beginning in 1942.

28 Q. I see. So that was--

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. *(?) moved along.

3 A. For us the war started much earlier than it
4 started here and the stringency that came later on was not
5 entirely unexpected.

6 We went--in the late 30's and early 40's we went to
7 the train station. We used to stay at train stations and
8 wait for trains of refugees because we would hear that a
9 refugee train was coming and we would be waiting there with
10 food and sometimes blankets and sometimes the information was
11 accurate, sometimes we just waited for days and nothing came.

12 Q. Could you listen to the radio?

13 A. Oh, yes, we had a radio. We had two radios. We
14 had an official radio, the registred radio, and we had a huge
15 Phillips set; a Phillips radio. They made very good radios
16 because we listened to the Yokohama Symphony regularly on
17 weekends in Rumania. Listening to the radio and going around
18 the world was the way many of us learned geography and with
19 stamps and so on, and we used to listen to this.

20 And when the Germans marched into Hungary and the
21 Hungarians began registering radios then they insisted that
22 Jews have their radios sealed. In other words you could only
23 listen to one station, one official station.

24 So we took our little Mickey Mouse mock radio and had
25 that sealed and we had another radio that really--the
26 Phillips radio which we used to listen to Voice of America
27 and mostly through the BBC--the BBC had more frequent
28 broadcasts than the Voice of America and they would come out

1 on the same band.

2 Unfortunately they had a very bad call signal. It was
3 the victory sign of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and this
4 carries through walls like mad. If anybody ever wants to
5 operate an underground radio they shouldn't put boom boom
6 boom on. But we used to greet each other with the opening
7 bars.

8 If you met somebody on the street, especially during
9 the war, the secret police tasks, if they see more than two
10 people together they will pull them apart and ask them what
11 they are talking about and so people meet and they tell each
12 other what they are going to talk about.

13 But when they first greeted each other they sometimes
14 would go Ta-Ta-Ta-Dum.

15 Q. You prepared for the police?

16 A. Right. But it led to a mentality where virtually
17 all government acts are distrusted and that is really not new
18 for Eastern Europe because most governments were really
19 atrocious.

20 They sold--they forced people to buy bonds for example
21 at the end of the first World War. I remember my father
22 lighting fires with the bonds that he was forced to buy,
23 deducted from his salary, and most people had a very cynical
24 view about what these bonds would amount to.

25 It was forced taxation, that wasn't called taxation,
26 really.

27 The food supplies were very restricted.

28 Well, let me see. I went to school in--as I entered

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1 gymnasium still under the Rumanians and I went through first
2 gymnasium under the Rumanians and then the next regime to go
3 over--that is when the Hungarians marched in.

4 Now, the Hungarians were much better Nazis than the
5 Rumanians were. The Rumanians are the ones--where we dealt
6 with them--were very laissez-faire. No rule was absolutely a
7 rule.

8 As a matter of fact my father, the way I got into
9 school--in elementary school--my father thought I was ready
10 to go to school at six and the official age is seven so he
11 went to the Ministry of Education on one of his business
12 trips and asked how he could get me into school and via
13 business connections he found out what the bribe is and how
14 much the price is and which third secretary gets it and that
15 is how people got things done in Rumania. It was a land
16 where almost anything could be done with money.

17 And it was a country that was fairly young because
18 they really only came into being after the first World War,
19 very strongly influenced by the French; mostly writers,
20 authors, the intellectuals. Most of the people high
21 government had been trained in France and France sort of
22 sponsored the country.

23 You probably saw that after the recent debacles with
24 the French who went there first because of their pre-existing
25 relationships and French was taught in schools.

26 But the Rumanians as I said were also under the gun.
27 They had a sort of a palace coup with Anielewicz, a Nazi
28 taking over.

1 But he wasn't quite as good a Nazi as the Hungarians
2 were. The official historic decision was called the
3 Belvedere decision because it was at the Belvedere Castle
4 where they decided to cut Transylvania in two and give the
5 northern part to Hungary and let the Rumanians keep the
6 southern part.

7 There was a--the border was a few miles from my house
8 and at the very beginning the consensus of opinion was that
9 Hungary would be a safer place to be during the war than
10 Rumania.

11 Q. Why was this?

12 A. Because they felt that the Hungarians would be
13 more civil, and on the surface the Hungarians did look more
14 civil and probably more reliable and probably safer and so on
15 and part of it--let's take for example the Jews in Budapest.

16 The Jews in Budapest were never deported in mass. I
17 don't know if you have interviewed any others who were. They
18 were never deported in mass. From the rural part of Hungary
19 they were departed, but not in Budapest because people--some
20 people were still very influential in the *(HORTHY) government
21 did protect the Jews. They couldn't protect those in the
22 provinces, but Hungary is a great land of contrast because
23 you have an airplane factory for example next to essentially
24 a feudal landlord's holdings and feudalism exists in Eastern
25 Europe and existed up to the second World War.

26 When I came to school in this country I always
27 wondered why they spent so much time explaining something
28 that was so obvious that existed, and they kept talking about

1 it as if it was hundreds of years ago. But that was--

2 Q. It was the very time

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Were you raised in a religious family?

5 A. No.

6 My family--my grandmother was religious. Let me
7 explain what we meant by observant and not observant.

8 When my parents were married they did observe
9 *(KOST-U-WITZ), mainly because my father insisted on it,
10 although my father ate non-kosher food outside the home
11 but--and we had one set of non-kosher dishes if you brought
12 non-kosher food home.

13 My mother did not have a kosher home once she was
14 divorced. My mother was not religious and she was religious
15 up to the point when her parents died and that was a great
16 crisis of faith for her when she lost her parents and she
17 lost--first her mother died and then her dad remarried. She
18 never liked her stepmother, and from what I have heard it was
19 not a pleasant match. And then her father died. And then
20 her stepmother died also.

21 And it--she told me, and interestingly enough when I
22 met my aunt in this country she told me exactly the same
23 story, that she went through a great crisis of faith and she
24 did not--I was bar mitzvahed in *(CO-LUGE) in the summer of
25 1942 and it's--it was a very touching ceremony because in
26 order to have a bar mitzvah everybody had to save for half a
27 year. So--

28 Q. Great sacrifice.

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1 A. It was an enormous sacrifice.

2 You had to literally scheme to get eggs.

3 I did have the bvar mitzvah and I belonged to a
4 congregation that is called *(NE-OH-LOG), a reformed
5 congregation by European standards and by American standards
6 it would be conservative.

6 7 I know recently my cousin found a book--a Rabbi wrote
8 a book about the community in *(CO-LUGE) and the rabbi
9 survived the war and he did go back and they restarted the
10 Jewish high school and so on.

11 Q. Did you have a personal religious belief, a
12 belief in God, following rituals as you were growing up?

13 A. Well, I did follow the rituals. I was not, I was
14 not terribly, terribly religious ever and I was, I was
15 puzzled mostly by the early religious training that I had.

16 I understood the holidays and I enjoyed those very
17 much, but I didn't go to *(HATER) either.

18 My parents rebelled against the notion of memorizing
19 enormous amounts and so they never even brought up the
20 subject.

21 I know some other kids did go.

22 I learned to appreciate Judaism both intellectually and
23 emotionally in some family celebrations, but they were always
24 tainted with some bitterness because my parents were
25 separated and I was not particularly happy at those times.

26 But the positive side was that the rabbi who ran the
27 Sunday--well, let me rephrase that by saying when I attended
28 the *(L^{ay}Y-SEE-UM) or the gymnasium they required that you get

1 religious education, so I didn't have to attend any other
2 faith's religious class which is taught as a matter of course
3 but I did have to attend mine.

4 So when I lived with my mother then on weekends I
5 would go to my father and the religious classes would, of
6 course, be Sunday mornings and I would skip a lot of
7 religious classes because I would rather be with my father
8 than go to Sunday. But I did attend a few.

9 And then when I lived with my father when I was going
10 to gymnasium by then they--I went to a Catholic gymnasium
11 because I got in--they had under the Hungarians, for example,
12 they passed a system that no more than six percent of the
13 students could be Jewish. Well actually hardly two percent
14 were during there. There are four Jews among--it wasn't even
15 one percent, there were four Jews among 600 students.

16 And the Hungarians as I said insisted on the religious
17 education and the Catholic school that I went to what is
18 presided over by an ordained priest of the *(PEER-IST) order,
19 it was a *(PEER-IST) school and the *(PEER-ISTS) are not
20 known in the United States, they are a teaching order. They
21 have been a long-term teaching order and they really brought
22 education to the masses so to speak in Hungary after the
23 reformation. It was sort of a counter-reformation movement
24 in Hungary.

25 And the school was presided over by a priest by the
26 name of *(KARL YAW-NOESH) and he was a remarkable man because
27 when he interviewed me to go into school he told me the story
28 which now everybody has heard, you know, on Monday they asked

(1 for the Catholics and Tuesday and--the first thing they asked
2 for the Jews. And I didn't say anything.

3 And so on I heard that first from his lips. It is not
4 exactly those words but essentially sooner or later they are
5 going to get me if they get you. He was a remarkable man.

6 In 1943 I remember graduating; in 1943 is the height
7 of the war. The Germans are not doing well. The propaganda
8 machine is spewing venom left and right. He got up in front
9 of the assembled crowd at graduation with the German officer
10 who commanded the town sitting in front of him and there were
11 the assembled German flags on the one side and the church
12 flags on the other side and he made a speech where he asked
13 the graduates to dedicate their lives for the timeless
(14 principles of Christianity and love of mankind and not for
15 the hate and violence that some others represent.

16 I thought he was going to be arrested on the spot.

17 And--

18 Q. Why wasn't he?

19 A. I don't know. I don't know whether they thought
20 it was just another speech that wouldn't make much difference
21 or whether they didn't dare touch the church, and they were
22 no church arrests but the church was split. My teachers were
23 split right down the middle. All the young ones were
24 Hungarian patriots and they thought by joining the Nazi cause
7 25 they were going to get a great independent Hungary
26 that--well, they were an independent country. I don't know
(27 what other kind of independence they wanted, but there are
28 some language problems here because when they--in Hungarian

1 the word freedom and independence is the identical word. It
2 is *(SUP-BA-CHOKE) and it implies freedom from and freedom to
3 both together. So it is a very muddy concept.

4 They have absolutely no concept of civil rights. I
5 remember how shocked I was when I found out something about
6 civil rights when I came to this country.

7 Let me say that in Europe inalienable rights are held
8 only if you have a title in Eastern Europe or you're
9 incredibly rich, you dominate everything and you have lived
10 there for a long time. Those are the inalienable rights, not
11 Civil Rights the way we understand them.

12 Q. By hierarchy?

13 A. By hierarchy, exactly.

14 All those legal rights and all that are written down
15 when really push comes to shove people look not for a lawyer
16 but for an influential lawyer, a lawyer who is connected to
17 the family or a lawyer who is connected to the government or
18 a lawyer who is connected to--because otherwise the system
19 doesn't work.

20 Q. Growing up how was it for you to be a Jewish
21 person in that time in that school?

22 A. The first day I went to school, first day in
23 elementary school--the town is 100,000 people, 20,000 Jews,
24 but people know each other really quite well. There is not
25 such a huge influx and outflux as there is here. Most
26 everybody knew whose son you were and, of course, if you
27 misbehaved it is reported at home. There are no telephones
28 but the tom-toms work faster than the telephones I am sure.

1 Well, we had--as a child I had met Jewish friends and
2 non-Jewish friends and we had Jewish friends and non-Jewish
3 friends in our social life. I think we felt closer to many
4 of our Jewish friends but we had some non-Jewish friends whom
5 we felt very close too also and some of whom took risk to
6 bring us food.

7 There were other people who were also very close to us
8 whose homes we went to, who came to our homes. We went to
9 New Years parties. We went to funerals and weddings and
10 such. And when we were being deported they would show up at
11 our house, you know, a week or two before and they--before we
12 even knew that something was going to happen they would say
13 why don't you give me your books and furniture because you
14 are not going to use it again.

15 And for me that, that was a very dramatic cut from the
16 society that I grew in. So I missed--I really didn't know
17 what homesickness was. I mean I wanted to be free as a
18 prisoner but I did not know homesickness in the sense of
19 having an attachment to the people and the place.

20 I was--after these events I was probably more attached
21 to the place than the people and so I didn't miss it. It is
22 true I was also very young at the time.

23 But there were some certainly who brought us food when
24 we had very strict curfews for example and when some things
25 were very, very hard to get they would bring us some. But
26 that was maybe two people and we knew hundreds.

27 My father had lived in *(CO-LUGE) since 1916. During
28 the first World War he was not drafted because he was

(1 declared essential for the factory that he worked for.

2 He went around and he bought--this was a shoe and
3 leather factory. He went around and bought supplies in the
4 country side for them.

5 Shoes are made with little wooden pegs in Europe, that
6 is the leather is nailed together with little wooden pegs and
7 they didn't have good thread or very little thread and the
8 factories made shoes for the Army so he traveled all around
9 Czechoslovakia and parts of Poland and down in Yugoslavia and
10 so on. That was his job.

11 And so having been there for such a long period of
12 time, he knew an awful lot of people in town and he had
13 helped a tremendous number of people.

(14 It was not unusual on Sunday morning there would be
15 eight or ten people sitting in his study who had various
16 kinds of problems, whether they wanted to write an appeal to
17 the government, a petition to the government or whether they
8 18 had some other thing and he would arrange it. And he works
19 for the shoe and leather factory. If he gave his card with a
20 little initial on it they could get a discount on shoes.

21 And he knew an awful lot of them. In fact I used to
22 joke that he knew so many bums. It's because he had worked,
23 you know, as a piano player in a lot of bars and in Europe it
24 is a very formal society. Somebody who is dressed like a
25 homeless person would never address you by your first name
26 without calling you Mister or something like that, or the
(27 German they put Herr; Hungarians ^{UR-}*(OOL).

28 Q. The title, right?

1 A. And--oh, yes, always the title. And these people
2 called him Rudy which is a nickname; which is literally
3 unheard of.

4 And I said how come you know so many bums?

5 And he would tell me that he knew them when they were
6 not bums, when they were just, you know, coming in the bar.

7 Q. I would like to know did you have one synagogue
8 or more?

9 A. Oh, no. We had quite a number of synagogues. We
10 had the--there were quite a number of conservative
11 congregations. There was *(HATER). There were several
12 *(HATERS).

13 There was a rabbinical training center, was--I forgot
14 the--maybe you should cut it a minute because all I am doing
15 is wasting your film.

16 (*Brief Recess Taken)

17 There were quite a number of Jewish, 20,000 Jews and
18 there was--eventually there was a Jewish Council by
19 the--during the years there was a Jewish hospital in my
20 hometown and then they organized a Jewish gymnasium and
21 because Jews weren't allowed to go to school with Hungarians,
22 the Hungarians passed the laws, see that is why how I went to
23 the Catholic school.

24 And my father, the reason he sent me to the Catholic
25 school was he said that the Jewish gymnasium is wonderful but
26 it is not life-like, that is not what life is like, and I
27 should learn and get along.

28 You asked me about how I was treated by others. I was

1 treated like anybody else as I grew up.

2 As the 30's fade out and the--in the beginning of the
3 40's there was the continuing and ever increasing drum beat
4 of anti-Semitism in all the official press. We got the
5 German films, films like *(YOO-USE) and some others which
6 caused tremendous atrocities, but there was the official drum
7 beat that was ever--

8 Q. You said films caused tremendous atrocities?

9 A. Yes. Jews were attacked on the street. There
10 are parts of town where a lot of Jews lived, it wasn't
11 strictly a ghetto; it once was a ghetto but now it was a
12 less-defined ghetto. But there were attacks and there are a
13 lot of very, very observant Jews with *(PAY-US) and the
14 kaftans and the hats who lived there and they were attacked
15 on the street. There were protests about it.

16 Q. Were there killings too?

17 A. No, there were just beatings at the time.

18 There was--when my mother was growing--not--when my
19 mother was a young woman, not when she was growing up, as I
20 had said she had moved to *(CO-LUGE). There was a seminary
21 of Rumanian Orthodox--this is like Greek Orthodox except the
22 Rumanian version of the Greek Orthodox--and those students
23 went on a riot in the Jewish section and they raped and
24 pillaged. I think there were people killed then.

25 Nobody was ever convicted of course of anything.

26 But there were a lot of beatings and exclusions and
27 humiliations and people wouldn't talk to them and people
28 wouldn't wait on others in the stores, in food stores and in

(1 restaurants and so on, that kind of thing became a very daily
2 occurrence. So you learned what were safe restaurants. What
3 were safe stores. What were safe pharmacies.

4 And so there was this duality in dealing with the
5 world. There were safe and unsafe places.

6 Q. Would you consider there was still anti-Semitism
7 as you were growing up?

8 A. Yes. I am going back that I mentioned to the
9 first day that I went to school.

10 I got into a fight and I got into a fight because
11 there was a Gypsy boy in the class and the other kids all
12 picked on us and we got into a fight and it sort of--this is
13 before the teacher even walked in the class then. The
(14 teachers are absolute powers in Europe and one goes to school
15 well primed for that. There is no disciplinary problem of
16 the scope that exists here.

9 17 So we sat down but there is a 10:00 o'clock break and
18 we got into a fight during the 10:00 o'clock break and one of
19 the boys, not the Gypsy boy, he and I were side by side, we
20 got into a fight and felt--I felt my life threatened to this
21 day, and I bit. After fighting I bit. And that is crossing
22 over a line supposedly. But I tore his jacket from biting
23 him, from the elbow down here.

24 And so we were sentenced that--and I got to see the
25 principal the first day and he sent us home and I was
26 supposed to take this boy with me, home with me and show what
(27 I had done.

28 So I did and I--this time was when I was living with

1 my mother and my mother looked at it and she is taking
2 material from the bottom of the back of the suit, she remove
3 this for him and she didn't say--I expected to be reprimanded
4 for fighting in school and she was weeping and she said "What
5 happened?"

6 And she was working on this. And I said "Well, he
7 called me a dirty Jew."

8 And she said "Well, do you feel like a dirty Jew?"

9 I said "No."

10 She said "Good. You stood up for what you believed
11 in."

12 And the kid who came with me, he was so worried about
13 being beaten I am not sure whether he heard that but
14 gradually he did hear it later on that it was not just
15 misbehavior.

16 We never became close friends or anything but he never
17 came near me either.

18 Q. He had a respect for you then?

19 A. Yes.

20 And then I learned something, that schools have
21 certain behavior patterns of rat packs, you know. People
22 gang up and they pick on somebody else and then we moved from
23 one place to another.

24 So I changed schools I remember in second grade and in
25 second grade I was, you know, I went to school with some
26 anxiety, it was a new school. And I remember the principal's
27 name literally translated Trojan War. His name was
28 *(TRIONEROUS BOYD) which in Romanian means Trojan War. And I

1 wondered who would ever name his son that. But I didn't have
2 any problems there.

3 There were kids who were very anti-Semitic and one
4 learned to avoid them. . .in Europe children do carry knives.

5 Q. Did you ever get ID cards at the time from the
6 police?

7 A. Oh no, not until the Hungarians came in.

8 Yes, when the Hungarians came in we got ID cards, you
9 are right.

10 Q. Your picture was on it?

11 A. Yes, yes, always. Even sometimes--I am trying to
12 think what was--if it was on the food stamp card or not. I
13 don't remember now, but the identification was there.

14 Q. They didn't give you a number?

15 A. No, no. On the card there was a number.

16 Q. Yes, but not for the Jews?

17 A. No, no.

18 Q. The identification--because the Germans did it,
19 so I wondered if the Hungarians went that far to give the
20 Jews an identification number.

21 A. No, I got a number in the camps only but not
22 before. No, not then.

23 Q. Did you suffer any being the child of divorced
24 parents?

25 A. Oh, yes, yes. There were a whole lot of people
26 who shunned me and--but both Jews and non-Jews. They
27 couldn't handle the situation, I see that now. I was puzzled
28 by it.

(1 Our social interaction, however, was very different
2 than in the contemporary context because European schools
3 really do give a hell of a lot more homework than people have
4 here, so during the school year the ardor of anti-Semites was
5 dampened by the fact that they had to show up with the
6 homework. So there wasn't that much time to roam around and
7 get into mischief.

8 During the war there was very little of going over to
9 somebody's home. We couldn't join the soccer teams. We
10 could join--there existed a Jewish soccer league and I
11 remember there was a Jewish soccer team in my hometown that
12 kept winning and the sportswriters were always trying to
13 explain why the Jews win one this time. (Laughter). But
(14 they had a *(SYNTERNAL) league in play there.

15 One of the effects of the war was the kind of pick up
16 game which occurs with kids just living along the same street
17 playing soccer together and they said "No, we don't want to
18 play with the Jews." And I remember being very shocked at
19 that, that these were kids I had played with since I was a
20 small kid and. . .

21 Q. In the town of *(CO-LUGE) were you living in the
22 Jewish section more or less?

10 23 A. No, I wasn't. We were living in part of town
24 quite away from it and we lived in an apartment house and the
25 apartment houses there have gardens, they have a courtyards
26 and--they have a garden and it is not unusual for people to
(27 have a plot of land and raise flowers in the courtyard and
28 that is where a lot of social interaction occurs and people

1 sit around in kind of the deck chairs in the summer.

2 There was that drawing away. They were talking and
3 then they wouldn't interact.

4 We used to have a maid and maids here are enormous
5 luxuries but in Europe virtually all of the young women from
6 the country would come from the country to the city to raise
7 their dowries. So they would work in the city two or three
8 years and then they would raise enough money for their dowry
9 and go back home.

10 And the maid--first the other people even shunned our
11 maid and I remember the maid was surprised by this also and
12 then the government forbade Jews from hiring others and we
13 couldn't have a maid. And maids actually preferred Jewish
14 employers because they had highly regulated hours and Jews
15 hired maids mainly to do things on Saturday--I mean they
16 certainly worked the rest of the week but they worked
17 Saturday and they always got off on Sunday.

18 Legally speaking in those days you only had to give a
19 half a day a week off.

20 Q. Was there in the second town you moved to--you
21 said in the second grade you moved to another town?

22 A. No, I moved to another school, not another town.
23 I just moved; not another town, just another school.
24 Same--right, just the different school district.

25 And I lived--I moved to--right near there is a
26 Unitarian Gymnasium in my hometown and there I lived just
27 behind. In fact the Unitarian Church owned the apartment
28 house that we lived in, my mother and I.

1 Q. While there wasn't an official ghetto it sounds
2 that there was kind of a Jewish sector?

3 A. Yes, there was a Jewish sector in town but there
4 are--a great many Jews lived all over, mostly those who were
5 less observant, mostly people who were in business and such
6 and they literally were scattered all over.

7 Q. Did you have other relatives? Aunts, uncles?

8 A. Yes, I did have. I had one of my--I guess a
9 great uncle who lived not far from us and I had--my mother's
10 uncle was--also lived in town and he was a very wealthy man.
11 He had the alcohol concession and he had another factory.

12 His name was Samuel *Solomon and he had two sons and
13 when his first son got to be eighteen he went to his father
14 and said I am going to Israel.

15 And his father said "All my life I worked for my kids.
16 Everything I have I have done for you and I don't want you to
17 go to Israel."

18 And he said "It's all arranged."

19 They did go to summer training sessions run by--I want
20 to say the *(HYSTRO-ANDROOT) but it isn't the
21 *(HYSTRO-ANDROOT).

22 There was a Jewish movement which supported summer
23 camps in which kids were really trained to do agricultural
24 work as such and the kids did go to those camps and as I said
25 when he was eighteen his oldest son, his name was *Hugo, told
26 his father--and his father literally disowned him. And
27 family gatherings were very bitter because you couldn't say
28 the name of Hugo and his--actually it's his wife whose name

1 was *Peppy that I was related to and a wonderful lady very,
2 very kind person and she was crushed because she felt she was
3 losing her son.

4 In those days people could not get into Palestine
5 legally so going to Palestine meant that they were smuggled
6 across the broder either to Turkey or to Yugoslavia and then
7 to Bulgaria or then to Turkey and directly to Bulgaria and
8 bribe somebody on boat. So getting there was really an
9 arduous task, full of risks and--

10 Q. What year was that?

11 A. In 1936, '37.

12 Q. Was he going because he had some sense of the
13 foreboding of the future?

14 A. I think no. I think he was going because he felt
15 that even if nothing would have happened in Europe, Europe
16 was not a place for Jews. Period.

17 Q. Uh-hum.

18 A. And his brother sure enough became eighteen, he
19 went.

20 And so then their house was very empty and there--and
21 of course they perished in the Holocaust.

22 There were other relatives who did get out also
23 gradually. Those relatives--when I mentioned to you when
24 Hungary and Rumania were separated, generally those who
25 remained in Rumania survived much better than those who were
26 in Hungary. They were not deported as thoroughly or
27 efficiently as the Hungarians did. As a matter of fact we
28 found out that--after the war that although we had heard

1 rumors that the Germans did not want the Jews any more by
2 1944 because the camps were full, their facilities were full,
3 and it is the Hungarians who insisted that they take the Jews
4 out. So it was on their insistance that we were deported,
5 not because the Germans asked for it. And--

6 Q. During the 30's?

7 A. Uh-hum.

8 Q. How was it that you began to get a sense of this
9 impending German--

10 A. Well, the German propaganda machine was very
11 effective, the German bund and the *(TOR-FRINES) were all
12 going like gangbusters all over here. They were recruiting
13 people. They had put out a lot of anti-Semite propaganda.

14 We had relatives in Vienna; we heard from them things
15 were bad.

16 We had relatives in Czechoslovakia; they were overrun.
17 They were under run so to speak. So we knew things were
18 going on.

19 There was an exodus of Jews. Many people got exit
20 visas of one kind or another. And as a matter of fact my
21 mother was supposed to come to the 1940 World's Fair in New
22 York and my father wouldn't let me go. He was afraid he
23 would never see me again. He was right, he wouldn't have.

24 So my mother decided to go and then she got as far as
25 the Yugoslav border and she turned around and came back. She
26 told me that the border was closed and all that but a lot of
27 people could have gotten out. I think she couldn't bring
28 herself to go.

1 Q. Neither of your parents remarried?

2 A. No.

3 Q. You said that you used to go and wait for
4 refugees. Were people coming into your part--

5 A. I am talking about now in the late 30's, early
6 40's, up to '41 or so, refugees from Poland, from
7 Czechoslovakia, from Austria or from anywhere else who would
8 sort of find their way through and then they would be coming
9 through in train loads and I remember staying up all night in
10 the railway station waiting and we packaged the food so that
11 we could hand it to them very quickly and--

12 Q. Were any of these refugees telling you what it
13 was like, where they came from? Or were there any of those
14 who had been released from camps?

15 A. No, we didn't know of people released from camps.
16 What we did know was that they cried and--we were not with
17 them very long--they were terribly upset and terribly
18 frightened. I had never seen anybody so frightened in my
19 life. But that is all the time we had with them.

20 What we did know about was that people who were
21 political refugees--the government, all European governments
22 are very oppressive and they believe that any association of
23 people is only there for the purpose of overthrowing the
24 government. My mother was suspected of being a subversive
25 because in the late 30's she and some of her friends tried to
26 organize an orphanage. And they thought that this would
27 admit that they are not taking care of orphans and there was
28 enormous harassment--and also the Hungarians were of the same

1 kind.

2 The writers used to come to our house and poets and we
3 would literally meet on the sly because if they saw a
4 gathering of people then they would investigate why are they
5 meeting.

6 Q. Were you experiencing difficulties in getting
7 food or other kinds of items?

8 A. Oh, yes.

9 First of all the food rationing, the rationing system
10 in Hungary was a farce. By the time they issued the ration
11 tickets all they were was paper left. There was no food
12 left. But luckily both my parents were informed, like my
13 father for example started buying cigarettes in 1939 because
14 he knew that during the first World War the only way you
15 could buy food is to go to a farmer and offer him cigarettes
16 and then you always got food. The currency was no good, but
17 a cigarettes always were. So--he was a non-smoker, my mother
18 was a smoker, but she saved--or she did things like put up
19 preserves.

20 It's against the law to hoard sugar, that is a capital
21 offense, so what she did was she boiled sugar syrup because
22 it is not against the law to store syrup. We probably had a
23 two or three year supply of syrup on hand and in our--in the
24 storage room, you know, in the food storage room there we had
25 these sorts of things, sacks of dry beans and things like
26 that. But those were pretty well used up.

27 And in, I know that--one year '42 to '43 we went a
28 whole year without eating any meat. And my grandmother saved

1 the breastbone of a duck; it was dried out. And she would
2 make these concoctions with ground potatoes and so what--sort
3 of pack it on top of the silly duck breast and we would cut
4 it and pretend it was our form of fake meat.

5 Actually it is a kind of hamburger or meatloaf is made
6 like this and then packed on top under normal times and we
7 did that.

8 No, food was in great--very short supply and sometimes
9 I would go and put on my raincoat and we had these slings
10 under the raincoat so I could carry two 10 kilo loads of
11 bread. 10 kilos is 22 pounds so when I was I guess about 13
12 or so, and I was always a small kid--I am not a big kid
13 now--but I learned to smuggle bread and things like that.

14 Q. Where did you get the bread?

15 A. From a baker that we knew.

16 My father once invested in the bakery and he had a
17 friend who was a baker and helped him. So if we went to the
18 bakery late at night, and we used the back streets so we
19 wouldn't get picked up by the police, and choose bad weather,
20 of course, then we would get some bread.

21 But standing--it was very difficult getting food. We
22 almost always had to get it on the black market and it was
23 very vulnerable because dealing black market was a crime.

24 We bought food stamps--not food stamp; what? Food
25 tickets, the ration tickets from Gypsies because the Gypsies
26 traveled all over. They could have seven addresses and so
27 they didn't depend on food ration cards any how and--but you
28 could only exchange that in certain stores because if they

1 really knew you well then they would know that isn't yours.
2 So it was always--food was--became a terrible problem and
3 even potatoes were being rationed.

4 Q. Did your parents' income get affected during this
5 period too?

6 A. Well, no, my father worked until shortly before
7 we were deported and so my mother had her alimony payments
8 and she was still working because people had their clothes
9 redone. They couldn't buy new clothes so they had clothes
10 recut in a different fashion. There was an awful lot of that
11 went on at the time.

12 It was difficult to find thread things like that and
13 certain kinds of ribbons and stuff like that that she needed
14 but not--so her income wasn't cut as badly.

15 People who were in business for themselves
16 were--suffered terribly because the businesses--they were
17 forbidden to own their businesses so they had to take on a
18 partner and sometimes they would--the partner was officially
19 called a strawman, because the partner really didn't own it,
20 it was an employee, it was a friend.

21 In other cases they lost their businesses and they
22 lost virtually everything they had.

23 Q. You had mentioned before that your father
24 contributed with the languages and that your mother also
25 contributed to your survival.

26 A. Well, my mother contributed in the other way.

27 The massive drum beat of Jews being inferior would
28 have been very, very devastating and my mother kept insisting

(1 just because liars tell a lie very often, it isn't true. And
2 she was much more concerned with the education of character
3 and of resilience and she--I am sure given a chance she would
4 have been literally fighting.

5 My mother was very much ahead of her time. All though
6 she only had an eighth grade formal education, she had read
7 an enormous amount. She strongly believed in what is now
8 termed women's rights. But she believed it in terms of human
9 rights.

10 And she felt that because for example she was married
11 she couldn't really run a shop and she wanted to have her own
12 shop and her own business and such and I think that was a
13 major problem, my parents' disagreement, because my father
(14 felt that here he was, he finally made it and a very
15 respected man in the city and his wife goes to work and it
16 will be taken he is not a good provider and it was a terrible
17 affront to him.

18 And in fact he wanted me to become an engineer for
13 19 example and so I went through apprentice training during the
20 summer because you can't get into the best European
21 engineering school without having passed the first apprentice
22 exam which involves manual skills, pretty high manual skills.
23 You have to know exactly how to cut metal, wood and to shape
24 it to a degree and you have to actually cut a thread on a
25 bolt and it is a crude bolt, but you have to do it not with a
26 machine but freehand.

(27 And that is the--that was part of the first apprentice
28 exam. And he wanted me to get out of Europe and go to

1 Switzerland.

2 Well, his orientation was in this direction and so
3 when I went to work as an apprentice during the summer and
4 people saw me in this apprentice costume and he got phone
5 calls at work and friends called up and they said, you know,
6 if you are in dire straights we can lend you some money. And
7 he kept saying No, no, that is not why.

8 But it even that, you know, it did bother him a bit
9 that people would take him as incapable of supporting his
10 family. And I can see that--how he felt about it.

11 Q. You didn't go to Switzerland?

12 A. No, the war came.

13 He had a friend in Switzerland, he thought about it,
14 but he thought he could weather the storm, that he knew
15 enough people in the various groups and various political
16 groups and such. He knew Hungarians. He knew Rumanians. He
17 knew Germans. He spoke German very fluently. And his first,
18 you know, executive job was in charge of correspondence so he
19 dictated letters in French, German--not in English, that came
20 much later, but in Hungarian, Rumanian, German and French.

21 Q. But like many, so many, many others he
22 underestimated what was coming?

23 A. Yes, he did.

24 He had a very close friend there who--who, they worked
25 in the same place and this man one day decided that he, this
26 was not the place for them. He took everything he owned--his
27 name was Arthur *(LAZAR), he passed away. He lived in Los
28 Angeles, so did his widow.

1 Any how, he sold everything he owned in order to take
2 something out of the country. He couldn't take dollars. He
3 could take very few dollars out of Rumania.

4 He bought handmade peasant blouses and Leica Cameras
5 and they came to the United States with something like five
6 bucks in their pockets and landed in New York and did some
7 work and then they moved to Los Angeles and established a
8 business there. And literally the founding of their family
9 was some Leica cameras and these handstitched blouses.

10 Q. When did they leave?

11 A. They left in '38.

12 Q. And your mother, did she never entertain thoughts
13 of leaving?

14 A. Yes, when she was thinking of--in 1940 when she
15 was going--

16 Q. *(?) permantly?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. But you needed money, didn't you?

19 A. Yes, yes. You needed money to leave and you
20 needed also connections to leave. Not everybody could have
21 left. You know there were long waiting lines for visas.

22 And another way of leaving was to do it by literally
23 crossing borders illegally.

24 You know hindsight is always 20/20. If everybody
25 would have utilyzed the Gypsies' routes we could have, but we
26 had no idea that we could and there were very few
27 Consuls--every Consul with a stamp could have saved a life.
28 Every Consular officer who had a stamp in his hand could have

(1 saved a life, and if the Consulates of the world would have
2 said No, and just opened their gates and the people go
3 inside, the Germans did respect the consular doors and--well,
4 you know, like I said, hindsight is 20/20.

5 Q. So when did it start to get really bad?

6 A. By 1941 we began and by 1942 we were wearing
7 yellow armbands first only on the weekends, not on
8 weekends--what I mean is Saturday, Saturday was the day when
9 one did military training and when other students were
10 getting military training I had to wear a yellow armband and
11 sort of clean the hallways in school. It didn't bother me
12 much because I didn't enjoy stomping around in the snow, but
13 we got the idea that we were to be humiliated and the
14 distance between me--there was another fellow who was in the
15 same grade I was in, his name was *George Kraus and we had
16 been born in the same month; his father was an attorney and
17 he and I were friends because we had go to the same
18 elementary school together.

19 And during the period of time he had an appendectomy
20 and the appendectomy operations were handled like major
21 disaster in Europe. Kids were out two, three months because
22 of an appendectomy. So I am the one who brought him his
23 homework and so we became fairly close. And he went to the
24 same school that I went to, the same gymnasium.

25 Q. You must have been engaged simultaneously
26 preparing for bar mitzvah?

(27 A. Yes. I don't know where he had his bar mitzvah
28 come to think of it. I don't know if he had his bar mitzvah.

1 But we didn't go to the same lesson. We had individual bar
2 mitzvah teachers.

3 Q. So there weren't restrictions about those kinds
4 of things?

5 A. No. There was no restriction. The restrictions
6 were mostly when you could be on the street, when you could
7 not be on the street, and on food, on jobs. All the
8 teachers--there couldn't be any Jewish teachers. Then after
9 a while Jewish doctors could only have Jewish patients and
10 this went on and on and on. And then Jewish lawyers couldn't
11 practice, and all this sort of thing.

12 Q. Could you go in restaurants? Were there signs up
13 there?

14 A. Yes, in some restaurants there were.

15 Well, let me say I did not see the sign. I heard
16 about Jews not being welcome in certain restaurants and I did
17 not specifically see--it is just that you weren't waited on;
18 there were other restaurants that one was.

19 And so I remember for a birthday during the war my
20 birthday present was that my father was going to take me to a
21 restaurant; I could eat all I want. So we went to the "black
22 market" part of the restaurant that is in the back and then
23 you can eat all you want. And that is one of the few
24 restaurants.

25 I remember another restaurant--we didn't eat much in
26 restaurants because of the amount of spying that went on on
27 people was tremendous.

28 And we used to have New Year's parties for example at

1 my mother's house and people would come before it was dark
2 and everyone would bring something and you knew that they had
3 to stay until next day until 7:00 o'clock, until the curfew
4 broke. And ironically it turned out to be some of the most
5 memorable parties I ever attended because everybody brought
6 not only food but something to entertain with.

7 And there was a textile engineer for example who was
8 an opera singer and one of the leading actors, leading
9 Shakespearian actors put on a performance of an *Edmond
10 Rustont play called *Lakelone which is Napoleon's son and I
11 remember I was in college and I was reading about this and I
12 said I have seen this and the truth is I have never seen this
13 play but I heard this play. The actor set the play simply
14 with his voice in a darkened livingroom. He lit the candle
15 and said this is the *(SHERGRAM PALACE). This is
16 *(MITTERSMITT PALACE). And this is a grenadier stepping from
17 the shadows telling Napoleon's son about this. And I could
18 swear I had actually seen the image.

19 And people read their poetry and they read their plays
20 and so it was a very entertaining evening. We all--

21 Q. How resourceful.

22 A. Yes, it was.

23 And we saw the first of the theatre without the
24 elaborate stage settings because we simply didn't have it.

25 Q. So people were having fun as well as--

26 A. Yes. Yes, they did. And they passed along
27 literature and news and there was ardent speculation about
28 what the after war area would be like. And many of the

(1 people were very hopeful of a much more socially just
2 society.

3 There was no doubt that the Allies were going to win.
4 The amazing thing is we really didn't have doubts during the
5 war and that positiveness that this will end was there.
6 There were many dark moments when it seemed we might not
7 last, but we didn't doubt that, what the outcome of the war
8 would be.

9 Q. Why did you doubt you might not last?

10 A. Because we knew people were killed.

11 Q. Did you hear that from the people coming on the
12 train?

(13 A. We heard that from people. We got it from
14 letters. We heard it from--a lot of Jews were picked up and
15 taken in labor battalions, mostly men to big mines in the
16 Ukraine, and some of our friends that had happened to and we
17 were in touch with them because the Hungarians who guarded
18 them operated a big racket. You would pay them a lot of
19 money and they would get a little more food and so on and
20 they would send letters back that were uncensored and we knew
21 that things were not going well with the front and we
22 listened to the radios also.

(23 What we doubted was our ability to last, but we didn't
24 doubt what the ultimate outcome was and we could see their
25 bombings were occurring more, more frequently. The supply
26 planes that supplied the Yugoslavs from Russian territories
27 flew over *(CO-LUGE) and because they didn't stop and bomb
28 and these were pretty big flights so we finally got the idea

1 that is where they are heading.

2 And the frequency of announced bombing attacks kept
3 increasing, you know. The radio would announce which cities
4 are going to be bombed, because they were so confident by
5 then that they had air superiority that we are going to bomb
6 them no matter what.

7 Q. Were you afraid?

8 A. No. We would cheer when the bombers came
9 through.

10 They bombed a railroad station in my hometown. They
11 bombed part of the factory area. There were not many
12 civilian casualties there.

13 All the time I was in the camps I kept waiting why the
14 in the heck--why don't you bomb this real quick? But there
15 weren't many bombings at the time.

16 Q. Did you get to the place of their being a ghetto
17 in your city?

18 A. No, there was not a ghetto in the sense of people
19 living there, but when the Hungarians collected all the Jews
20 in my hometown, mostly from the Jewish section and other
21 section, they were placed actually in--on the territory of a
22 brick factory. I don't know if you have ever seen a brick
23 factory. It has open sheds and then, you know, some
24 manufacturing plant but mostly open sheds and so families
25 were housed in open sheds without adequate facilities and
26 from there they were shipped off to the concentration camps.
27 The brick factory always has a railroad siding there and that
28 is where they were sent from.

1 Now, I didn't go with that shipment. I lived in the
2 other part of town and my father for a while was considered
3 "essential" to the "war efforts" which wasn't true, but a
4 friend of his helped.

5 So we weren't--we went about three, three weeks later
6 than the rest of the town.

7 Q. Did your mother, was she exempt for that too?

8 A. No, no. She lived in another part and she was
9 deported. So by the time I got to Auschwitz which was--I was
10 deported from my hometown, we were first taken in like a
11 house of detention, the major house of detention. From there
12 we were sent to a Hungarian camp in northwestern Hungary.
13 And from there to *(BEER-KA-NOW) actually.

14 And as I said that lag was about three--between three
15 and four weeks. By that time my mother had died. I didn't
16 know that until after the war when I got to *(BEER-KA-NOW).
17 My aunt who was with my mother, the only person I saw that I
18 knew from my hometown who we didn't travel in the same
19 shipment with and she saw me but she didn't tell me that my
20 mother had died and she died too.

21 So it wasn't until after the war that I found out that
22 my mother had died.

23 Q. What year are we in now?

24 A. We are in 1944, '44.

25 We weren't deported until the very last.

26 Q. Was there a gradual tightening--did you have
27 rumors of being transported out?

28 A. Oh no. The first when they sent, when people

1 went in the--we heard rumors from 1942 on, but war breeds so
2 many rumors that you learn to discount them.

3 When we were shipped from my hometown to the Hungarian
4 concentration camp we stopped in Budapest at *(LA-TRAIN-KA)
5 at Budapest. So my first sight of Budapest was from a cattle
6 car. And they took us off the train and they took us into
7 the house of detention in Budapest and a representative from
8 the joint came and he tried everything that he could to
9 rescue us in any way.

10 He got us food, very good food, the best food we had
11 had in months. And then he said "Is there anybody sick?" He
12 said "I think you are all sick. Let's see if we can get a
13 medical certificate." There were all kinds of pretexts and
14 he tried and he tried and he tried and couldn't budge it.

15 But we heard from other people about *Walderstein. We
16 heard that there was a Swedish guy going around giving
17 passports and I didn't believe it. I thought that this
18 was--there were always some stories. It was always a modern
19 day ~~M~~ssiah coming out of the woodwork and it's great to
20 build the spirit but I didn't really believe that anybody was
21 doing that.

22 They--up to the time that we went in the camps we did
23 listen to the radio and we knew that the Allies were moving
24 and we knew that on the Russian front--*(RUSS-STOFF) was the
25 first place that I remember that Germans got thrown back.

26 We knew about the landings in Africa.

27 We knew about the landings in Italy.

28 The factory where my father worked got a magazine

(1 which is called the *(SWITE-ZER) Illustrated *(ZYFUNG) which
2 is sort of a Life Magazine type book and I--the censor takes
3 a brush literally to each copy and brushes out things that
4 the censor doesn't want you to see in sort of a heavy ink and
5 I accidentally spilled a little bit of rubbing alcohol and I
6 noticed that it dissolved the edge. So we used to take
7 cotton and wash it off.

8 So we knew that Stalingrad had not fallen and the
9 Germans claimed that they captured Stalingrad. And the
10 amount of lies they told were incredible.

11 And there was a picture of the German General *(VON
12 PALLIS) being interviewed by the Russian General and that was
13 a major turning point in the war.

(14 And more German prisoners, not German prisoners but
15 German wounded were sent to my hometown. In my hometown
16 there was a small teacher's college and they put a high fence
17 around it and we discovered why there was a high fence around
18 it or rather a--they blocked out the fence so you couldn't
19 see through it in a regular wrought iron fence there, and the
20 reason they had done it was because the, these were
21 quadriplegics and the entire hospital was filled with people
22 without arms or legs.

23 Q. They were Germans?

24 A. Yes and German prisoners all over.

25 At one point, in 1942 I think, there was a German
26 officer quartered, they used to quarter officers in *(?) and
27 we were terrified because they could get drunk and shoot us
28 all. And this man, I think it was around *PAY-SAW) time,

(1 he got terribly drunk one night and he cried and cried and
2 cried and said all he wanted to do was go home to his family.
3 He hated the war. He hated the killing, he hated that and
4 then he begged us not to tell anybody. And we were scared
5 stiff that he would make sure that we won't tell anybody.

6 But the German soldier--by '44 all the German soldiers
7 that were on leave were getting drunk out of their skulls.
8 They were depressed. They saw what was coming.

9 Q. Did they talk with any of the civilians?

10 A. Only when they were drunk.

(11 When they were drunk they would come up and they would
12 cry and talk about the terrible things they had seen and how
13 terrible the war is and I was with my father when they would
14 come up and they offered to sell their Luger pistol. You
15 know being seen with it was enough to be executed at the
16 time.

17 Q. Were there a lot of brutalities against Jews just
18 in general up to '44?

19 A. Yes, yes.

20 There were sweeps on the streets. The sweeps on the
21 streets were really to pick up warm clothing and, of course,
22 they took Jews first but later on they took other people's
23 and if you wore a fur coat they would take away your fur coat
24 and give you a receipt. Well everybody knows that receipt
25 was worthless. The Russian winter got them.

(26 Q. Did you have to turn in personal property or--

27 A. We--no, we didn't have to turn in. We had to
28 make sure that we didn't have any contraband. We spend days

(1 burning books and such; but people who owned businesses did.
2 They were taken over.

3 Q. You had to wear the yellow star eventually more
4 than on Saturday?

5 A. Exactly. We started first with the yellow
6 armband, then we had to wear the yellow star. Then we had to
7 wear it all the time and there were certain dimensions and
8 such and we wore--even before that we were set aside but the
17 9 yellow star really did it and then stores would shun you and
10 everybody would shun you and it was a way of dehumanizing
11 people.

12 Q. Was there ever a committee of the *(YUME-LOT)?

13 A. Yes, there was a committee. My father served on
(14 it. They essentially provided for the welfare of the Jewish
15 community and they taxed themselves for it and my father
16 would could home sometimes and say oh something complains
17 "What are you complaining? You still have the money to give.
18 What is to complain? You should complain when you don't have
19 any money to give."

20 The Jewish community drew together very well. They
21 were very compassionate in the operation of the hospital, in
22 making sure that people had things. I had never seen that
23 before the war.

24 Q. Did the Germans actually enter your homes? Did
25 they search for people?

(26 A. No, the Hungarians usually came around, not the
27 Germans. We didn't get house-to-house searches. But the
28 reason we didn't get house-to-house searches is because we

1 were very well-informed. We knew why they were searching
2 house-to-house and they were searching for people that had
3 escaped, politically underground people. They were mostly
4 leftists and they were people also who were smuggling
5 information and I carried information but I made sure I
6 didn't know what it was, what the information was.

7 A lot of kids had been captured and the most
8 terrifying thing for a child was that you didn't--that you
9 would inform on your parents. And for me at least that
10 was--the fear of being tortured and informing on your parents
11 was devastating fear and it made me look on the world--I had
12 to make a quick assessment, very fast assessment on whether I
13 could trust somebody or not. And I knew I couldn't make any
14 errors.

15 Q. You had to hone your instincts?

16 A. Yes.

17 (*Brief Recess)

18 A. When I came to this country I could tell
19 policemen to this day--sorry my family will tease me, (about
20 wearing his glasses), but that is okay.

21 *MR. FIELDEN: I was talking with Sandra outside about
22 some context for this and she suggested I ask you a question,
23 if it is okay with you?

24 A. Certainly.

25 Q. I am trying to get a sense of the continuity of
26 your childhood. It sounded like you had sort of some
27 different kind of living situations.

28 Basically you were living with both parents?

PAUL BENKA

46

(1 A. Right.

2 Q. And then you were living with your mother and
3 also at times you were living with your father?

4 A. Uh-hum.

5 Q. And there were a couple of different school
6 situations in there.

7 I was wondering if you could go back to the very
8 beginning of your life?

9 A. Uh-hum.

10 Q. And just tell kind of a personal history of what
11 your childhood was like and go through those periods and give
12 us some detail about your living environment and your
13 situation in those periods.

(14 MS. BENDAYAN: The most detail possible

15 A. Okay. Let me say that between the ages of zero
16 and two about we lived in a little, in a house in--an
17 individual house on the edge of town there. There was a very
18 nice orchard behind us, part of it was a cherry orchard. And
19 I revisited it--I don't remember that--I have pretty good
20 memory from the time I was three and a half on but before
21 that I don't have a--much of a memory.

22 And we then moved into town into an apartment house
23 and I will bring the pictures one time and perhaps you can
24 photograph them and then you will see what that looked like
25 at least on the inside.

(26 We lived middle class life at the time. My father
27 went to work and my mother stayed home.

28 The barber would come early in the morning and shave

(1 him and that was not unusual in those days.

2 And I remember that my aunt was married in our house
3 and my father's barber's name was Mr. *(SONNEN-SHINE) and so
4 the Rabbi came and I looked at him and I said we better call
5 Mr. *(SONNEN-SHINE) to shave his beard.

6 That was one of my early memories.

7 I went to kindergarten at the *(NEE-YO-LOTT)
8 kindergarten and they operated a very nice kindergarten and
9 we did the kinds of kindergarten things kids do now. And
10 they had small furniture and small toys and that sort of
11 thing.

12 And when I was in kindergarten is when my parents were
13 separated and then divorced.

(14 MS. BENDAYAN: Q. Was that hard for you?

15 A. Oh, yes, very. I never approved of it. Of
16 course no children do.

17 But I did, I did live then with my mother and my
18 mother lived essentially with her sister and her husband who
19 had no children and right across the street from the
20 elementary school where I went to.

21 Q. You all lived together?

22 A. Yes. It was a spacious apartment. Again the
23 apartments are not really scrunched little apartments, they
24 are quite spacious and they have a large yard and a garden
25 and this was sort of a duplex.

(26 And in the front of the house lived my aunt's
27 sister-in-law and her husband and her children and they had
28 children about my age so we played in the garden. It was a

1 very convenient existence. And, you know, uncles would come
2 into town and uncles always round up the kids and take them
3 to the *(CON-DA-RYE) and stuff us with--

4 Q. What is a *(CON-DA-RYE)?

5 A. It is a bakery that serves the baked goods on the
6 premises and they serve excellent coffee and cakes and ice
7 cream during the summer months and that was kind of
8 entertainment.

9 We went--there is a big public swimming area. It is
10 sort of--it is not only a swimming pool but a park around it
11 where we went swimming summers.

12 We sometimes went--there are some saltwater lakes near
13 us where people take the cure--there is nothing to cure, I
14 mean you just go there and soak in the saltwater. But the
15 kids love it because they can float in it. You don't have to
16 be able to swim. It is like the Salt Lake in Utah.

17 Q. Did you have a good relationship with your aunt
18 and uncle you lived with?

19 A. Yes, yes. They are very nice, very different
20 people from my parents.

21 He was a bookkeeper and an accountant, I guess, for a
22 firm and they then moved away from my hometown and when they
23 moved away they moved to a smaller town that was near lumber
24 towns because the lumber comes--they don't transport lumber
25 by trucks, it comes down the rivers and then they made
26 insulation out of this. Lumber is literally shredded and
27 they made it in insulation. They manufactured *chalk.

28 So I used to spend my summer with my aunt between the

1 ages about six and ten. My--

2 Q. *(?)

3 A. Oh yes, it was very enjoyable,

4 There was--I say what rural life was like. We took a
5 lot of bicycle trips. I got a bicycle when I was about--I
6 learned to ride when I was about six but I didn't get a
7 bicycle until I was about 12 or 13. I was 13 because that
8 was, I made an agreement with my father that I would study
9 for the bar mitzvah, that I would take classes and I not only
10 took classes as an apprentice as I mentioned to you before,
11 but I took classes in shorthand because he thought that if
12 you were really going to go on it's silly to write the way
13 people usually do in school, you ought to learn shorthand.
14 So I, if I did all of these things and everything came out
15 okay then I would get a bicycle.

16 So once I got a bicycle--we could ride around in the
17 country side very safely on a bicycle.

18 Q. During the main part of the year you and your
19 mother lived alone?

20 A. Yes. After my aunt and--moved to this town my
21 mother and I lived alone and then I moved when I was about
22 11, as I said I moved to my father's.

23 Q. Did your mother ever have a boyfriend along the
24 line?

25 A. Yes. I didn't regard them boyfriends in the
26 sense--they were a group of people who, who used to play
27 chess together. They read books together. They would
28 discuss the recent plays. They would discuss poetry.

(1 And they had a lot of friends who were in the Spanish
2 Civil War. A tremendous number of European students from
3 university went to the Spanish Civil War and fought on the
4 loyalist side and we got to know them because my mother
5 rented rooms to college students and I knew them before and
6 after.

7 And there are quite a number of women too, by the way.
8 There was a higher proportion of women than people think here
9 going to school and many of our doctors were women, not men,
10 and you could always tell professional women because they
11 wore a men's watch; that was the designation.

12 I know women lawyers and women doctors were--and as I
13 said there were women and I remember one in particular who
14 went to the war in the Spain and came back wounded and she
15 had been burned and it is the first time I had seen anyone
16 with a burn wound. She had been burned extensively on her
17 body.

18 Q. So your mother had another form of income?

19 A. Yes, and so through them and through others we
20 met and various people and you know my--they were not live-in
21 boyfriends but I think she was particularly fond of some that
22 I can think of and--

23 Q. But she didn't have a romance in
24 male/female--whatever?

25 A. Not in my presence. I suspect she did because I,
26 there was also a girl who helped her and she went out at
27 night and it was not unusual for parents to go out at night
28 in normal middle class people in the 30's. Going out, you

(1 know, five days a week was not unusual. They would go to the
2 theatre or they would go to nightclubs or they would go to
3 people's houses for dinner. People don't work as intensively
4 as they do in the United States. So that would not have been
5 unusual.

6 But as I said, it wasn't a live-in boyfriend.

7 Q. Uh-hum.

8 A. They were all politically interested and they
9 were interested in pretty radical changes. And they
10 organized essentially underground railways for people who
11 were on the run and we learned to not know too much because
12 again we were afraid of being arrested. I am talking now
13 about 1940, '41, '42, '43. We knew that people were arrested
(14 at random at times, they would simply take you and arrest you
15 and you would disappear for a couple of days and people were
16 beaten and tortured to inform on other people.

17 Now, the information may be whether they smuggled out
18 money or they hid money or whether they were giving
19 information to the enemy, whatever that was.

20 Now, obviously some information did go through because
21 the first time they bombed the factory that my father worked
22 in they only bombed the right part and they didn't bomb any
23 other empty warehouses.

24 But the general tenor of life was such that it got
25 more and more stringent. You had to be more aware of what
(26 you said to whom and how.

27 And simply getting enough food became a huge problem.

28 Q. When you say there was an underground railway,

1 was your mother involved in this?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. From when was she involved, if you know?

4 A. Oh, from 1940 on.

5 People came in the country illegally and they had to
6 leave illegally and they had to have papers made. But they
7 were taken from one house to another house and you didn't ask
8 their name. You didn't ask the name of the house that you
9 went to.

10 Preferably they tell you it is the third house from
11 the corner so you wouldn't know the address as such, so if
12 you got caught you wouldn't--

13 Q. What was your mother's role?

14 A. My mother gave me the message and I would take
15 the people over there.

16 Q. Well, she would say take so and so to the third
17 house?

18 A. She would say take these people to the third
19 house, you know, the corner after that and take them to the
20 third house.

21 Q. That was the only information?

22 A. That was the only information. And I asked her,
23 you know, why is it that we can't know. The reason is
24 because if they catch you, you don't know.

25 Q. Did she explain to you what was going on, why she
26 was asking you to do these things? And about the underground
27 railroad?

28 A. Not in so many words. You knew after a while

1 that these are people running for their lives.

2 Q. What other kind of information did you carry?

3 A. You knew where you could buy things and that was
4 something you weren't supposed to know.

5 We knew where valuables were hidden. We knew what
6 books we had that we weren't supposed to have.

7 Q. There were some books?

8 A. Yes, personal books. You know the Good Soldier
9 *(SWIKE).

10 Q. Yes?

11 A. That was a highly forbidden book.

12 And there are many other books that were absolutely
13 forbidden.

14 We would go to the--we would never get a book from a
15 lending library, never, because those were always checked
16 by--they would know what you read. And even by the pattern
17 of your reading they would know.

18 So we would go--book stores there always operate
19 lending libraries and you go to the lending library and you
20 would, there would be an official lending library where you
21 took out a book that was official and there was an unofficial
22 lending library and you got the book. And you got a book
23 from the official lending library where they wrote down what
24 you borrowed and then you would get a book from the other
25 side of the library where they wouldn't know.

26 Q. So as a teenager you were doing that?

27 A. Yes.

28 Q. And your mother also?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Was your father involved with this?

3 A. Yes. Not in the same group but he had other
4 groups. So everybody had their own group.

5 Q. Uh-hum?

6 A. We all got books that were "unapproved" books
7 by--I keep threatening my students now-a-days I wish they
8 would put a guard in front of the library--everybody was
9 sneaking in the backdoor then--they would use the library
10 more often.

11 But we got books this way and we got new books and
12 written that--they even objected to popular novels, there are
13 popular novels here, Sinclair Lewis' novels--no that they
14 permitted but I remember I just ran across it a couple of
15 days ago and I can't remember it now. It was a bona fide
16 novel but the authorities decreed that this was against the
17 popular creed. I--

18 Q. Your parents sounded like they had very similar
19 political views.

20 A. Yes, they did. They did.

21 Q. You said the quarrel they had was your mother
22 wanted--

23 A. Yes, my mother wanted to be much more independent
24 and I don't think my father could stand that and there--I
25 think that was very strong clash among them and I think my
26 grandmother probably didn't help matters much because she was
27 naturally on her son's side.

28 Q. Uh-hum.

1 A. But--

2 Q. Did you have any kind of relationship with that
3 grandmother?

4 A. Yes. Not a very good one, but I did have a
5 relationship with her.

6 She tended to denigrate my mother's efforts and I
7 became old enough to see what really bothered her and after
8 that it didn't bother me so much how she reacted.

9 Q. You were able to see the qualities in your mother
10 that your grandmother disapproved of?

11 A. No, I began to see that my grandmother wanted a
12 very rigid control of my father because she had had three
13 children, two of them died. My father was her only child.
14 She lost her husband and this was somebody she wanted to
15 control very much.

16 Q. Uh-hum?

17 A. And that was really at the heart of it. And
18 there was no--no woman that was going to take that place.

19 She believed in kind of Victorian propriety that put
20 so much effort on the description of the exterior, on the
21 maintenance of this exterior.

22 Q. Formalities?

23 A. Yes. This propriety without content.

24 Q. Uh-hum.

25 A. Formalities without content. But, you know, I
26 couldn't expect somebody 72 to change very much.

27 Q. Did your father have aspects like that?

28 A. Yes and no. He had certain proprieties, although

(1 he was much more informal, much--very unconventional by his
2 standards.

3 My father got a job fresh out of school and in most
4 cases people there, you know, if they got a job with a quote
5 good company they die working for that good company. And he
6 lasted there about I think a year or so and he--this was
7 being a bookkeeper for a match company and he walked in and
8 said you are going to get a machine to replace me. This is
9 stupid work.

10 So he quit that job and then he went to work for a
11 bank and he went to work for a bank and when he saw that
12 their job became so terribly routine he quit that and he went
13 to work for this new company that was just organized by two
(14 brothers and they became--they had 3,000 workers and exported
15 to 27 countries.

16 Q. Do you have a sense of how your parents met or
17 where?

18 A. Yes. They met on a picnic and my mother made a
19 very good ham sandwich. My father loved them and it became a
20 joke because she slipped a ham sandwich in his pocket when
21 they parted and then he found the ham sandwich and the
22 romance continued.

23 My mother was living with her two sisters at the time
24 and then one sister immigrated to the United States and then
25 she got married and then her younger sister lived with--with
26 us in my early years and there was a great battle between my
(27 father and my mother because her younger sister got TB and
28 what is happening in the United States now with AIDS is

(1 exactly what happened then. If people had TB the family
2 denied it and hid it and they shipped them out of town and
3 all this.

4 Well, he was afraid that I would be exposed and so on
5 and not really--the treatments for TB were primitive at the
6 time, but my aunt finally--she went to the sanitarium and she
7 did come back with the TB arrested.

1 8 Q. He didn't want her to be in the home?

9 A. In the house, because he was afraid I would get
10 the TB at the time and the meanwhile, you know, she met
11 somebody and they were married and they were married in our
12 home, I do remember that. And that was the first wedding
13 that I remember.

(14 And I remember another wedding when I was four years
15 old when my uncle, my mother's brother got married and that
16 is the first time that I met the extended family and I
17 realized I had such an extended family and I didn't have
18 grandparents but I had a great grandparent.

19 Q. Great grandparents?

20 A. Yes, I met one. The great grandfather, and his
21 name was *(ROLPH) Solomon and he was quite a character. He
22 was known as a practical joker all his life which I didn't
23 know at the time, and he was a very, very jolly and good
24 natured person.

(25 And running outside--this was a country wedding--and
26 running outside I fell in a puddle in a white sailor suit.
27 To my mother's everlasting credit she had anticipated, she
28 had brought a blue sailor suit along. So I was the only kid

1 at the wedding--all the other kids had white sailor suits on.
2 I had a blue sailor suit.

3 Q. Did your great grandparents live far from you?

4 A. Only great grandfather--yes, he lived about oh
5 about a half day's travel away in the country and that is the
6 only time I saw him. He passed away shortly after in his
7 90's, way in his 90's.

8 Q. How did your parents get on after the divorce?

9 A. They didn't. They never spoke. They did come to
10 the bar mitzvah and when there was something to be discussed
11 my uncle, my mother's sister's husband is the one who spoke
12 to my father.

13 Q. Your parents never talked even about your doings
14 or--

15 A. No. No, they didn't.

16 As you detect in many respects they were very similar.
17 There are various topics that came up in our discussion. We
18 did talk a lot and I learned a great deal of world history
19 from my father. I learned a great deal about how things are
20 made from my mother. I didn't go to college without knowing
21 how to cook. I knew how to cook by the time I came to this
22 country because whenever I was with my mother she always
23 showed me how to do things and she showed me how to sew. I
24 just wish that I had kept those skills at the time I came to
25 this country, but I hadn't.

26 They both valued books and education very much, they--

27 Q. How did you come to--I think you were around 11
28 when you went to live with your father?

1 A. Yes. I didn't get along with my mother. I
2 fought a great deal with my mother and she realized that this
3 is an area where boys really begin to approach rambunctious
4 age and anticipating that growth spirit I guess just before
5 puberty and I guess I went through that and I went to my
6 father's house and I did get along much better with him and
7 then when I lived at my father's and visited my mother on
8 weekends actually we got along very well and she began--I
9 began to understand why she did some of the things she did
10 much better than before that. Before that I just felt
11 aggrieved that she wasn't paying attention to me.

12 Q. So--

13 A. But--

14 Q. --that was one of the main points of argument was
15 she--

16 A. No, it didn't know one ever, you know says that--
17 it takes years of looking back saying why did I do that? But
18 that, that was one of the things that--there were other
19 things that she was interested in besides just being the
20 standard mother role.

21 Q. I see.

22 So it was your decision to move to your father's?

23 A. Yes. I wanted to and then she agreed. She
24 thought and I think my aunt encouraged her then that this is
25 a time where I would be better off there. And we did have
26 very good times when I came back, when I used to visit her
27 that is, and I understood more her need for very direct
28 social action.

1 I think if she had been fortunate enough to come to
2 this country she would have been a wild success because all
3 the barriers that existed there didn't exist here.

4 Q. Uh-hum?

5 A. Not that there aren't any barriers here, but
6 judging by the parallel--in fact the couple I referred to you
7 about, the *(LAZARS) who moved to Los Angeles, what really
8 happened was that he had been an official in a shoe and
9 leather factory and she also knew dress design and so she
10 established herself by opening a slack shop on Wilshire
11 Avenue which later on turned out to be the Miracle Mile
12 but--it wasn't a Miracle Mile when she started it but it is
13 with her skills and she suddenly blossomed.

14 Q. Uh-hum?

15 A. And she couldn't have ever done that back there.

16 Q. What do you mean by direct social action?

17 A. Well, she was interested in an orphanage, she was
18 interested in changing things from the way they were. She
19 didn't like the way maids were treated or how maids lived.
20 Those were strong concerns of hers.

21 Q. She had a little social conscience?

22 A. Yes, very.

23 Q. As well as her business?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. And so was your father living alone after that?

26 A. No, my father lived with his mother. She lived
27 in--she ran the house.

28 Q. Uh-hum.

1 A. So--

2 Q. And did he ever have any women friends?

3 A. Yes, he did.

4 Q. But never remarried?

5 A. No.

6 Q. After you moved in with your father, things went
7 more smoothly?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. You were about 11 and a half?

10 A. 11 at the--the summer that I was 11 and then the
11 Hungarians came in and that made things touchy. The
12 Hungarians were much more stringent. There was more control.
13 There were places you couldn't go to. They began applying
14 for identity cards. Pretty soon it was food rationing. Jews
15 couldn't go to the public schools. Then gradually businesses
16 were taken over.

17 It went from bad to worse under the Hungarians.

18 Q. How was your grandmother wearing through all
19 this--and you were living with her, weren't you?

20 A. Yes, well my grandmother sort of stuck to her
21 role as a housewife. She--I think she didn't mind the
22 orderliness and she was not well-informed enough to see the
23 prospects in the future.

24 She got alarmed when some relatives on her side of the
25 family from *(BRES-LOW) wrote and they were deported and then
26 there were some who wound up in Theresienstadt and
27 Theresienstadt was touted as a very safe, very nice place,
28 sort of a go there for your own safety. And I kept wondering

1 who are these people safe from?

2 But they always kept referring to them as for their
3 own safety and so on, as if there would be mass uprising
4 against them.

5 And then her relatives in Vienna wrote that things
6 were very bad after the Germans took over.

7 Well, after the *(POOTCH) and the Nazis were taking
8 over so we could see the clouds gathering, the question was
9 where, where should we go or what should we do.

10 And as I said, my father was very confident that he
11 could survive it having been there so long, having had
12 connections.

13 Q. Were you still running messages or taking people
14 in the underground after you moved with your father?

15 A. Yes, on weekends.

16 Q. And--

17 A. My father wasn't directly involved in that. My
18 mother was involved in that. My father was involved when he
19 knew somebody was coming--somebody needed something, somehow
20 we would get it, whether it was medicine for example or
21 whether who can get hold of passports in such and such or who
22 can get a hold of a doctor or who can get a hold of whatever
23 was necessary or drugs--I don't mean recreational drugs.

24 Q. Uh-hum.

25 A. Usually it is *(PRON-TI-SELL) which is the
26 equivalent of sulpha drugs for people with infections.

27 Q. So your father was able to get a hold of these
28 things?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Then I assumed that had he gotten caught as you
3 say, he might have been tortured or--

4 A. Yes. He would find out where things are
5 available and he would tell people and he would give them a
6 little card so they could buy shoes cheaper.

7 Q. Uh-hum?

8 A. After a while, once shoe rationing is there there
9 is nothing you could do, the price was fixed and no card
10 would do anything.

11 Q. Were you involved in these underground activities
12 in any other way besides taking a person to a certain--

13 A. No, I sometimes carried messages or documents and
14 they were disguised, but I didn't look at the documents and
15 I--as I said we tried to know as little--I knew where all
16 of--my father had Maria Theresa gold coins. Virtually
17 everybody in Europe had those, because that is what people
18 who expect to become refugees can carry. They are very small
19 and you can carry a lot and they are a small denomination and
20 people who expect to run have to carry small denominations,
21 otherwise they lose the large denominations because they
22 can't get change, they can't get change in the kind of
23 currency which they can use. So if you carry the small ones
24 then you can buy something.

25 You know a glass of water may be \$20 but carry \$100
26 pieces, it is \$100. So this is why.

27 And he had things like that, and I know where it was
28 hidden.

1 Q. Was he educating you in all of these things?

2 A. Well, he was telling me that in case he got
3 killed I would know where it was, you know, and I knew it and
4 he would tell me where the cigarettes are hidden which was
5 just like gold at the time.

6 And he would tell me that--where the papers are hidden
7 and something that he had an interest in in some business so
8 it would prove it.

9 Q. Where would he hide those kinds of things?

10 A. Oh, in the house.

11 Q. But I mean--

12 A. Well, we moved boards that have boards in front
13 of them so people can pick it up, they don't see anything
14 behind it.

15 They would then--there are things he gave to certain
16 people to keep for him and I knew who those people were.
17 Those we hoped were reliable people, that is the only thing
18 you can hope for.

19 Q. Uh-hum.

20 You talked about--

21 A. But--

22 Q. --his wide range of friends?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. But I had the feeling that they didn't all come
25 through?

26 A. No, no. They didn't.

27 Q. The people that he gave his goods to?

28 A. Uh-hum.

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1 Q. People he expected help from or food.

2 How did that go?

3 A. They brought it, I don't know whether he paid for
4 it or not. I wasn't there for that. I think he probably
5 did.

6 But they did volunteer this. In other words they came
7 up with the food. The two people I spoke about, one of them
8 was his girlfriend and I mean I assume it was his girlfriend,
9 I think he was very fond of her. And the other one was a
10 woman who he had trained as a secretary when he was a young
11 guy and after the war the only thing that I did get back is a
12 goldwatch which he got from his employees when he got married
13 and that is--that was the only thing that I ever saw in this
14 country which I had also seen in Europe. Everything else was
15 new.

16 Q. How was it that it was saved through out the war?

17 A. She saved it. She stayed there and she saved it.
18 And my uncle was there during the war. My uncle wound up on
19 the Rumanian side of this border and in fact my mother was
20 arrested because she tried to help my uncle come to the
21 Hungarian side.

22 But any how my uncle went back after the war and went
23 to the woman and she gave it to him because she knew I was
24 alive and he sent it to me.

25 Q. So you have it still?

26 A. No, it was stolen from me as a matter of fact
27 when I was a student. I don't have--the most worthwhile
28 things I have are the pictures of my parents and shortly

(1 before and after they were married and some pictures of me
2 when I was a small child that my mother had sent to my aunt
3 in New York.

4 Q. Do you know why it was your parents never
5 remarried? They apparently had people they could have
6 remarried.

7 A. I don't know. I really don't know. I don't
8 think I was at an age where I thought--divorce was strange
9 enough and remarriage was really unheard of.

10 Let me say that families where men have mistresses and
11 women have boyfriend were not unheard of and people didn't
12 talk about it blatantly. They only talked about . . .

13 (END OF TAPE ONE)

(14 A. What was not approved of is if a person did not
15 support their family, now that was the major crime.

16 Or if they flaunted their relationship in front of
17 others in an act to humiliate the other persons, whether it
18 is one party or the other, that was felt--that was cause for
19 social ostracism.

20 Q. I wondered why your parent maybe didn't simply
21 quietly separate. Was that something that would have been
22 done in the times?

23 A. I don't know. I was so young at the time. I
24 don't know. It might have been, but I don't know. All those
25 in my development came much later in life.

(26 Q. It sounds like a brave thing they did in a way
27 almost to get the divorce?

28 A. Yes, yes. That was very different from what

1 other people did.

2 Later on more people were divorced, but in most
3 classes I was the only child whose parents were divorced. In
4 fact one of my surprises when I came to this country was in
5 most classes there were a lot of kids when I was going to
6 high school whose parents had divorced.

7 Anyhow, I went to the gymnasium. By the time I
8 entered gymnasium the--which was when I was let's see
9 ten--eleven years old, 1940, I went to--it is--the Rumanians
10 call it *(LEE-SAY-UM) and Hungarians call it gymnasium, but
11 the organization is identical and the subjects that are
12 taught are substantial and the work is very substantial.
13 Judging by that I have a fifth grader now and she is a very
14 good student, but the substance of the material they are
15 getting is not the same as what I got, I am sorry to say.

16 And we did have a lot of work and the school work was
17 very, very taxing for--first of all you take an entrance exam
18 to go to school, so the summer before you take the entrance
19 exam you spend boning up for the entrance exam.

20 Then you take the entrance exam. If you don't score
21 on that then you can kiss your career goodbye. There is no
22 alternate route up.

23 Q. At age 11 that is it?

24 A. At age 11--you take the exam in the summer and if
25 you don't pass that exam you can only go to the industrial
26 school.

27 Q. Were you still studying summers with your aunt
28 and uncle after you moved with your father?

(1 A. No, not by that time. That was before that.

2 Then I went to--I spent the summer literally going
3 through one of these cram courses where five kids and a
4 teacher sit in the room and go through everything one every
5 learned and you take an examination and I remember the
6 entrance examination had an interesting math problem on it
7 about where streets meet and how much area is devoted to the
8 center of the street and all that. I passed the exam and I
9 was admitted to the school I wanted to go to.

10 The Rumanian governments were changing and Rumania
11 became a one party government. Everybody had to take a
12 loyalty oath and so I began to understand that--what these
13 political machinations had to do with because all my friends
(14 had already talked about the prospects of a one parties
15 government.

16 So the--meanwhile in Rumania there were upheavals.
17 The king went into exile or rather was chased out of the
18 country and the Nazi General took over, I forgot got the name
19 of the General--*(AN-TOO-NOS-KOO). There were pogroms in
20 Bucharest, not in my hometown but there were pogroms in
21 Bucharest and this guy obviously was the leader of the Iron
22 Guard. The Iron Guard is the code name, is the local popular
23 name for the Rumanian Fascist party.

24 Q. Uh-hum?

(25 A. Things were getting tighter. Teachers began
26 wearing uniforms to school to prove how loyal they were to
27 the system and all this sort of thing. So we knew something
28 was amiss we just didn't know what it was at the time.

1 Q. So the Rumanians were not brutalizing the Jews
2 even as you say in Budapest?

3 A. No, the Hungarians didn't in Hungary. They
4 weren't deported from Budapest, largely most of the people
5 were not deported from Budapest.

6 In Rumania there were labor battalions but they were
7 not sent to concentration camps directly. There were--some
8 people may have been, but the vast majority were not.

9 Q. Did you ever see round ups for the labor
10 battalions? How were people selected?

11 A. Oh, they are called the Rumanian labor
12 battalions. I don't know, but the local authorities
13 constructed lists usually by age.

14 Now some people managed to have enough influence to
15 have their names removed from that. Officially there was
16 always some kind of influence like they had TB or they had an
17 injured leg or there-- I had a distant cousin who had polio
18 so he was excused from this. So there were various reasons
19 for why some people were excused. But still a great many
20 went.

21 Q. How were they--were they rounded up in streets
22 or--

23 A. No, you got a notice and you had to report or
24 they would come and get you. There are no alternatives.

25 One of the things that you have to know about a
26 country in which there is really a police state is if you
27 move from one town to another you have to tell that to the
28 prefect of police of the town you are leaving from and tell

1 it to the prefect of police that you go to.

2 Now you can go to visit in good times without any
3 ID's, but the moment things are a little upset you always
4 have to carry your identification.

5 I mean as a kid we used to go swimming, we used to
6 carry the ID and stick the ID in the shoe and you can be
7 challenged by police anywhere about who you are.

8 In a police state the control is so complete that they
9 know where you are going, so you can't just pick up and go.

10 Q. You would be recognized or neighbors would tell?

11 A. Yes, neighbors would always tell.

12 Q. Did you experience that a lot, neighbors
13 betraying people?

14 A. Yes. The neighbors tended to at the time tell on
15 each other because they view the government as really
16 omnipotent, that there is no line that they can draw.

17 My first practical lesson in civil rights occurred
18 after I arrived in this country and after I met my aunt. I
19 will tell you about that in a moment, how I got here.

20 I was in my aunt's house in New York. The first day
21 that I arrived in New York she had picked me up at the train
22 and this was an apartment on the East 88 Street with a long
23 hallway in the front and there was a knock on the door and
24 she went to open it and there was a big burly New York cop in
25 the door. He was so big he darkened the door--the hallway.
26 I can see--I can see his shadow casting.

27 And I thought oh, what now. And in those days--you
28 would call it paranoid behavior here, but I have been a

1 prisoner and I knew I wasn't going to be a prisoner again.
2 If the cop showed up at one end of the hall I would look at
3 the other end of the hall, which one is the nearest window,
4 and I was ready to flee literally.

5 And my aunt who was about five foot zero looked at
6 this six foot cop who was this wide and darkened the doorstep
7 and she said "Yes?"

8 And he said "May I come in?"

9 She looked at him and says "What is the matter with
10 your hat?"

11 And I was frightened out of my mind. I thought we
12 would both be killed on the spot. And this big burly guy
13 took his hat off.

14 And he said "Can I come in?"

15 And she said "No." She said "Do you have a warrant?"

16 He says "No."

17 Turns out he was inquiring about somebody down the
18 hall. This five foot nothing brought the whole machinery to
19 a screeching halt. It is an unbelievable concept in Europe.
20 Maybe it happened in France, though I doubt it, and I have
21 been in France--maybe it happens in England, I haven't be in
22 England. But it didn't happen in the rest of Europe, not in
23 the 30's not, in the 40's.

24 Q. I can appreciate your parents' political point of
25 view in the face of that.

26 A. The state had unlimited powers in every way.

27 Q. So did some of the people your father hoped to
28 rely on in the early 40's I guess disappointed him very much.

1 A. Yes. He also had a Swiss friend he thought was a
2 good friend and he wanted to--he actually did have an
3 account, a bank account in Switzerland through his friend and
4 then the friend wrote him a letter that he had to take his
5 money out because the government forbade these kinds of
6 accounts. And he said Gee, I thought he was a friend.

7 Q. Were there people who really came through?

8 A. Yes, there were.

9 Q. Who were--

10 A. Those were the two people who brought us food and
11 I said--one was his girlfriend and one was a woman who
12 was--they were both women who did.

13 Q. Were they Jewish?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Neither one?

16 A. Neither. They couldn't have been. I mean they
17 would have been under the same restrictions.

18 Q. They had obviously access to food?

19 A. Yes, yes. One was the wife of a big executive.
20 He knew--he met her when she was a secretary, now she was the
21 wife of a big executive. And the other one was his
22 girlfriend.

23 Q. Uh-hum. So now through--this is around 1941 when
24 you first went to the--

25 A. Yes, 1941 was a year of change because the
26 Hungarians came in also and then I went from the Rumanian
27 school to the Hungarian gymnasium.

28 Now, as I entered the *(PEER-IST), it is called the

1 *(PEER-IST) gymnasium, the *(PEER-IST) school and it is a
2 very old school and the walls are as thick as your doors are
3 wide and that's been there and by the way I never had more
4 than a 24 kids in the class in gymnasium; never. In fact in
5 elementary school I didn't have as many kids in my class as
6 there are in my daughter's classes--

7 Q. Uh-hum?

8 A. --today.

9 Q. Interesting.

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Did you already speak Hungarian?

12 A. I spoke Hungarian at--my mother tongue is really
13 Hungarian, all though I hardly speak it now, and then I
14 learned German because of my grandmother and the *kinder
15 fraulein who took care of me spoke German. She was a Slavian
16 woman.

17 And then I learned Rumanian when I went to elementary
18 school and beginning in first year gymnasium I officially
19 learned French in school, but meanwhile my father would
20 always bring home these books.

21 Q. Uh-hum.

22 A. Picture books in French and he would speak French
23 to me so that the French went along, so by the time I started
24 in Rumanian gymnasium we had French and I remember my
25 teacher's name was Madam *(ROO-SOE) and she was a Rumanian
26 woman who had gone to study in France and her husband was
27 French and so we took a great deal of French.

28 Under the Hungarians we took German. I knew German

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1 already, in fact my German teacher ironically was very
2 anti-Nazi. My Hungarian teacher was very pro-Nazi. In fact
3 he was a priest and he was a member of--he was an informant
4 for the Gestapo because we followed him to Gestapo
5 headquarters a couple of times. People don't go to the
6 Gestapo headquarters for afternoon tea.

7 Q. Was there any trouble among the children in the
8 school about telling or betraying?

9 A. Well, no. By the time I went to school in the
10 Rumanian school there wasn't a problem yet. In the Hungarian
11 school the distance between me and my colleagues to begin
12 with was great because I came in as the kid--everybody knew I
13 was Jewish. The number of fights, the ostracism became
14 sharper and sharper as the time went on. During Christmas
15 time it would relax and during Easter time it would get worse
16 also because Christmas time is a very joyous time and
17 Christmas time--and Easter time the old myth would come out
18 of the woodwork and the stories about the Jews and Passover.
19 I don't know whether--there was a famous trial in
20 Czechoslovakia in the 20's where Jews were accused of using
21 Christian blood for making matzos for Passover and there
22 were--things were on the verge of a riot and Thomas
23 *^{Magayak}(MUS-SER-RICK) himself separated the rioters, first
24 president of Czechoslovakia, and--but the myth is a very
25 strong myth and it was reenforced by a lot of Greek Orthodox
26 priests, they preached that sort of thing.

27 Among Catholics it was a myth and the priests tried to
28 discredit it, at least those that I knew. But there were

1 also anit-Semitic priests who simply stood silent when people
2 would mention this.

3 Q. By the time you were getting into 1942--

4 A. Well, by 1942 the Germans were all over
5 Rumania--I am sorry, Hungary. They came in in massive
6 numbers. First they were only going to take through a few
7 train loads and then life became more and more stringent
8 because there was less and less food. There were fewer and
9 fewer places where you can get food because we were running
10 short on supplies.

11 Q. What would have been a normal daily ration of
12 food for you?

13 A. Well, you would have had coffee in the morning,
14 children do drink coffee there at this age.

15 Q. Real coffee?

16 A. No. That is a good point.. This is a coffee that
17 is made mostly out of chicory and you save the grounds of
18 good coffee and I can't tell you how many cups of coffee we
19 made from reused coffee. You mixed the chicory and coffee
20 and used that and then also some teas.

21 We did have more tea than coffee actually. We used a
22 lot of chamomile tea because that was officially--that was
23 the Nazis' treatment by the way for infections, chamomile
24 tea. It is wonderful to taste, but don't ever depend upon
25 chamomile tea to cure any infections. It is only if you
26 don't have anything else.

27 We would have slice of bread for breakfast and a cup
28 of coffee.

1 At 10:00 o'clock snack we would have a little slice of
2 bread, sometimes with some--either lard on it in school or if
3 it was at home some chicken fat or duck fat which we rendered
4 and use.

5 At 1:00 o'clock you'd have the major meal of the day
6 which often consisted of soup or of pasta made with potato
7 flour, we ate a tremendous amount of potatoes and sometimes
8 shells or something in there stuffed with another variety of
9 potatoes or chopped onions or chopped cabbage or something
10 like that.

11 For dinner you would have some tea and some bread, not
12 an awful lot.

13 Occasionally we would get lucky and get a little bit
14 of meat, chicken usually, and sometime very, very rarely beef
15 because it was hard to get kosher butchered beef and my
16 grandmother wouldn't eat anything else but.

17 Sometimes my father would bring home cold cuts he got
18 from some black market place and then he and I would have
19 that and he would bring cheese for my grandmother and she
20 could eat that, the *(EMMI-TOL-LER) cheese, Swiss cheese.

21 Q. Did you own your own home or have an apartment?

22 A. No, we had an apartment in an apartment house.
23 No, we didn't own our own home. I think--I don't know why
24 they didn't. An awful lot of people there live in the city,
25 live in apartments, and they don't own homes. Home ownership
26 isn't the standard it is here.

27 Q. So the three of you were living there?

28 A. Yes.

1 Q. I assume, of course, your father was not
2 traveling around?

3 A. Oh, no. He was--we were strictly there and most
4 of the business was transacted by telephone.

5 Let's see, we had--let me see how many rooms did we
6 have? 1, 2, 3. We had three bedrooms, a livingroom--but we
7 restricted, my father and I shared a bedroom because we
8 wanted to limit the heating and my grandmother had a separate
9 bedroom and then people were quartered, I mentioned to you, a
10 German officer was quartered in our house for a while.

11 Q. When?

12 A. That was '43.

13 And then we had people quartered there for short
14 periods of time, but I remember him in particular because he
15 got drunk and he told--

16 Q. Do you remember his name?

17 A. No, I never knew his name.

18 Q. How is that to have a German officer in your
19 home?

20 A. Terrifying, terrifying.

21 He wanted to do something nice for us, I remember one
22 weekend, and he brought this dressed pig, a piglet, and we
23 tried to explain to him that it is very hard to cook it
24 because we don't have a pot to cook it in and my grandmother
25 can't eat it, but we finally gave it to various people. My
26 father and I ate some and then we swapped it for some other
27 food so my grandmother could get some, because naturally she
28 wouldn't eat it.

1 Q. That was one act of kindness, but it sounds like
2 you were--

3 A. We were afraid of him because he had confided in
4 us. If we would have gone to the German command and told
5 them what he told us, he would be sent to the front
6 immediately. If he felt threatened he could have killed us.
7 He didn't.

8 Q. Uh-hum.

9 A. But he could have.

10 Q. Is this the person who was so miserable?

11 A. Yes. Alcoholics are really not very predictable,
12 we knew that much about alcoholics, and he was an alcoholic
13 so we felt that, you know, he could easily do away with us.

14 Q. Didn't he have duty during the day where he would
15 have to be away?

16 A. Oh, yes. He would come back in the evening and
17 it was--sometimes he would stay there and sleep in his bed
18 and so on or he would come out and demand breakfast and we
19 would fix him--

20 Q. You had to feed him too?

21 A. Yes, we had to feed him. Not legally, because
22 there is no legal barrier, you see. They had to--he is the
23 guy who decides what you have to do.

24 Q. He doesn't bring food for himself?

25 A. Sometimes he did, but other times he didn't.

26 Q. You were on small rations at the time?

27 A. Right.

28 Q. Plus the fear?

1 A. That was the main thing, that he would come home
2 one day and he had this submachine gun in his room and he
3 could have, you know, shot us up and there is no way you can
4 say no to this.

5 Q. Uh-hum.

6 Did you feel he was a good person or--

7 A. Oh, I think, you know, he was probably a good guy
8 he worked in some auto factory and he was a manager of some
9 office in an auto factory and he was probably as lost and
10 frightened as--not quite as frightened as we were because our
11 prospects were less.

12 Q. Uh-hum.

13 A. But he was probably lost and lonely and felt
14 terrible.

15 But I am not--at the time he was such an overwhelming
16 threat, there were--people disappeared. I can't tell you how
17 people would say "Have you seen so and so?"

18 Say "No."

19 "Who do you know at the police prefecture?"

20 And then the line would start and one person would go
21 to the other, there were no telephones--I mean there are
22 telephones but we don't have telephones at this time, so it
23 is everything goes by word of mouth and people go from home
24 to home to home.

25 Well, who knows who is a guard at this place?

26 Who did they bring in?

27 And it takes two days to find out where somebody is
28 because you can't get them out until you know exactly where

1 they are because all officers' mouths are shut and they don't
2 have to disclose anything.

3 So I remember kids who were arrested. I was arrested
4 once, and they just threw me in jail.

5 Q. How did you get arrested?

6 A. On a bicycle. I still don't know what I did.
7 They just suspected and that was enough.

8 And I saw, you know, my father's face was--it was like
9 bleached with fear. I have never seen a man so terrorized.

10 You know I saw him just before he saw me and then the
11 relief in his face that I was alive. It was--people would
12 get together and they would ask is everybody okay or is so
13 and so and they were afraid to ask whether somebody has
14 been--has disappeared.

15 Q. How long were you arrested before he found you?

16 A. Just one day.

17 Q. Did you ever find out what process he went
18 through to find you?

19 A. No, no. I was sure that he called this person
20 and the person called this person and this person and they
21 called the guard and somebody else knew somebody else and
22 then they found me.

23 I told you my mother was arrested.

24 Q. Uh-hum.

25 A. My mother was arrested because she hired a man to
26 guide my uncle and his family from the other side of the
27 border because they are literally something like ten miles
28 apart, to take him through a surreptitious route over the

1 border and to bring him to our house.

2 And, you know, she thought she was saving his life
3 because the Nazis were going very strong on the Romanian side
4 at the time and the Hungarians had just come in. She felt
5 they would be more civil. And there was a guy who for a
6 certain amount of money would take--well, it turns out the
7 guy was an informer and a guide. Both and a guide. He
8 played both sides of the fence and so he informed on her and
9 she was arrested.

10 And at this time I was staying with my father and I
11 was in school and I had a big fight in school because
12 somebody said that my mother was a felon because there was a
13 little article appeared, about two inches square, about Mrs.
14 Benko was being tried for--they usually, you know,
15 "activities against the state" or it is always a term that
16 makes misdemeanors sound like mass murder or high treason
17 and treason was very foremost in their mind at the time. And
18 it turned out that that is what my mother was trying to do.

19 Well, my mother was arrested and she disappeared for
20 three months and I--well, every week end for three months we
21 hoped and we couldn't find where she was, so through
22 connections and lawyers and such we found that she had been
23 taken to Budapest to this house of detention that I
24 eventually wound up at myself.

25 Q. You too?

26 A. Yes, but it was just a shipment, we stopped
27 there.

28 And then she was released and she was released to

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(1 arrive on the day after New Years of 1943. I think it was
2 1943. And it was unbelievable.

3 And she was arrested at my birthday party and we are
4 sitting around the table and she had made this cake, she must
5 have saved a year, and they arrested her and she was packing
6 and I saw that she was taking rolls of cotton and it was
7 known that if you get arrested and you have time to you take
8 rolls of cotton because if you bleed you will need it.

9 And then they took her away in such a rough and
10 demeaning manner, it was wantonly cruel.

11 And then as I said for three months we didn't know
12 where she was and I would see my aunt and uncle and they
13 worked enormously hard and my father did too to find out
14 where. I don't know who got the lead, but I know they got
15 it.

16 They found that she was in the *(TOLLANDS) and I don't
17 know whether the charges were dropped or something must have
18 happened but she was released as I said the day after New
19 Years, because I remember taking--we saved things that--the
20 New Years party for her so that when she came back she would
21 have some nice things. And my God, I remember we saved
22 sardines for her. She liked sardines and we saved--we had a
23 can of sardines. I thought we would save that until she came
24 home.

25 And we went to the railroad station to see her and she
26 arrived and she was drawn and thin and we were so happy to se
27 her. And that was the year 1943. That was the beginning of
28 the year of 1943.

1 Q. Did she talk of her experiences?

2 A. No, no. All she said was that she met great
3 people in jail, that she was inspired by their courage and
4 their dignity and that nobody had informed. And you knew
5 from that that she had been tortured.

6 Sometimes we knew when people had informed because
7 they got arrested and then other people would get arrested.
8 So that was '44, '43.

9 She came back while--in '44, by June of 1944. We went
10 to--excuse me, maybe you should--

11 Q. Stop now.

12 MR. FIELDEN: Okay, we are all set any time.

13 MS. BENDAYAN: I would like to introduce *Evelyn
14 Phelin is here as a second and you have some statements you
15 would like to--

16 MS. PHELIN: During this interview we had with you,
17 Paul, I noticed that you never mentioned the word Gestapo and
18 maybe you can explain that.

19 MR. BENKO: I never met the Gestapo face-to-face. The
20 Hungarians did the dirty work for them. There was a Gestapo
21 headquarters, of course, in my hometown. I told you we had
22 followed this teacher, his name was *(GAR-BOR) Miko, M-I-K-O,
23 and we followed him to the door. He went in and he was a
24 particularly nasty anti-Semitic teacher.

25 And I had other teachers in the Catholic gymnasium, I
26 had a music teacher who was very anti-Semitic but it was
27 understandable, his anti-Semitism stemmed from the fact that
28 the chior of the synagogue was better than his chior and he

1 couldn't understand why.

2 But any how, that was his anti-Semitism.

3 But this other guy was a priest and he was very, very
4 blatantly anti-Semitic.

5 He told me no matter what work I did, the best I could
6 do was pass his course with the lowest passing grade. And he
7 constantly made very, very derogatory remarks about
8 Jewish--Jewish writers and so on.

9 But I was amazed that for a guy who said so many
10 derogatory remarks he had actually read their books and I
11 kept wondering if they are all so lousy why he spent his time
12 on this.

13 But it was my mother's training that made me look at
14 things that way. And my, it was my mother's contribution
15 that I didn't let them rob me of what I think was worthwhile,
16 by denigrating Jews. I just categorized them as one more of
17 those liars.

18 As far as the Gestapo, as I said I never met them
19 face-to-face. I--at the end of the war I worked in a war
20 criminals camp in *(GAR-NIS-PAR-KEN-CUR-CHER). That is when
21 I met Gestapo people. But they were on the other side of the
22 fence.

23 MS. PHELIN: But you heard the word Gestapo?

24 A. Oh, yes, yes. Sure. Oh, yes, we knew about.

25 MS. PHELIN: *(?)

26 MR. BENKO: No, we knew about the Gestapo.

27 The Hungarians are--they have an equivalent of the
28 Iron Guard it called the *(NEE-LOR) party which are the

(1 archers and *(A-GARE-ERSCH-NEE-LOSS) means a cross and arrows
2 party but yes, we had heard of the Gestapo certainly and they
3 were around town and their numbers increased as time went
4 on.

5 MS. PHELIN: I have one more question.

6 MR. FIELDEN: Sure.

7 MS. PHELIN: What did you hear about *Wallenberg at
8 the time?

9 A. You are right , *Wallenberg. I called him
10 Wallenstein.

(11 What I heard, that he gave out passports, visas
12 rather, visas to people to go to Sweden. That is what I
13 heard, and that he did this all over the Jewish community in
14 Budapest and he did this not only for people from Budapest
15 but for itinerants. A lot of people were literally
16 itinerants. They went to Budapest in order to get somewhere
17 because Consulates were there, embassies were there. People
18 with connections were there. So it's not unusual that they
19 gravitated there, plus there were no major sweeps that I can
10 20 recall that I know of in Budapest. You wouldn't have been
21 picked off the streets so rapidly. There was greater
22 diversity.

23 In a town like *(CO-LUGE) they know anybody who is out
24 of town pretty fast. In Budapest--if I would have been on
25 the lam I would have picked Budapest over *(CO-LUGE) because
26 you could blend.

(27 MS. PHELIN: In relation to Budapest where is
28 *(CO-LUGE)? South, west east?

1 MR. BENKO: East, almost directly. You look in the
2 center of Transylvania. It is called *(CO-LUGE),
3 *(CLAW-SEN-BERG) and it is also called *(COE-LOGE-VAR) in
4 Hungarian.

5 Now, it is--at the moment it is called
6 *(CO-LUGE)--*(NAP-PA-KA), *(NAP-PA-KA) is the old Roman
7 outpost that was at the site of *(CO-LUGE) and that is why--

8 MS. PHELIN: Did they have a German settlement at the
9 time there?

10 MR. BENKO: Yes, sure. A lot of Saxons and Slavians
11 were born into Transylvania because following the devastation
12 of wars there was nobody there and they were good farmers so
13 they were brought in and they are parts of central and
14 southern Transylvania where there were a lot of Slavians and
15 Saxons and these, of course, became great places. The Hitler
16 *yungene used to spend their summers there. They were all
17 deported since.

18 MS. BENDAYAN: That is another thing we can talke
19 about next time.

20 MR. BENKA: Sure.

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

22 MR. BENKA: You are welcome.
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26
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28

1 DECEMBER 12, 1990 INTERVIEW OF PAUL BENKO

2 COURT REPORTER (TRANSCRIBER) SAMM MCGREGOR
3 1543 - 43rd Avenue
4 San Francisco CA 94122
5 661-4968

6 The words I had trouble with are in the index immediately
7 following this page. (After corrections are made I will
8 remove the line numbers--unless otherwise requested--and move
9 in the ~~left~~ right hand margin. I will also provide with you with
10 an IBM disk at that time).

11 For we non-Jewish reporters it would be a help if you would
12 make a short list of Jewish terms.

13 Also an attempt needs to be made to have the interviewers
14 speak up (if they can't be gotten a microphone of their own)
15 and to have them quit talking at the same time the
16 interviewee is.

17 If they could be given a list to fill out indicating their
18 names and any of the really common things that come up (in
19 this instance it was Co-Luge, his home town, which came up
20 over and over again--family names also could be a help if
21 they are repeated frequently)

22 This is proving to be an extremely interesting experience!

23
24
25
26
27
28


cluj	Hungarian pronounced	* BEN-KEW, but no one can	1	11
Ilus	— of Rumania called	* (CO-LUGE) in 1929, August	1	15
	My father name was	* Rudolf Benko and my	1	23
	and my mother's name	* (ILL-LUCHE) Benko. My	1	24
	near a town called	* (TURE-IS-DAW) which still	2	18
	with an accent	* (EX-VEE) on the first E.	2	20
	her name? A.	* Solomon. My mother's name	2	22
	material called	* (JAW-BRA-CHOE), so he had	4	3
	a small town called	* (CHEW-CHA) and this, this	4	18
	his life because in	* (CHEW-CHA) there was a	4	20
	whose name was Mr.	* Gallaway and he looked	5	27
	like John Chris	* Stanmus, if you remember	5	28
	A. Yes. Q.	* (?) moved along.	7	2
worthy	influential in the	* (HORTY) government did	10	20
	they did observe	* (KOST-U-WITZ), mainly	11	9
	was bar mitzvahed in	* (CO-LUGE) in the summer of	11	24
	that is called	* (NE-OH-LOG), a reformed	12	4
	the community in	* (CO-LUGE) and the rabbi	12	8
	but I didn't go to	* (HATER) either.	12	17
lycoun.	when I attended the	* (LAY-SEE-UM) or the	12	28
	priest of the	* (PEER-IST) order, it was a	13	18
	order, it was a	* (PEER-IST) school and the	13	19
	school and the	* (PEER-ISTS) are not known	13	19
	priest by the name of	* (KARL YAW-NOESH) and he was	13	26
	word. It is	* (SUP-BA-CHOKE) and it	15	2
	father had lived in	* (CO-LUGE) since 1916.	16	27
	put Herr; Hungarians	* (OOL). Q. The	17	27
	There was	* (HATER). There were	18	11
	There were several	* (HATERS). There	18	12
	film. (* Brief Recess Taken)	18	16
	films, films like	* (YOO-USE) and some others	19	5
	observant Jews with	* (PAY-US) and the kaftans	19	13
Bajusz	said she had moved to	* (CO-LUGE). There was a	19	20
bedid4	War. His name was	* (TRIONEROUS BOYD) which in	21	28
	But they had a	* (SYNTERNAL) league in play	23	14
	Q. In the town of	* (CO-LUGE) were you living	23	21
	His name was Samuel	* Solomon and he had two sons	25	12
	by--I want to say the	* (HYSTRO-ANDROOT) but it	25	20
	but it isn't the	* (HYSTRO-ANDROOT).	25	21
	son, his name was	* Hugo, told his father--and	25	25
	wife whose name was	* Peppy that I was related to	26	1
	German bund and the	* (TOR-FRINES) were all going	27	11
	name was Arthur	* (LAZAR), he passed away.	33	27
	going-- Q.	* (?) permantly? A.	34	16
	was in, his name was	* George Kraus and we had	35	15
	a performance of an	* Edmond Rustont play called	37	9
	Rustont play called	* Lakelone which is	37	10
	and said this is the	* (SHERGRAM PALACE). This is	37	15
	PALACE). This is	* (MITTERSMITT PALACE). And	37	16
	territories flew over	* (CO-LUGE) and because they	38	27

		PG	LN
And from there to	* (BEER-KA-NOW) actually.	40	13
the war when I got to	* (BEER-KA-NOW). My aunt who	40	16
in Budapest at	* (LA-TRAIN-KA) at Budapest.	41	4
other people about	* Walderstein. We heard that	41	15
the Russian front--	* (RUSS-STOFF) was the first	41	24
which is called the	* (SWITE-ZER) Illustrated	42	1
Illustrated	* (ZYPFUNG) which is sort of a	42	1
of the German General	* (VON PALLIS) being	42	11
quarter officers in	* (?) and we were terrified	42	26
I think it was around	* PAY-SAW) time, he got	42	28
a committee of the	* (YUME-LOT)? A.	44	12
A. Yes. (* Brief Recess) A.	45	17
but that is okay.	* MR. FIELDEN: I was taking	45	21
barber's name was Mr.	* (SONNEN-SHINE) and so the	47	3
we better call Mr.	* (SONNEN-SHINE) to shave his	47	5
kindergarten at the	* (NEE-YO-LOTT) kindergarten	47	7
and take them to the	* (CON-DA-RYE) and stuff us	48	3
Q. What is a	* (CON-DA-RYE)? A.	48	4
They manufactured	* chalk. So I used	48	27
My-- Q.	* (?) A. Oh yes,	49	2
know the Good Soldier	* (SWIKE). Q. Yes?	53	9
and his name was	* (ROLPH) Solomon and he was	57	21
to you about, the	* (LAZARS) who moved to Los	60	7
of the family from	* (BRES-LOW) wrote and they	61	25
Well, after the	* (POOTCH) and the Nazis were	62	7
A. Usually it is	* (PRON-TI-SELL) which is the	62	25
Rumanians call it	* (LEE-SAY-UM) and Hungarians	67	10
name of the General--	* (AN-TOO-NOS-KOO). There	68	19
Now, as I entered the	* (PEER-IST), it is called	72	28
it is called the	* (PEER-IST) gymnasium, the	73	1
gymnasium, the	* (PEER-IST) school and it is	73	1
grandmother and the	* kinder fraulein who took	73	14
name was Madam	* (ROO-SOE) and she was a	73	25
of a riot and Thomas	* (MUS-SER-RICK) himself	74	23
could eat that, the	* (EMMI-TOL-LER) cheese,	76	20
that she was in the	* (TOLLANDS) and I don't know	82	16
like to introduce	* Evelyn Phelin is here as a	83	13
teacher, his name was	* (GAR-BOR) Miko, M-I-K-O,	83	22
war criminals camp in	* (GAR-NIS-PAR-KEN-CUR-CHER).	84	20
MS. PHELIN:	* (?) MR. BENKO:	84	25
Guard it called the	* (NEE-LOR) party which are	84	28
are the archers and	* (A-GARE-ERSCH-NEE-LOSS)	85	1
did you hear about	* Wallenberg at the time?	85	7
A. You are right ,	* Wallenberg. I called him	85	9
In a town like	* (CO-LUGE) they know anybody	85	23
picked Budapest over	* (CO-LUGE) because you could	85	25
to Budapest where is	* (CO-LUGE)? South, west	85	28
It is called	* (CO-LUGE), *(CLAW-SEN-BERG)	86	2
is called *(CO-LUGE),	* (CLAW-SEN-BERG) and it is	86	3
and it is also called	* (COE-LOGE-VAR) in	86	3
moment it is called	* (CO-LUGE)-*(NAP-PA-KA),	86	6
is called *(CO-LUGE)-	* (NAP-PA-KA), *(NAP-PA-KA)	86	6
	* (NAP-PA-KA) is the old	86	6
was at the site of	* (CO-LUGE) and that is why--	86	7

schweik

Emmerich

Qabor

(
places. The Hitler * yungene used to spend their

PG LN
86 16