

INTERVIEW WITH JUSSI RAJNA

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HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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BY MR. SOKOLSKY:

Q My name is David Sokolsky. And this is an interview for the Oral History Project in San Francisco. Today is April 1st, 1990.

For the record would you state your name and where you were born.

A My name is Jussi Rajna. My original name is Jussla, which is a very Hungarian name. I was born in Budapest, April 8th, 1935.

Q And can you describe your family, how large it was and your parents and their names.

A Our family was small. I was the second child. That was rather typical for that time. My sister was four years older. She was a girl. And many families at this time, they had if the first child is a boy, there was only one child. And if the second was a boy then usually the family stopped there. Even if they had two girls they usually -- there were very few families that had more than two children. And that was in the thirties. And later on

it was more understandable that people were very hesitant to have large families.

Our family I would describe as upper middle class family. My mother had three sisters, and the two younger and the two older sisters are from a different father. Her middle name was Schnair. And the older sister's middle name was Kline. And she was born and raised in the city on the TISYA Hungarian. There are two large rivers. They flow separately parallelly through the country. The TISYA, and the DONYA is the one which is more known.

My father's family, they have been there living for the third generation in Budapest. And my grandmother's maiden name was Smiddle. And the Smiddle side of the family, they were tall. And I think my grandmother on her side, she was taller than my grandfather.

The Randall, he came somewhere from the north, which is Czechoslovakia. On my father's side there was four boys and one girl. And my father was the youngest one of the five children. And he was the only one who married and had children.

The one boy died fairly early in the 1920's. The other four children survived. All three were boys, were serving in the First World War in the Austrian-Hungarian army, Hugo and Rager, and my father's name was Laslo. That

being veterans from the First World War, that gives them certain privileges during that semi-Nazi era in the early twenties and the early thirties.

The family business was kind of a restaurant and bakeries. And economically they were doing well. And the times I remember at first was when they had to cut back on their business because of the legislation, anti-Semitic legislations, the restrictions on how many employees they could have and what kind of supplies they could get.

And I remember living in different parts of Budapest. They were kind of moving around so that they live closer to the business they were running.

Q Originally did you live in a Jewish neighborhood? Was it like a Getto?

A No. There wasn't really a very strictly Jewish neighborhood. There were more Jewish neighborhoods in Budapest. There were quite a few Jews. Probably about as much as twenty, twenty-five percent of Budapest the population were Jews.

And in Hungary there were about two hundred fifty thousand Jews all together. There were certain religious Jews represented the percentage of the population. The areas which were probably more Jewish in Budapest, they were the place that later became the Getto in '44, the establishment.

Q Was your family very religious?

A No. In Hungary the Jews were divided in sort of NARROW, which is conservative and Orthodox. And the Orthodox were a definite minority. They were like even in the cemetery, the Orthodox cemetery was a tiny little area compared to the regular mainstream cemetery, which was huge.

I mean, my father passed away in '82. He was eighty-seven years old at the time. This was the last time I been to Budapest. And visiting the cemeteries is usually shows you the backgrounds of the Jewish history of that city. The Communists were anti-Semitic or most anti-religious. But they left the cemetery alone. They didn't tear up graves. They left it the same size.

And the present day population in Hungary is very small. It's mostly older people.

Q Did you attend a Hebrew school?

A Yes. Like before the Second World War in Hungary the Jews were doing well for different reasons. But basically the non-Jewish population, they were either Catholic, Lutheran. And between those factions it's just like in Ireland, the Jews were doing all right. They were left alone.

The anti-Semitism started after the First World War when the country lost certain areas, and many people, Hungarians, kind of refugees from them areas, they came back

to the so-called main or mother country. And they were finding competition in the Jews. And that's where the universities, and, basically, all over it kind of popped up.

My experience is that the apartment house that we were living there we were probably -- there was two -- about five apartments, two large ones in the front and six smaller ones in the backs on each level. And it was a four story building. Out of that so there was about twenty apartments. Out of twenty apartments there were about four Jewish families in that apartment building.

And when I went to school, that school it was public school. And for early lesson the class was divided into three groups, the Catholics, the Lutherans and the Jews. And in my class the Jews were the sizeable group.

And I remember back then when anti-Semitism started that they were yelling, cursing at us by some of the other children. But for a long time it wasn't approved of by the teachers. It was kept in control. But I heard later in Budapest, which was the capital, everything was much easier, much easier to be a Jew than in the countryside.

Q When were you first affected by the Nazis?

A Well, Nazis, you mean the Hungarian Nazis?

Q Either.

A What I can remember is that I think it was first when we had to wear the Star of David. That's when I

really understood that something is happening. That was in early 1944.

Q So you were about nine years old?

A Yes. I noticed that many stores, which small stores that were Jewish owned, they were closed down because the owners were drafted for -- what is it called? -- work troops or labor battalions. And there was a sign on the door that that business was temporarily closed.

But I was probably very well protected. And my father was drafted for a battalion several times. But he came after a certain length of time they let him return, different reasons, family. But they lived in the city and they had connections, and they let him come home. And he stayed with us while we had to move into the so-called Yellow Star houses.

Q That was the Getto?

A No, that wasn't the Getto. Things, that never happened very abruptly. They always were creeping up slowly, one ordinance after the other, and restriction after the other. The first came the Yellow Star. And after having wearing the Yellow Star for about three, four months, then they selected certain houses there which were almost a hundred percent Jewish, and they forced a very large number of people into those houses. So that if you had the apartment before then you get a room in that Yellow Star

house. And that opened up vacancies for non-Jewish people.

And then until the end of October -- I think it's about the end of October, that's when they started to force people from the Yellow Star houses into the Getto area. I know the deportations, they started earlier, '44, from the countryside. That there was a big difference between what happened in the countryside and what happened in Budapest.

And my relatives on my mother's side, they were taken away. And I remember -- well, some memories are coming back to me -- that my father went down to visit them in the Getto, down in a smaller town closer to the village where they have been. But Hungarian authorities were gathering up the Jews in the countryside and turning them over to the Germans.

That was one of my aunts and her family were taken to Theresienstadt. And they survived. They came back. But the rest of the family, they were taken to different extermination camps, and they got lost. So that part of my mother's side relatives, it's about three, about four people who survived out of about forty-five.

Q Up until the time of the Getto were the orders coming from the Hungarian Nazis?

A Oh, even in the Getto everything was run by the Hungarians. There was some difference in the government



because of after the First World War formerly Hungary was a kingdom. But they kicked out the legal royalty and elected I think it was a noble person, Admiral Horthy was the name. And he was talking Hungarian with a pretty bad accent because he was raised in Germany.

But he was a liberal and he realized the economic potential of the Jewish population. And he represented a much more liberal stand than many of the so-called Arrow Cross people who were the first Nazis. And those people were low class. Just like in the beginning of the Nazis, there were Nazis, they were socialists. They were kind of competing in the same clan as the Communists. But later when they came to power then some of the educated people joined up for the opportunities. And that was the situation in Hungary.

Many of these people who were refugees for the territories, Rumania and Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, they had education, mostly legal degrees, which were rather useless in a smaller country.

Q So then all the notices were published in Hungarian?

A Yes, everything was Hungarian. The Hungarian police and the countryside, it was called the gendarmerie. This was kind of a semi-military organization. That was established to keep the poor peasants and the agricultural

worker down, but they were basically a very ruthless bunch. And they were happy to the VAVIER Jews in the countryside, as well.

Q You were a child. Did you realize what was going on in the world with Hitler and the war?

A Well, I realized but I looked at my parents and my parents didn't appear in front of me scared. And when they had something to discuss it was in German, which I did not understand. And I knew that it was a war in the end of '44.

At night you could hear the Russian guns fighting from the store where the Russian -- the fighting was already in about -- what was it? -- a hundred fifty miles distance or something. That was within the Hungarian borders. And I didn't really understood what it was.

I remember the children in the apartment house and later in the Yellow Star house, we tried to discuss it and we tried to understand what was going on. I remember discussing things. "Is that really true what these people are telling about us Jews? Is there some other Jews that might be as bad as they say?"

And we didn't -- as later I heard that people were coming at that time to Hungary who escaped from the concentration camps in Poland, but I didn't really know about it. And I wasn't really aware of what kind of danger

was threatening. I realized that it was bad times. And I was always told not to talk to anybody and keep quiet, and don't trust people, and don't let yourself be interrogated, and you just say that you don't know. Which information was about the Communist regime, which came after the war, that you don't open up to foreigners.

But I really didn't notice anything. There was no violence in '44 until after the order came to move into the Getto. Now, in the Yellow Star house there was a curfew that the doors, they locked the gates to the house between seven in the morning to five in the afternoon, so that meant that people who had a job either they had to drop it or they had a reduced income, so it was a hardship.

Of course, the business we had at that time, there was only one business left. And that business was run by formerly was a CITY manager, who was Aryan, non-Jew order. But my father went over there and run the thing.

Now I have to mention that half the brothers, the four brothers, one died early in the twenties. The second one, who was the oldest one, he died in an operation. He was operated with some kind of stomach problem. And on a second operation, which should have been kind of a touch-up for the surgery, that the infection occurred and that he died.

So there were only my father and his brother

whose name is Hugo left. And Hugo, he was an officer in the Austrian-Hungarian army. And he saw his rights to a Hungarian citizen and so on. And he was called into the police because somebody sold a -- this was a Gentile who sold his quarter of the material to him. And it turned out that the police found out what's happening.

And while he was there, there was a police detective who wasn't from Budapest but he was from the countryside. He came in there, and according to the story, he was kind of drunk. And he started to curse at my uncle Hugo. And he kind of stood up and he said that "I am a Hungarian officer and please don't talk like this to me."

And then that's when the man hit him and my uncle hit him back. Then they arrested him and he had ended up in a place called Czestochowa. That was a concentration camp for political prisoners and other detainees. So they were other than Jews.

That was the place where when this was a first contingent that the Germans wanted to take out of the country. And this governor Horthy stopped that transport at the border and gave order to return them to Czestochowa. But the second later occasion when the Germans already came into Budapest and basically occupied the whole country, then the Germans again took the Czestochowa, the whole camp, and took them to Auschwitz. And that's where my uncle Hugo

died.

Q Were you there at the time of the fight between your uncle and the police?

A No, that was in the police. I just knew that he disappeared. And they were telling me that he's not coming home and he got arrested.

Q You mentioned that the family business was a bakery and restaurant?

A Yes.

Q Was it Kosher?

A No, no.

Q Did you keep Kosher at home, by the way?

A No. My grandmother, my mother's side, she survived Theresienstadt. She died back in what is '85. She was a very, very small lady. And my mother wasn't very tall. My father was tall. But she kept Kosher. She spent the winter with us. When she came up to live with us they always brought utensils for her. And she brought her own food. And in the countryside they're un-Kosher, because that's smaller, everything was around. And we weren't.

But my mother, the family, they were always Shabbat candles and Challah, that's really kept the high holidays. They were very much assimilated Jews. But they Shabbats candles, that's a steady feature. That's what I remember very much, the high holidays and the Yom Kippur,

and the Rosh Hashanah, of course.

Q Can you describe then your experience in the Getto?

A Well, we didn't move into the Getto. The bakery was in the basement of the restaurant. And that was located in the building of the railroads. And they're long ahead of -- I think that was before I was born, of some other reason they made up a secret room, the stories almost like Anne Frank, that there was kind of a KAMNAUGHT, and the KAMNAUGHT is a back door and that opened into another room, which is partitioned off for a supply room. And I think that they just wanted to have a place there which was kind of safe from burglaries, and that's why probably that's why they did it in the twenties.

And that was the room where we kept or stayed during the days. And at night we went down to the cellar, which was the bakery.

And we were staying there when the order came to move into the Getto. Then my parents decided that it was safer to try to hide there than moving into the Getto. Because they never discussed this with me. And I -- they were very careful not to scare me up. And my sister was older. She was more hysteric. She just understood more. I think I was more immune by ingorance.

So we were hiding there. It was from quite a

few months. It was November and December, and probably I think the beginning of January. I lost contact with time. There was plenty of food.

And the Russian troops were surrounding Budapest and they were coming nearer. And the fighting was louder and louder. And all of a sudden one morning my -- there were two people actually who were -- who knew about that we were hiding there. One was a woman who was the manager of the store. And the other was a kind of a handyman and helper who came as a young boy to work for the family. And he was living outside Budapest and coming in and bringing us supplies and whatever we needed. And they just left a newspaper there. And the headlines were that martial law, everybody's going to be shot, disasters and the Jews and the enemies of Hungary, and that was the last I seen of them.

And from there on the business was closed. And the business went from the front of a street facing the railroad station and the back street was a smaller street. So the business stretched across the building. And we were there, and my parents were listening to the radio, and mostly the BBC. And they were waiting for the advances of from the troops were coming closer and closer.

And I remember one night there was banging on the back door. And besides my parents and my aunt, or my





father's sister was staying with us. And she wasn't married. They went up to the back door and they opened it up and asked what it was. They felt it was better to open up than wait until they bang on the door. And it turned out there were some Hungarian troops who wanted to move in the basement area shelter in the building on the other side of the street.

And the concierge there told them, "Hey, we are so cramped here. There's a huge empty basement across the street in the bakery. Why don't you go there?"

So those soldiers, the commanders and some civilians, they came over there and they were banging on the door. And they were asking my parents who they were. And they said, "We are refugees from the east." And that's why they didn't have any papers.

And they said that, "We need a place for troops." So they went down there and looked around and they were very happy that they found a nice shelter, and said that, "Well, we're coming back."

And then in a short time later there came policemen with these -- there was a special red and white striped armband with that Arrow Cross symbol in red. That was the sign of this Arrow Cross people. So there was a police, some of the police and a couple of civilians with weapons and armament. They came over and looked over

everything. And they started to take food stuff there and whatever there was. And then they took us, my sister, my mother and father and my aunt to the district headquarters of the Arrow Cross.

That's the first time when I started to see how poor things, and I realized that really our life was -- it was a foggy day, and probably early in the morning. And as we went there were burned out cars on the streets. And there were people hanging from lampposts and from trees. There was signs that "I'm a Jew. I'm a deserter. And I'm a Communist."

The Arrow Crosses, they were just like Nazis. They were less disciplined, maybe. They were murdering people and keeping the reign of terror. That that's my first experience, that's what I've seen as you walk in the fog through that rubbish line and the damaged, batter torn houses, that there were dead people and hung people.

And when we arrived to that house, which was a regular house, which they took over and converted for their purpose, they took us down in the cellar, and they kept in one corner.

And I saw there was a prisoner there. It was a man who was almost naked and he was bag balmed and his back was a mess. They tortured him. And they put one of these Arrow Cross people to guard us in the corner. And my mother

started to talk to him because he looked like a peasant man. And it turned out that this guy was a very poor peasant from that village where my mother grew up. And actually they knew some families there.

And that man was kind of complaining. He said, "I'm so afraid. I don't know why I got into it, but I am afraid because they will kill me." But these were the people who were kind of chance being -- they were promised, "Take everything from the Jews, you hear everything." And he got into the Arrow Cross and then he just couldn't get out of it.

And he was telling that person who was there, he was a Hungarian resistant. I don't think he was a fighter. He was just a single person. He started to shoot at from a rooftop to these Arrow Cross people. And they went up to the roof and he run out of ammunition and they got hold of him. And they said they took him prisoner. Then they tortured him. And they wanted to find out some information. But they didn't kill him because there were some Germans who would take that man over to the German headquarters somewhere under the side of the river.

So that was a horrible experience to see people tortured and killed. And while we were there in that house some people recognized my parents and there were no doubt about it, who we were.

And they asked my father to remove his wedding ring. And that's when I got really scared because he started to cry. I never seen my father cry. And that was when he took off his ring. It was hard to take it off because he never took off the wedding ring. And then I saw him cry. That was the first time I saw him. That scared me probably more than anything else.

And then they take him aside to help in the kitchen. And the way we survived was that one of the leaders of that Arrow Cross group, he came in and he recognized my father and said that, "What are you doing here, Mr. Rajna?" And Jews weren't entitled to "mister." So that showed that the guy, the person is kind of had a respect for him. That fellow was a barber, the profession, but he worked on the weekends as an auctionary waiter in one of my parent's places.

And my father didn't recognize him. Then he told him who he was. And my father told him, "Well, we were hiding. And we were found." So there was nothing come up a story, obviously. We were known in the area. And this man was frank, too.

He said it, "Mr. Rajna, I am leaving tonight. I am trying to get out of the west. What do you want? I want you to remember this, I'm saving you. What do you want me to do for you? Do you want to take you to the Getto or

you want me to make sure that you will be safe here in the Arrow Cross house?"

And then my father and my parents, they were huddled, and the Russians are going to come in the Arrow Cross house. They probably not going to ask questions, "Are you Jews or are you Arrow Cross?" They will probably finish off everybody who is there. And they felt that it was safer to go to the Getto. And my father told that to that person, and then we were taken over to the Getto.

And that's the reason that they didn't -- usually what would happened would have happened to us. That's that man I talked about earlier, the peasant. Because my parents asking him, "What's happening to people you find?"

They said, "Well, if there is no heavy shooting we take them down to the Dunya. They shoot them into the river. Or if the shooting is bad then we just take people off to the next, the closest park."

So he obviously kept his word. They took us over to the Getto. And the Getto was run by Jewish police and Jewish administration. They gave us an empty kitchen to stay in. There was no stove. There was no furniture. There were no food, nothing.

They said, "Well, this is the place you can stay." And we went there and we spent there one night.

Then my mother remembered that she had an uncle who lived in the Getto area. And so they went up to look him up. And they found him. And they were there.

And they said that, "All right, come in. You can stay with us." That was a furnished. They didn't have anything, too. That wasn't opulent either, but at least it wasn't stripped down. I remember that from there on basically we stayed up in -- we had one bed for all families, double bed, in that bed. All food we had basically is every other day or so they came with some warm water, soup with a few kind of rice or something floating in it. It was hardly warm. And my mother and my aunt, they had Challah HEAT HAND BAG from the bakery. So we were getting small pieces out of that. And we kind of kept warm. There was a air shelter in the basement. But once we went down there and it was sort of strange. And it was so overcrowded that my parents decided it was better to stay up in the apartment because it was less of a risk.

Now in the Getto I remember coming over from that original windowless and bare room to that relative's apartment, there were dead bodies we were stepping over there. It was a cold winter, frozen snow, and there were frozen people who either died of different reasons, because of the shooting or heart attack or starvation or what. And they dropped. They were just left there on the streets.

And there was an area where the entrance of the Getto. That was a famous huge Synagogue of Budapest, it's supposed to be the largest in central Europe. In that garden that I saw there were frozen bodies stacked up. It was too cold. There was no effort, they didn't make an effort to bury them. But the bodies they picked up were people who died. They just carried them over and stacked them up like firewood. And the people were dying continuously.

Of course, the shooting, it was going on. And there was very little over air activity because the Germans didn't have any air force and the Russians didn't have much air force, either. I remember once, though, that one of the supply bombs, you know, it looks like a bomb. It was full of supplies they dropped with a parachute. One of those fell into the Getto area, and we saw that it kind of hung hanging on the balcony of an opposite building. And we saw through the window that unit. And we saw that some German Hungarian soldiers were kind of recovering it. That was the memory I had of the fighting.

And, of course, sometimes the building was shaking because it took a hit. But that was kind of a background noise. It was almost continuous. After a while you just got used to it. You don't get scared from any of those.

Then towards the end it must have been early January that we were taken to the Getto. So it probably took about three weeks, we were there kind of just subsisting, staying in bed and moving little. And then when the Russians finally reached the Getto. And I think the Getto wasn't so heavily defended by the Germans. It was mostly German troops who were doing the fighting. There were some Hungarian troops, too, but I don't think there were too many or they amounted to much. But the Germans, they were not defending the Getto, as such. And they were not inside there.

So the Russians, they came in often. They went through the broke up the escape between area charters. So they went underground from house to house. And they always painted signs on the buildings they already cleared so that troops who came underground and troops who came on the street they wouldn't kind of fight, shoot at each other.

So the Russians came in a couple of days before the word came that they -- the Russians reached the area where our original apartment was. And then my father ventured out. And he found that the people who took over our apartment, they were decent. Because they took our furniture from the whole apartment, which was five large rooms, they put it into the smallest room without opening and just sealed the doors. And we were extremely lucky



because there were lots of food and clothing and everything, very valuable supplies. And then those people, we got that room and another room. So we got two rooms. And they kept the rest of the apartment until they left. I don't know what happened to them.

We returned to the house. Basically, I would have to say that I was lucky. Our family was more lucky than most people because we survived. That was actually lucky right there when they found us in the Arrow Cross people. If that guy didn't show up they probably would have massacred us just like everybody else.

Q Let me ask you, when you were in hiding in the basement of the bakery --

A Uh-huh.

Q -- how long a period of time was that?

A Well, it must have been the time we have to create the Yellow Star house to move into the Getto. That's when we went into hiding.

Q Right.

A So that was sometime in October. So from November and December, it must have been about ten, twelve weeks' period.

Q And did you venture out during the day?

A No, no. From the time one had to go to the Getto we were in hiding, then when the order confined our

Jews in the Getto with the Yellow Star you couldn't have been outside anytime.

Q Okay. How did you pass the time then? You were all in a room, one room?

A Well, during the day we were up in the small room, you know, that was upstairs. There was three levels. So there was the street level was the store and the coffee house. And the basement was the bakery and the supply areas. And one story up was the office and papers and other supplies and dressing rooms for the person. And so that little room which was upstairs, that's where we spent the days.

Q And --

A At night when the people left the bakery the police went home, then we went down to the cellar. In the cellar we could light candles or kerosene lamps. My father could even fire up the oven and bake bread.

Q And so then during the day the only people that saw you were the two people you mentioned that had your confidence and brought the supplies?

A Well, other people might have suspected it. But those were the two ones who we were in touch with, that they knew. And during the day I guess we were doing a lot of reading. And at night my parents tried to listen to the radio, the news, what's happening. I was all the time --

they always were hoping that the English will come from the south, from Yugoslavia. But it was the Russians who freed us, and the Russians who lost -- well, if you're going to look at the figures, the Communists, they did us in in their own way after the war. But it was the Russians who died. There were more Russian soldiers died in the Second World War than anybody else. They were the ones who were really pushing the Germans, and the Italians and the Rumanians and the Hungarians and everybody back.

Q Did you feel that your family perhaps got a little closer when you were in hiding? Did you discuss --

A No, our family was so close. So, actually, my mother died fairly early, in '48. Then my aunt raised us from there on. We were a very close, good family. And my parents said that was their reason, that he was the youngest, my father, was the children, because they didn't miss the family because they were so close.

Q And then when you were found and they took you to the prison and you mentioned your experience there --

A Yeah.

Q -- how long were you in the prison?

A Well, it wasn't the prison. It was the Arrow Cross house.

Q The Arrow Cross house, how long were you there?

A It was a short period. I think it was, if it

hardly must have been too nights or two days. Because I was there all the time in the cellar, too, so I can't judge time. But I think that it was a very short time. It wasn't more than two days. Because as soon as they confirmed and they knew who we were I -- there was one reason that they could have been that they didn't take us down to the river is because there was too much fighting, too much shooting. Second, they could have been looking for the appearance of this leader who should have made the decision what to do with us.

Q When they asked for your father's wedding ring were they taking your jewelry?

A Yes, yes, they took my mother's, and they asked for all the paper, all the money we had, everything else, yes.

Q Had you heard of RAL WALLENBURG?

A At this time? No, not -- I heard about these houses. That was discussed. Because you could buy either real or falsified requisitions, passports from other, the Portuguese, the Swiss, the VATICAN and the Swedish. And it was discussed how much value was to have it. And I think that my parents decided that probably these Arrow Cross people are not going to honor it, and then you're stuck in a place and locked up. They felt that that wasn't safe. For some people it worked, other people it didn't.

Because that's exactly what happened. The Arrow Cross went into some houses and murdered everybody. But I heard about those houses. And this was discussed about what to do. And I know that I remember that my sister was the most upset, she understood more than I did, probably, or assuredly. But my parents, they had kept their composure. That's why I wasn't scared. I got scared when we got on the street and I saw people hanging there and the fighting and the terror, and the ghoulish sights in that place, the Arrow Cross place.

But we were only kept there a very short time, because they had some use of my father to work in their kitchen. But they were cramped, too, and quite a few of those people, they were -- they would have gotten out if they could but it was too late for them. And they were afraid, of course, what would happen when the Russians eventually would come.

Q Now, when the Russians came and basically freed you in the Getto --

A Yes.

Q -- can you describe that experience? Was there a lot of jubilation?

A No, no. Everybody was so emaciated. You haven't eaten. Actually, I think that most of the food we had were given to my sister and me. I'm pretty sure that my

parents were eating less than we did. And so they must have been very weak.

And so actually when the Russians came the fighting still didn't stop because then that was the central part of Budapest, but still a large part and the whole mountainous and part of the other side of the river were still kept by the Germans. There was still firing over.

And then my father went to the apartment, and after he found it clear. We were leaving the Ghetto and going home. Then even then there were still shots were coming in on the streets. It was the siege, the fighting was going on for weeks afterwards. You know, street fighting, it's very sticky business. It's very difficult to dislodge defenders. And there were lots of casualties on both sides.

And but that was a jubilation. We said, "Finally we are freed." And they were very composed people. As soon as we were free they started to think about what happened to Hugo because they still didn't know what had happened to him or my mother's family. So they were very energetic people, very intelligent people. And they were both very strong, both physically and mentally. And I understood little of what happened. Because I thought their reaction, and they were always composed except on the few

occasions.

Q Then you lived in your old apartment until the war ended?

A Yes, the war officially ended in May when Berlin fell.

Q Do you remember that?

A Well, I remember because there was jubilation on the street. And I was running into the store, running to my father and says, "Oh, Dad, the war is finally over." And my father was busy there running a business.

And he said, my father said, "Well, I'm happy, but you know this is not the end of our trouble." Because he saw, you know, besides, okay, the business was gone back. That was because first there was Hungarian troops went in there. Then the Hungarian troops moved and then some other troops moved in there. So there was different military groups moving in and out. And they were destroying and everything that is possible. So he had to start basically to clean it up and open it up.

And then I think the Russians helped to set up civilly and the administration. And they gave some help to stores, because the store was so close to the railroad station. In the beginning for several months we mostly had Russian troops coming in. And the civilians were sort of afraid of coming to the place because of the troops. And

there was lots of Russian Jews among the troops. Somehow the big countries somehow figured out who he was. So my father had contacts in that way.

And there was a huge army, and different levels. They had more better trained troops, and they have some pretty low moral, low class troops, those people. They were comitted, pretty official things as well. In the business they were more or less left alone because in the mixture there was always some people who were Austrian, they were troublemakers.

But from the time we got back, it was in February. I think it was in April, sometime in April when all the fascists, the mostly German forces were out of Hungary. Then it took April and the first week in May before the German resistance collapsed and they took Berlin.

Q Did you have any friends, you know, when you were a child and that you were able to meet after the war? Did you get together with any of the friends?

A Some of the people who lived in the original apartment house, they came back. And I became good friends with a boy who I met in the Star of David house. And his father was in one of the worker troops, and he died or got murdered. That happened, most of the people disappeared. Like, there his father, didn't know for sure where he died. They just knew that he was taken away. And they could kind



of trace what happened to the whole group. And sometimes the Hungarian and the ganders, the Hungarian fascist army people, they were just murdering, martial gunning down a whole battery of Jewish men and boys.

I know that there was one boy who I met in school. I went back to elementary school. And he lived with his grandmother. And that boy, he was my age. And he told me that he was in a -- it was one of these protected houses. And they were taken with his parents to the river. And they were shot into the river. And he was too small so he just got pushed into the river. And somebody fished him out, way down. And it was a decent Gentile who kind of kept him and they hid him. And his parents died there. They were shot into the river.

Q After the war when you went back to school did they continue to have the religious classes for Jews?

A No, that was the next period, too. I completed the elementary school and I started on the advanced grade school. And I had to take the streetcar to get to the grade school because that was the grade school system. I couldn't go to the closest school. I had to go to that one. There again the school started and religious school started. We were divided into these three groups. So there was a little Jewish group and there was a Catholic group. And there was a Protestant group.

And as the weeks went people from the Catholic or the Protestant group decided that, well, they changed their mind, they would be Jews again. So then that was a school which was in an area where there was rather much Jewish people, but a few of the people, either for real or formerly before the war said that they are not Jews, they are so and so. And they thought that might protect them. The Jews that survived you don't know if that's the reason or not, but it was amazing, that during the first year almost every week there's a few more who join the Jewish group for religious school education. And finally I think that close to half of that class was Jewish in that class. This was a public school.

Q Was there any kind of celebrations in the synagogues or something after the war, do you recall anything like that, or in your first Yom Kippur after the war?

A The first Yom Kippur was the people said, "No, we're not going to celebrate Yom Kippur any more. We have been fasting long enough." And so most people they had the attitude that religion had caused them the trouble. And they didn't want anything to do with it.

But as time went more people kind of got back to following a tradition. Our family, we kept -- we continued the same way. And I remember going out to the

cemetery and when they became sure my uncle Hugo died, and they put his name down on his brother's tombstone. And that was kind of a tradition in the family, that PSALMS KADDISH was a steady observance. And Rosh Hoshanah and Yom Kippur, that was kept in the family.

Q And you mentioned you moved to Sweden. How did that happen?

A Well, that was way -- it was in '56. At that time my mother passed away in '48. And that was a combination of sickness or she had kidney trouble, which originally she contracted it after the First World War when she was very young. She had the Spanish flu or something. Then because of the starvation and the cold in the Getto that kind of got renewed.

And they wanted to operate on her. And I think the top surgeon in the country came to visit her. And the guy was kind of hesitant. He said that, "Well, there is just so much chance to operate on the kidney won't help." And then my parents kind of decided that they're not going to pursue an operation. And they let things go. And I guess when I was away from school she was resting. When I came home after school then she was up.

So again I was protected from realizing how sick she was. And when she died it was a really a very big shock for me, because she deteriorated very quickly and in a

few days and she died. That was a very big shock.

And next year, in '49, the Communists, they got quite a lot stronger. And, of course, there was the red army was in the country. So whenever there was particular opposition they just a leader saying he was foreign imperialist agent, so they had an easy time. Then there were often many Jews in the -- ethnic Jews, not religion Jews -- in the Communist administration and in the Communist party.

And the top guy, this RAUCKISH, probably you heard the name, he was a real Stalinist. He was just like this Rumanian guy KUSHASUSKOR. In '49 they walked, in between Christmas and New Year's, into the bakery and they nationalized it. It was an act of the Parliament.

Q Your bakery?

A Yeah, our bakery, and all the other small businesses, so that wasn't particularly our bakery. It was kind of a final step of socialization of the country. And then in the late forties and early fifties there was Stalinism, full blown Stalinism, that people disappeared and terror and everything. And then one had to be in the same way as in '44. You shouldn't tell your source or shouldn't tell what you had for dinner to anybody because that could be a political crime.

So in '56 when, you know -- '53 was when Joseph

Stalin died. And it took about three years, things started to get more liberal. And then in '56 there was the Hungarian uprising. And I remember that my father at that time was working. There was a Jewish hospital. That was a pattern which was common in Europe, and even in this country, that Jews established their social institutions early. So probably one of the best or best the hospital in Budapest was the -- or the whole of Hungary, was the Jewish hospital.

There were Kosher food for Jewish patients. And he was working there as a baker. And he went even during the revolution, he went there every morning. And some days he took me along. And I remember that we were walking. It wasn't that far. So we were walking to work early morning. And when we were getting to that large wide boulevard there was a round boat and they were coming, the Russian tanks. It was in October again, 4th of October.

That was when the Russians decided that now they will clamp down and crush the revolution. So there are these armored troop carriers and tanks that were rolling in around the railroad station and in the intersections, so it was kind of lucky that we were on the other side of the street when they came in. And then we just stood and passed and went home.

That was clear that there was no resistance

which would put up with the Soviet army at that time. And the Hungarian Communists and the Hungarian secret police agents disappeared there for a while, they came back.

Then I decided to leave the country. So that's when I went to Austria. And in Austria we were in a refugee camp. And there I was there with a friend of mine, a Jewish boy and a Gentile girl and her Gentile fiance, we four crossed the border together. And we were in the refugee camp. This was kind of a first stop.

At the loss PICKERS outside that, "This is secret service. Is there any refugees of the Jewish faith? Would you please come out?" And then we started to discuss it. Is it safe to come out? Is it not safe to come out? And then we went out, and there were I guess two gentlemen, a British and American from New York in a huge bus. And they were looking for Jews, because they were figuring, well, if there were Hungarian refugees there must be Jews. And there were Jews but they were afraid to stick their neck out. They didn't know what that meant.

And then we two and their two younger boys joined the bus, and we had a huge bus for us four. And they stopped somewhere. And we get a good dinner. And they took us to Salzburg and they put us up in a hotel. That was a very good thing because in the hotel you were free to go to different agencies for to try to go to different countries.

The Austrians or regular refugee camps, they usually put up people outside the cities. And there from there, there was no mobility. It was very difficult to get in touch with these people who would take refugees.

And I got out and wrote my name up on the different lists, the different agencies. And I remember that there was an American consulate in Salzburg. And they were very organized. And almost everybody wanted to go to the United States. I wanted to go, too. But they were very slow in processing people. They gave out, passed out numbers and for one line. And the next morning you showed up with the number and you stood in line and they give you a new number for the next line. And I cannot -- I didn't have the nerves to stand in line. So I stayed in the hotel and I walked around in the city of Salzburg, which is a nice place.

And pretty soon, I think after ten days or so, I got a message to the hotel that the Swedish Transport is leaving from the railroad station 10:00 o'clock at night. And that was all the message. It sounds funny but I didn't have much to pack up. So I went down there with my friends. And that was the Copenhagen Express from Vienna to stop, and the last two trains were the Swedish Transport.

And I said, "Is this it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I applied to."

"Get on."

So I got on the train and they took me over to Germany, and Denmark to Sweden. And they put me up over there, and the others, in a camp. But it was actually, it was in the winter. So it was a summer resort. We were there about three, four days before they asked me my name. So they were very generous of picking up people as long as they had the quarter, anybody who wanted to get on the train, they just brought it. Some people they left the train in Germany because they had German relatives in Germany. So that's the way I got into Sweden.

Q And your family stayed in Hungary?

A Well, my sister, a few weeks later. And she left to Austria. From Austria she ended up in Venezuela. And she is still there. And my aunt and my father, they stayed in Budapest. And I haven't seen him for three years. That's when he first came out and visited me in Sweden. And it took about I think about eight years before I first went back to Hungary.

Q When did you come to the United States?

A I lived in Sweden for ten years. I came in the end of '66. I went to school in Stockholm. And I got a newspaper. And there was American companies were advertising for engineers. And in Europe, you know, at that



time there was space program going on and so for civilian industries there was no defense contract or anything. They had to go to Europe to hire people. And I answered the ad and I got an interview in Copenhagen, so I flew down to Copenhagen. The person who interviewed me, he was a Dutchman, but he was working for the company here in California.

About that time about three of my friends from Budapest who had the patience to stand in line in Austria, they were established here. You know, they got to come KILMER and other places. And they get through American colleges. And they -- two of them were here in California. So it was very nice for me to meet friends, connections, and my company.

Q You kept in touch although you were here?

A Yes.

Q Did you want to show your photographs to the camera?

A Well, this was a picture in '44. I think that the idea behind this photograph was that to apply if in case we applied for those, that passport, you know, that protecting passport, to go to the protecting house. That's why my aunt was not on that picture. So that was only my sister and my parents on the pictures. This is it. So that we were all in the Star of David.

Q When was that photograph taken?

A That was must have been in the spring or early summer in '44. Of course, that was the different harassments during that time, that you had to have that Star of David sewn on your outer clothing, sweater, shirt or clothes. Then the police or even something, they started to push a pencil under and seen that it was sewn on strong enough. And that was the general attitude.

There were lots of decent people. But the decent people were intimidated. They didn't stood up, you know, and there was a point of how far they dared to go, like the two people who were supporting us, up to a certain point.

Q When you were walking the streets with your Yellow Star were you ever approached by a policeman or anyone to check?

A No. I think we were advised not to be out there after the curfew hours and not to stray too far away. That was the center part of Budapest.

I remember both after the liberation and before the liberation that in the class there were anti-Semitic remarks and there were fights, and this kind of thing. But that wasn't so horrifying. That was kind of creeping up slowly. And it became slowly a way of life. And one kind of learned to cope with it.

The most shocking memories were the ones when we were taken out from our hiding and taken over in the -- over those streets to the Arrow Cross headquarters, and what I seen there, and the scenes in the Getto, the streets with the frozen bodies and the dead people, that's about the worst first memories I had.

I was extremely lucky. Our family was very lucky. But you know, even to remember the realities is very difficult to grasp when -- it's just like, you know, the earthquake, if you live through the earthquake, it's a few seconds. And as time passes it's more and more difficult to remember, realize how horrified you were in those seconds.

Q Thank you very much. Is there anything you want to say?

A No, not really. I think that my first experience I told you is luckily to me is very limited. And for me to get into what I have heard and what you hear, you learn later on, your education, that you have become more analytical. When you hear the same stories from so many people then you have to believe it. But what I've seen firsthand, you know, that that's I'm very positive about. And I want to pass on. That's my solid brick to the facts.

Q We appreciate that, and your recall is very good.

A This book I brought along. I don't like to

read it. It's nothing that you want. But I don't know if there is any library of any kind, but that gives names and especially goes back in time how it did, the Hungary and fascist system started way before Hitler. Hitler was painting houses or whatever he was doing, you know, when the Hungarians were making legislation.

Hungarian Jews were going to Austria and Germany universities to study because there was a NUMERALS CLAUSE in Hungary. So they were starting things on their own. And I would say the brutality, and such, it was there. It just got maybe later directed towards the Jews and focussed on.

In Hungary it was occupied in the fifteen hundreds by the Turks. The Hungary and proverbs Turks is still the boogieman. They threatened to kill if you don't behave, they will take you away. Now the Turks were doing their -- they were behaving like animals. And they were slaughtering people.

And on the other hand, in Hungarian history the Hungarian nobles were slaughtering their own surfs ruthlessly and torturing. So the methods, the behavior was there. The Jews were lucky that we're protected under the Turkish rule. The Jews were accepted. And when the HUSBULLS who were Catholic to convert the country, they were hard on the Jews for a while but later they used the Jews

because they didn't want to use the Hungarian peasants. They wanted to keep the peasants down. So the Jews, they had the area to be a middleman. They were managers for the land owners.

And most of the large Hungarian companies were founded by Jews. They established industry and agricultural industry. And they had the good influence. Of course, as the life was good there people from -- Jews from Poland and other areas were moving over. Russian Jews preferred to come to the United States instead of going to Israel. The Polish Jews, they moved a little bit closer. I think that's a pretty human normal behavior.

Q Have you been to the Holocaust Library here in San Francisco?

A I didn't even know there was one.

Q On Fourteenth and Balboa. And there's a lot of books like that. As a matter of fact, there's probably books in Hungarian.

A That's interesting.

Q Books in Hebrew and Yiddish.

A My family, my parents, they grew up in Budapest. And my father said that after Hungary became independent after the first war, one could hear more German spoken on the streets in Budapest than Hungarian. That was the official language and that was the language of the

trade.

Q Matter of fact, they have a lot of what they call memorial, Yizkhor books written by various SHETTLES AND TOWNS, and there might even be one from Budapest. They list names and they have photographs.

A I should visit it. Is it listed in the phone book?

Q Yes, the Holocaust Library. We'll give you the address and phone number. It's not far from here.

A Well, our congregation, it's the Saratoga address. It started out in Sunnyvale and then moved around, and now it's a nice building in Saratoga. There are a couple of people I know who might -- I will ask them if they have anything to tell you or encourage them.

Q There is, like I said, about several hundred of these Yizkhor books there. I think they have five hundred.

By the way, were you bar mitzvah'd?

A Yes.

Q Was your mother still alive?

A No, my mother passed away in late March. And my birthday is the 8th of April.

Q Because I knew --

A That came so close, so it was postponed. And I had -- you know, Hungary is the only place in the east block there they have a Rabbinical school. And they produce

really great scholars in Hungary. If you look up the Juddia encyclopedia, I was surprised when I first saw that many, I thought that they were genuine Hungarian writers and artists. They were Jews. They just adopted a Hungarian name. And basically they were very assimilated. But that was a very large population that was very intellectual.

Q Thank you, again.

A Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it.

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