

INTERVIEW WITH: Michael Bokor
 INTERVIEWER: Irene Rotenberg
 DATE: 2/84
 PLACE: San Francisco - Brisbane
 TRANSCRIBER: Nancy Fisher

EXAMINATION

Q Tell us your name and where and when you were born?

A My name is Michael Bokor, and I was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1929 - March 10, 1929.

Q Could you please tell us a little about your family and the life in Budapest when you were a small child - what you remember about it.

A Yeah, we had -- there were -- I was a first-born, and then there was a sister born two years later, another one seven years later.

My father was a very ambitious young man, but he was at the age when the Hungarians drafted him in 1936, when I was about seven years old. And for most of the time that I remember between 1936 and the time the war was over, he was either in the army or in the Jewish Brigade, the Jewish Labor Brigade, which was the Jewish version of the Hungarian Army - whatever,

semi-slaves, you might say.

So we were living at home under relative poverty. I attended orthodox school in Budapest and so did my sisters. And I was raised under extremely strict orthodox rules at least my mother was extremely orthodox, and my father was going along with it whenever we saw him.

And times were difficult. And we lived in - we lived in a section of Budapest that is - that was prominently Jewish. So my whole youth was surrounded with Jewish life, Jewish culture, Jewish activities. I didn't even know any Gentiles. I can't think of anything else. Okay.

Q That was - what years approximately are you talking about?

A I'm talking about the time we grew up - let's say from 1936 to 1942, '41, '42, after which the war started - we started to feel the heat of the war.

Up to that time it was mostly - you know, dirty Jew, stinking Jew. They stopped us in the street and took our money, our belongings, and spit on us. But basically it wasn't - we could stand it, it didn't happen that often.

That's one of the reasons we lived in the ghetto area. We didn't expose ourselves too much to the Gentile community, because the Hungarian community is very anti-Semitic, always has been, and always will.

Q Could you tell us when you first noticed signs of more overt anti-Semitism than these things that you mentioned - in other words, things that were happening through - you know, through the Government and so on?

A Yes. Well, about 1939 they had - they started I was kind of young, but historically I know they had the - Jews couldn't get jobs. They had what they called numerous clauses, they had quarters for Jews.

They lost their jobs, they lost their right to go to college, university. And this was all around 1941, '42, when the Germans started to put pressure.

It was my understanding at that time and reading about it afterwards, that the Hungarian Government under Admiral H-O-R-T, he was the Regent of Hungary, was trying - while it was anti-Semitic, he was trying to keep it a Hungarian problem - away from the Germans,

knowing that the Germans would probably deal with it a lot stronger.

And I mean, you can verify history, and you don't need my opinion. I was only ten years old, ten or twelve years old. But I was very opinionated. As a matter of fact I sometimes got into trouble for calling the Nazis hooligans and gangsters - in front of other people.

One time I had a severe problem about that. But I noticed that after the Jews couldn't get jobs and they couldn't attend school, they started to put swastikas on businesses. And it was - we were really careful about going out on the street unless we really have to.

It started to get worse in '42, and then by 1943 there was very severe anti-Semitism. And I guess we'll go into those details later on as part of the story. But it gradually grew in Hungary to the point where it was becoming unbearable around '42, '43.

I finished eight years of school in 1943. I had my bar mitzvah in 1942. I had my bar mitzvah and at that time we were still joyous. All the people were there. Everybody

was still feeling - they could enjoy a bar mitzvah. They could enjoy celebration. I guess I just didn't know the real extent of the problem.

And as a matter of fact as you will find out in later conversation, as you found out from others, we really didn't know what was going on. We did listen to Voice of America from time to time. And it was forbidden for us. They even took our radios away.

But we had ways to listen, and we knew about what went on in the world, but not really - at least at my age level. I was somewhat sheltered from it, being my mother was more preoccupied with K-A-S-H-E-R-E-T-T-E than with politics. I think it was a little sheltered from it.

But I am aware that it started to get rough on the adults. They started - for one thing, by about 1942, they took all Jewish men of something like eighteen and up - took them into a labor force. They drafted them. Just like the Gentiles were in the Army, the Jews were drafted into a labor force, and they fought in Russia.

As a matter of fact,
now that I think about it, one of my most beloved
uncles was taken to Russia, and he froze to death
at the River D-O-N-B-A-N. I don't know how to
say it, Hungarian. But he froze to death, and
some witnesses later verified that that was a
fact. The Red Cross notified his wife.

And so they were taking
the Jews out to fight in Russia - or rather dig
fox-holes without weapons and without proper
clothes.

I remember as the
Jews were taken away, they spent their last nickle
on buying warm clothes, and they bought themselves
boots. And by the time they got there, they
stripped them and gave them rags. So they were
frozen.

They were not getting
proper nutrition. They were - they had no way
of defending themselves. Many of them died
from the combat, and many of them died from just
frozen. And to add to the misery, Russians captured
them and treated them as prisoners of wars. And
I can verify to that for Russia's later activities,
as they so-called liberated us.

I guess we'll get to

later on.

Q If I'm not mistaken, Hungary was actually an ally of Germany and fought on the side of Germany. I mean, Hungary was not occupied by Germany until I think '43 or '44.

A Right.

Q So there were no Germans actually in Hungary, and all these laws against the Jews were made by the Hungarians.

A The Hungarians, as I mentioned earlier, are historically anti-Semitic. It's in their mother's milk.

But the Germans didn't come into Hungary until March 19, 1944 - they marched into Budapest, March 19, 1944. They marched into Budapest. To that time the Hungarian Government was the one that was doing all the activities.

Like I say, up to that time they weren't killing Jews in Hungary. They picking on us. What they did was, they took some Jews away - now that I'm refreshing my memory - back in about '41 they started to pick up Jews who were called Polish. What was Polish? Well,

if they couldn't prove their Hungarian lineage back to a hundred years or more, they were called Polish.

Now, my father, I remember this one quite clearly now all of a sudden, that my father spent a lot of time running around trying to prove that we were Hungarians. Indeed, our name Bokor went back a couple of years, he found out. And it didn't help anything, but at that time at least they didn't pick us up as Polish - although my mother would have qualified, because she come from a part of Hungary - they were quite certain they came from G-O-L-I-T-S-E-E or some place.

At that time we had - we were at least safe in that respect - in the 40's, early 40's. Later on when the Germans came in, of course it didn't make any difference. And that's a later conversation, I imagine. I don't want to jump ahead of it.

Q I don't know about jumping ahead. If you have anything to tell us what happened before '44, fine. Otherwise, we'll just go along and start what happened when actually the Germans came in. How did the situation change?

A Well, it's not jumping ahead. It's just that I want to have a sequence. I imagine you probably want an orderly sequence.

Q Yes.

A So 1942 came, '43, '44, difficult times, that many of our acquaintances and friends were taken away because they were so-called Polish. And they were no more Polish than the rest of us, but because they couldn't prove their Hungarian lineage back to 1860, whatever, they were considered Polish. And that was bad enough.

And we didn't know at that time, but our Polish brothers were already in concentration camp in Auschwitz. And we had no way of knowing that, but - As a matter of fact back in about - okay.

Early 1943, '44, when the Germans finally did occupy Budapest, historically they did that because the Hungarians weren't doing enough about the Jewish problem.

And it's not to the credit of Hungary, at least I don't think so. Sometimes I want to be a little bit lenient, because there must have been some good people there, but - I don't know. There must have been

somewhere.

Then when the Germans came in, I was watching them on the street. It was a Sunday and we were out on the boulevard. We heard about it, and we were watching them marching and the motorcycles. It was a sad time. We didn't know what to say.

It didn't even sink in. You know, it just didn't - it didn't seem like it was really much of a problem. I mean, we almost anticipated it. But it wasn't days before, I mean maybe by Passover, which was maybe a few weeks later, we were all wearing stars. And, oh, gosh, I could go into hours of details about how we bought the - we had to buy oil cloth, something like table cloths - yellow. And we had to make a star a certain size.

And we were so anxious to please. This is almost nauseating to think about it now. We were so anxious to do everything right and not to rock the boat. We were sewing, my mother was stitching them, you know, make sure it's proper, you know, and lined up right. We thought it might make some difference, but apparently it didn't.

Immediately thereafter we couldn't go out on the street. And it wasn't by - within weeks - within a few days that we had -- well, the curfew, I was just saying. We couldn't go out. But during that time we heard - oh, yeah, my parents were taken away. Oh, gosh, it's the sequence I have to think about.

First my father, his regiment was taken away, the military, whatever, you know, that he was in, this labor force - was taken away -

Q (Interposing) Excuse me, what do you mean by "taken away?"

A Well, the group was taken somewhere from Budapest, and we just didn't know where, okay? They were marched out and gone. I found out after the war they were in concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen or someplace.

And so they were gone, and then little by little we found out that - well, then they started to pick up men over eighteen to thirty-five and sixty. They took all the adults, took all the older people. Immediately after the Germans marched in, they took all older people - and all people, for that

matter, from all villages and towns except to Budapest.

Now before that happened, I'm jumping back a little bit, as the Nazi era started to get bad, say late '43, my grandparents who lived in what is now Romania, at that time it was reoccupied Hungary because at one time it used to be Transylvania. is the area - they begged us to come to live there, because, you know, it's a small town, nobody is going to know you, nobody's going to bother you. And my mother insisted to be near where my father was and insisted on being in the City. And she just had the premonition that it wasn't the right thing to do, and low and behold, they were taken to Auschwitz.

Now, we know that, because we got a postcard from them. "We just arrived to Auschwitz and everything is wonderful." And I think by the time we got the card, they probably weren't alive. This was my grandparents.

Now, my uncles and cousins and other - a bunch of big family from all over little towns of Hungary, they were all taken away, never heard from any of them after the war.

But we - just a minute. Okay, so we stayed in the City and my mother was still with us. And I found out that there was really protected houses in the City - as Swiss protected houses in the City. So one day, when the curfew was on, I and a fellow downstairs in our apartment house decided to go out. He was older, he was a grown-up and I was just about fourteen then, I guess, fifteen maybe, whatever.

We tried to go to the part of the City where they had these protected houses and see if we can get reservation or somehow get in there. Because we didn't know what the story was, just that they had them at that part of the City, you know, the inner City.

So we went out and we found a place - or they told us if you can just make it there and just come in the door and then we'll be protected. So I was very excited about it. But on the way back we stopped at the Swiss Consulate to talk too. We heard about them. So we were standing in line trying to get inside the Swiss Consulate to talk about it, and there was a German raid and a lot of people were shot and taken and all that. So, we just ran and - ran back.

On our way back, just about half a block from where we lived, the SS on the bicycles stopped us. Now, I forgot to mention that I am an artist, so

I always have inclination to forge things. And I forged myself a document that I was a young - what is it called, boy scout - but it's a para-military boy scouts.

So I had the certificate and I remember taking a Hungarian coin with a crown on one side and some ink, and I stamped it. So the SS stopped us and told us he was a Hungarian SS, you know, they had the S-C-H-R-A-B-R-I-A-N-S. You know, you must have heard of them - the German Hungarians, the German ethnic Hungarians.

He stopped us for questioning, and this other fellow that I was with, since he was - for his own reason, he started to run. And he ran into the house which was where we lived which had a big star on it, of course. And so he took me - this SS grabbed me, and I went with him to the house. And he announced in the house that if everybody - that if this particular man doesn't come out within a couple of minutes, the whole house will be taken away.

And my mother saw me and my sister saw me upstairs - and that I was down to the third floor. And they watched me. And I was, of course, very frightened.

And a man came out, and then they took us - this SS man took us - I walked with him. He left

his bicycle someplace, I guess. I mean, because we were walking, I remember distinctly. When we came to the cross street, boulevard where the trolley cars come, and they - he wouldn't let us stop. The trolley cars stopped instead of hitting us. And he shoved this rifle in our back and says, "You stop when I tell you." I remember distinctly.

So the trolley car stopped. He took us to a place called A-N-D-R-O-S-H-A Boulevard, Sixty, which was the headquarter of the Hungarian Nazi Party. The arrow, or something, I forgot how they say it in English. Well, they had a four-pointed arrow, on the green field, black arrow. That was their symbol.

They took us in there, and that was a notorious place forever, everybody knew about that. I was taken - the man that I was with was taken away, and we never ever heard of him again. Because people was killed in the basement of that building, Jews were killed.

I was taken up to the first floor and knocked on the floor. And I sat there, and this man came in - Oh, gosh, let me go back a little bit, because I lost something.

This Nazi man took us to the German headquarters. In the German headquarters they kicked

us upstairs. They kept kicking us and shoving us upstairs, and the Nazi officer asked this man, "What did they do?" And he said, "They were trying to escape." So he slapped me in the face a couple of times, hit the other guy in the stomach, and they roughed us up.

And then they assigned another man that was wearing grenades and bayonet on his rifle, and he was the one that walked us to the Nazi headquarters. He told them to turn us over to the Hungarian authorities. Okay, so he went down somewhere, and that's the end of him. We never, ever heard of him.

I was taken upstairs, and I was sitting there and my mouth was bleeding. I remember, my lips were cracked and my eye was black, and I was really beaten and crying. And this tall red-headed man came in, and I remember him. And he says, "What are you here for?" I says, "I violated the curfew."

So he - oh, while I was there, another Jewish couple was brought in, and then they were telling him something. And I heard the man say, "Take him downstairs and finish him." So I know that was what was going on downstairs.

So this man was there and he told me - this red-headed man, I remember his face, tall

red-headed man, he says, "Now, listen to me." He says, "When I come back, I'm going to yell at you." He says, "Listen quick, go out the door and just say it was a mistake."

So he came back about two minutes later, and he says - he started to yell at me, "Jew boy," or something, "Get the broom, go downstairs to the book store, get a broom and start working." I says, "Yes."

And I went out and walked out the door, and I saluted them, "S-A-K-A-R," or whatever it was, Hungarian - I think it was called, freedom, or whatever. And then I ran home, all the way home. And the policeman that saw me picked up, he looked at me but didn't say anything.

I ran into the house bleeding and everybody was delighted. It took until 1960 sometime, when I was working - I was an engineer in Los Angeles, and I was talking to a Hungarian man and I was talking about this story. And he told me that that man, his name was Joe R-O-H-T, and he's a Jewish man working in the underground. He's the one that got me out. I found that out later on.

Q The one with the red hair?

A The one with the red hair. There were Jews working with the underground. I didn't know much about them.

I heard it from time to time - they took out German brigades, German groups, and take them out to the forest. They were dressed as officers, or something. But there wasn't enough of it, you know. There were not too many young people around to do that.

But anyway, I escaped that one. From that point on - let's see, we were there - Okay, so we managed to get to that building somehow during the hours we can be out. The details escape me. But my mother and my two sisters and I and my cousins and all, somehow we were all there. And we marched into this protected house, and we were there awhile. It wasn't but a few weeks before the Germans did not respect that protection and they started to come in.

We were at the window up on the third or fourth floor, so we could look down the street. And we saw them coming and picking up people. So we tried to either hide or go down the basement or run to the next house or next street. And we just jockeyed around as much as we could.

I remember when mother - because I was small, my mother parted my hair in the middle and dressed me in short pants, you know, to make me look about twelve. Because they started to pick up people from fifteen and sixteen up.

And everyday it changed. They were always picking up younger and younger. When they run out of the middle-aged ones, they picked up the younger ones. So they - one of those times they picked up my mother. And they took her to the D-A-N-U-E, I don't know if I am in sequence. I'm trying to say it in the order it happened.

They picked up my mother in one of those things where we were separated. The children we managed to hide, but my mother wasn't able to. And they took her out - and this I heard the details. I didn't see it happen, although I knew they were shooting people into the river.

My mother was standing there, as she was telling us later on, she was standing by the river all lined up and then there was a priest there who said, "In the name of Jesus, shoot." And they were shooting people into the river, which is documented. You know, it's not something that I -- I mean, it's been verified since then.

And my mother was standing there and all of a sudden she decided to run. She just didn't want to get shot in the river. She started to run and another man was running - a man was running too. And they shot at them, and they shot the man, but my mother

got away. She came back to us. So she told us what happened. It wasn't about a week later, a couple of days later, they took her to concentration camp. So that was the end of that. We haven't seen her - we didn't see her until after the war.

And there I was with my two sisters. I was the oldest, and I had about two cousins, three cousins. And then later on my other cousin's mother was taken away, the one whose husband was frozen to death in Russia. She was taken away. I acquired another couple of kids.

And when all of us decided, well, we couldn't stay there anymore, so we went to the orphanage. There was a Red Cross orphanage. As soon as we arrived there, a bomb hit the building. Because we were also bombed by the British, almost twice, three times a day by that time. So - to add to our miseries.

We arrived there, and a bomb hit. So we survived that one. We survived the bomb, of course we didn't get hurt. But - let's see.

We didn't get further than that. But we were sleeping all over the floor in this building that used to be a factory. It wasn't very good, and it wasn't a good place. And we were home-sick. Everybody was crying, you know. Too many kids there, and they were

sleeping on stairs and everywhere. I mean, it was just loaded with people. And it wasn't much longer - I don't think we were there a week before the Germans started to take the older children.

Q I have a question. Who ran the orphanage?

A Red Cross, International Red Cross. The Germans took the older children. And then...

Q (Interposing) They took the older children out of the International Red Cross?

A Oh, yeah. They didn't respect that place. It was just temporary.

Q There was nothing the Red Cross officials could do to stop it?

A No. They were threatening them. They don't give up. I know there was one lady who was trying to protect us, and as soon as - they took her away too.

And they took the management, and pretty soon they took everybody. So, somebody came for us. There was a man that we knew, a Hungarian, a Jewish guy. He was somehow outside all the time. I think he was involved in the underground.

And he knew about us there, so he came for us. And he took us away. Okay, we went to look for this lady that we used to know, used to be a tenant of ours when my father was away and my mother rented

the kitchen for somebody to sleep in so we can have a little more money. And this is a Gentile lady. So all of us went to her house.

Now, at this time, it's the understanding we really couldn't go out in the street, but we tried anyway. I was the oldest boy, and the other ones were kids. And we could get away with a little bit, you know, especially my sister didn't look too Jewish. And I don't, I guess I looked - it's hard to say. I don't know how Jewish you look. But it wasn't like every minute everybody was watching. There were times when you could run around.

You watch - look the street, and you can walk a few blocks. Anyway he took us someplace, he took us to this lady, and the lady didn't have a place for us. She was afraid, she was afraid. So we weren't - oh, gosh, stop for a second, okay?

Interview with MICHAEL BOKOR
Date: Place: San Francisco, CA
Interviewer: Irene Rotenberg
Transcriber: Katherine Wayne

(Begin Tape 1, Side B.)

A: During the -- during this period that I'm describing, we had a friend in the house where I used to live. I had a friend, his name was Irvin Eisner. Irving Eisner. He was -- he was Communist. His whole family were Communists, and they were -- little by little, they were all taken away and he was the only one that was left.

 He and I had fantasies about escaping and doing all the things. He wanted to -- he was older than me and he somehow managed to survive. I don't know, I think he was a tough individual. Very strong and very strong-minded and he managed to -- he managed to survive all during this time and he wanted us to -- he helped me get documents and the blanks and all that, so we tried -- we tried to go out and live as Christians while -- and tried to take care of the kids, you know, at the same time. It was like a fantasy, but, you know, kids are like that. We fantasized about being able to save the world.

 And so with him, we tried to -- we went to live -- okay, while the children were taking care of themselves -- my sister was a little older -- I was outside and this took place within weeks or something. Within two, three weeks, but I went with him to try to live as a gentile, so we reported into the -- the two of us -- oh, my

sister went with me, too, older sister -- and we reported to the authorities and told them that we just came from the northern part of Hungary, and the Russians had occupied the area and that we were refugees and my parents were taken by the Russians and so we wanted to get coupons so we could buy food and get some kind of identification that was legitimate, so maybe we could get away with it.

So we did that and we reported and the lady looked down at me and she knew that I was Jewish, I'm positive she did, but she gave us the coupons, she gave us plenty of coupons to buy food, although we had no money to buy food. We still had to buy it, but she gave us the coupons.

We went to this -- Irving and I went to this place and we rented a room from a lady. We had somehow -- maybe gave her coupons or food or something. The details escape me. Maybe we had a little money. She was alone, she was afraid. Her children were gone. This is a gentile lady, and she rented us one room in her place, the two of us. We assured her we weren't Jewish, and we were there a few days when a bomb hit the building and I mean, really shattered all the windows, and this lady -- this is as true as -- it's the most saddest part of my whole part. I almost forgot to mention.

She took out what was a part of a Torah. She asked us to cut it up and make windows for her broken windows. This was winter, this was cold, you know. Late autumn in Hungary, and we debated about it and I made my

friend cut it and I put them in. He was Jewish, but he didn't -- he didn't care that much. I mean, maybe he did, but it didn't matter to him as much as it did to me. To me, this was a horrible thing to do.

So we cut up four or five pieces and we nailed them into the window to protect it. It didn't last long because the next bombing attack blew it out too.

And then while the bombing attacks were on, we were -- we were not -- we didn't go down in the basement to the shelter, because we were afraid we might be recognized because there were all those people around that knew us. It's not a big city, -- it's a big city, but some people may have recognized us. We were just worried, so we were sitting through it and shivering and we were frightened. No way I can deny it. We were extremely frightened.

This couldn't go on too long, so we just abandoned the thing and went back to the children and all together -- I may be out of sequence, but we went into the ghetto. The ghetto was already in existence. It was a walled section of the city, maybe a few blocks, and as we went in there, there were dead people all over the place. They were dead in the park, they were laying on the street, they were half buried, there were stores where the bodies were piled, naked bodies like so many logs of wood, all over the place. It was a pitiful place and there was nothing to eat. Really nothing to eat.

We could go for soup. There was some kind of

tomato soup. I hated tomato soup all my life and at that time, we were really -- there was one kitchen where you could get tomato soup and off the record -- a peculiar part of me I found in the ghetto, I found out -- I had an aunt that lived in the ghetto, my father's sister, an older lady, and she was -- I don't know where she got it. I think she was selling food for gold.

Her apartment, when I went to visit her, the first thing we did as soon as we walked in to visit her, because she was very enterprising always, and she had food. She gave us bean soup and some meat but then, we saw dead people in her apartment. There was one lady crawling on the floor and then she died as she was moving around. This is the first time in my life I really saw so many dead people. We were almost callus to it, but I found out from her and through her and through later experience that if you had gold rings or coins, that was not taken away when you were taken into the ghetto -- by the way, when you were taken in, they -- if they had to cut off your finger, they would have cut it off. They took all gold from everybody, including if they could knock out gold teeth, any way, they took everything away from everybody.

But for gold, you could buy white bread, you could buy chicken, you could -- you could have anything -- I understand just about anything you wanted, as long as you had gold. Some people in there, maybe they were dealing with the outside. Some people were able to go out, maybe

the guards, I don't know, but somehow or another, you could have it.

Needless to say, we didn't have anything to eat. All of us were sitting in these basements and the rain was coming in and it was just really miserable, and many people were crying and they were ill and we were hungry, and this was going on for maybe three, four weeks and I think -- later, I'll think of some more details, but as I gloss over it, this was going on for a few weeks, after which one evening, the shooting started to be very loud and so we -- and the one German soldier came into the basement apologizing for the interruption. We knew that something must be happening, and we shot a bazooka out the window into I think -- I found out later it was a Russian tank, and the Russians came through the basement walls. All of a sudden, they walked in, you know, they knocked the wall down and we were supposed to be liberated.

The first thing they told us, that Jews were no good, they were speculators. They made us carry our hands up in the air, which we couldn't hardly lift, those of us that were still alive. They -- one of them gave me some food and the other one knocked it out of my mouth, and then we were liberated. I'm sure there's more to it, but -- let me think about it.

Would you like a cup of coffee now?

(Pause in tape.)

A: I want to go back a little bit. During the time

that we were -- that Irving and -- well, during the time that we were alone, the children were alone, I heard that if we become Catholics -- remember, I was only 14, 15 -- if you become Catholics, which would have been unheard of any other time, we would maybe be able to survive, so consequently I found out that we had to go to a certain address to some church, rectory, whatever, and that there is a way to take a course for a couple of weeks and then you become Catholic and then you don't have to wear a yellow star. You can wear -- I don't think you had to wear anything. So the story went.

So we went there and I stood in line with my sister and we kept talking about what my mother would think. She was already gone at that time. What she would think and all these other things, and finally we got inside and the man, the priest wanted us to -- we had to kneel. I just turned around and left. I was nauseated. I couldn't have done it. Anyway, that was the end of my experience of converting. Never did anything about it. It just that we went there and I thought that was significant that we took that step and I think it was --

(A phone interruption in the interview.)

A: So that was the end of the Catholic episode. Let's continue now at the time that the -- when there we were surviving the ghetto. All right, as far as I was told and as far as we found out, the ghetto was mined, completely mined all around. You asked me a question during the

intermission about -- let's see, what you heard how safe we were in the ghetto. Aside from the fact that lots and lots of people were dead and buried, we were mined. I found out that the walls were mined and the Germans were to blow it up when the Russians come in, and the Russians came in I guess -- may have been a surprise to me; may not have been a surprise to the Germans -- but they were attacked and as the Russians came in through the basements, you know, through walls and I guess they didn't have time to blow us up and all of a sudden, the Germans disappeared, and for days after that, the war was seesawing back and forth and for some good reason, lucky reason for us, we were not -- we were not re-occupied by the Germans.

One of the first things we did after the Russians came in, we broke -- we went under -- we went into the -- our house where I was staying was the very last house in the ghetto and as we run through the basement wall, it was outside the ghetto, and we found, as I poked through the wall as the Russians went around to the next building -- which they were only there for about 10, 15 minutes or maybe an hour, I don't know -- we went to the next building and we found some food.

This is where the gentiles were living. Actually, there was food in a coffin, that they were hiding food and I grabbed the food back and we all gobbled and gobbled until I think days after that, we had dysentary, but incidentally, my grandmother, my mother's mother, was in the ghetto, too,

and we were all together. I forgot to mention that. At that time, she was in her sixties. Let's see, this was six, 25 -- maybe about 70 or something, 65 or 70 years old and she too had -- she was very sick and we all had dysentary from gobbling down some unknown foods, maybe.

There were ch~~oz~~zera~~i~~ and, I don't know, all kinds of canned food. And she was sick. I ran into a basement of the house -- we went into a neighbor's house, a neighboring house where there used to be a liquor store or a wine store, and somehow a couple of us were able to struggle and take a little barrel of wine and since the water was contaminated, we were drinking wine and felt happy about it, I guess, but it did help the dysentary situation and we felt better afterwards.

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I have to say this. I'm going to go to unless you want to go back to the war situation.

When the Russians came in, they were a great disappointment to us. I was not prejudiced against them. As a matter of fact, we were praying and hoping that they would come in. During the pre-war years when I was still in school, we were involved, the children in the Jewish school, and the war was going on, there was there was ^{anti-semitism} ~~great interest~~ in it and we were dreaming about someday migrating to the state of Birobidzhan, which is in Russia; it was a fantasy, which was a Jewish state there. It was a fantasy that we thought would be great.

So we looked to the Russians as liberators. We

263 weren't quite aware of all the ramifications of the Russian system and how they -- what they felt about Jews and some of the first words I mentioned were *Russian phrases* and we figured out that that meant, you know, "You're no good," and "You're speculators," and we had to walk around with our hands up and after they left, we ventured out to the streets and of course everybody was looting and greeting us and I managed to steal a telephone, which was for no purpose, but it fascinated me, and other people were looting other things, and we were all looting, and some of the looting that my sister did became handy, because later on, we were able to exchange it for food. Food was very scarce.

Now, the whole time after the Russians came in was really very difficult for us, because the Russians continued to pick up men that -- they treated Hungary of course as an enemy country, but the difficulty was that they did not discriminate between Jews and gentiles. It didn't make any difference who you were, every able-bodied man was supposedly taken to -- was a prisoner of war and we were picked up many times. I must have escaped from Russian capturing probably four or five times. We tried to take some clothing and everything we could steal and borrow and whatever we kids had, since the parents were still gone.

We took these things to little towers around the city and tried to exchange them for food, and as we were traveling -- for instance, one time I was traveling on the top of a flatcar, the train, on my way back after I received

290 some sausages and maybe a or something in a bag and some flowers and we were traveling back to the city and Russian soldiers came up, took the food away and kicked us off a running train. It didn't matter to him that I was Jewish, it didn't matter anything. I told him I was sick and nothing mattered. They kicked us out.

So it was a great disappointment to us Jews that the Russians were not any -- really didn't treat us any better than -- at least not -- let me clarify, okay, because I'm going to go on with the conversation; I'm going to go into different aspects of Russian occupation.

But this was the Second Ukrainian Army, and as I found out later on, the Ukrainians are just slightly more antisemitic than Hungarians, so we had the bad luck of being occupied by the Second Ukrainian Army, who hated Jews and they didn't have many Jewish officers either. They were mostly kids from Catholic or anti-semitic background.

And so later on, as the Russian occupation went on and I was captured several times for many different things and kept running away and being questioned and not -- I can't say that. They never mistreated us. It's just that they just took many of us prisoners and of course, I was still very young and they couldn't take me as a prisoner, but they did catch me as a speculator or as a blackmarketer, which was very -- all we were trying to do is get some basic foods. We weren't selling anything.

As time went on, I found out that there was an

organization in Budapest who was taking Jewish children into the country to build them up and feed them.

I didn't know much about it, but things started to stabilize and we had some other friends and relatives that were taking care of us a little bit. My sister and I allowed ourselves to go to listen to what they had to say, what this Jewish organization had to say. We wound up different places, but I can only speak for myself. I wound up in a town called Bekescsaba, which is southern part of Hungary.

We were taken to a place which was a beautiful building, a large building. There were boys and girls. We were all about -- this is 1945, so about 16 years old, 16, 16 and a half, and we started to be -- we were introduced to the Zionist movement; frankly, against our will. I mean, we had no idea this had anything to do with Zionism or anything like that. Just like I said, we went to eat, we went to live well and to build ourselves up, because we were very undernourished and frightened and ^{nerve and} didn't trust anybody and it was difficult times for children.

I had the most wonderful time in my whole life since then and before then during this four, five months we stayed in this place. We were singing Hebrew songs, we learned the language, we --

Q: I WANT TO ASK A QUESTION. I WANT TO ASK WHO WAS RUNNING THIS --

A: Hashomer ~~Zair~~
Hatzair

Q: SO THEY CAME FROM PALESTINE?

A: That's right. This was a Jewish agency from Palestine. We didn't know it at that time, but the leaders of the group were Israelis, Palestinians of Hungarian descent, and we were learning Hebrew songs and we were living together, boys and girls. Of course, there was no hanky-panky, if you will. This was just children and we had our own newspaper, and that's the significant part it.

Aside from the fact I was introduced to Zionism which didn't turn me on terribly much, but we had a wonderful time and really liberated, free, happy. Next door to us was a building which was a Russian headquarters and they had some Jewish officers there and they were the kindest, friendliest type of people that spoke Yiddish and although we didn't speak Yiddish, we still learned a lot from them and they came over and helped us.

This wasn't an entirely Jewish brigade. It's just that they had several officers who were very friendly who did give us some food and so we had an overall great time. It wasn't until about May or June '45, my father surprised me. He came to find us. I was up there and he came up and we were very delighted to see him and he told me that my mother is found and that she'll be home.

It was maybe May or something, so they were both -- we all got together. The only thing, sad part of it was, was that after I saw them, I was so imbued is the word with this -- with this *Herhomer Hartzair* ~~Zaire~~-propaganda, that I

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 didn't want to go back home with my parents, because they told us that our parents were bourgeois and they were no good. Their life is not the one we want to continue, but we want to become ^{hachutzim = "pioneers"} ~~hachutzim~~, go to Israel and toil, work in the fields and do all those nice things, and I was -- I hurt my father very terribly, because I was happy to see him, but I didn't want to go home with him. And he made me go home, to our greatest delight. I mean, later on, it turned out it was the best thing to do.

So we went -- we were all together now and my father -- okay, at this point, I want to go back just for a few minutes to previous times.

In 1938, my uncles, two uncles, my father's two brothers, came to America from Hungary. That was before the war started. And so, my father took all the money he could and borrowed from his former boss and some friends, I don't know, and was able to bribe his way out of the Hungarian Army, got himself a certificate that he can leave the country.

We had the passport and we had the visa to go to the United States, to ^{settle} -- pardon me, with another sister that he had here and an uncle he had here since year ^{me} 11, I guess. 1900 something, early 1900's.

So we had all the papers and we were ready to leave. We were on the way. We were going to Lisbon, Portugal. First, we were going to go to Geneva. Genoa, Italy, and we had the tickets and the war broke out again.

BOKOR -

Then we were supposed to go to Lisbon, Portugal, and my mother didn't like it, because she heard that they didn't have many Jews and the food wasn't kosher, so we dillydallied a little while until it was too late to go to -- until the borders were closed. So we couldn't go there.

As it turns out, I found out there were a lot of Jews stuck during the war in Lisbon and led a great life. Eventually came to America. But we weren't lucky, because this -- my mother's orthodoxy has not helped a lot throughout her life. It was difficult all along life, including today. I'm still -- I'm still a victim of orthodoxy. Shall I say this on the record? Fine.

Of the dogmas and the inhibitions and superstitions, but nevertheless, we didn't go there and it was too late. We tried to get out through Russia, to Vladivostok, and that sounded -- that fell through fortunately, as we found out later on. That fell through and so, we were stuck there during the war.

So when my father came ^{back} from concentration camp in Germany during -- in the Russian -- I mean in the American occupational zone, he either felt or knew or found out that it might be a good idea -- they were forming displaced persons camps for refugees in Germany, so as soon as he came back, why, he started -- ^{his} the wheels were turning, he started to think about what to do. He couldn't settle down, he couldn't get a job. They were -- Russian communists had inspectors at every house there watching what you do, what

you eat, how much money you have and it was very difficult and they tried -- this is already past the time when they were capturing the men, but the communists were interfering with our daily lives and he couldn't see -- all he had in his mind about going away.

So later that year, sometime -- well, it was in December, in 1945, all of a sudden out of clear blue -- actually, I was in the movies and my father came for me and the whole family escaped the country. We went -- how did we escape?

Apparently, we were -- he made contact with a Zionist organization, the Palestinian Jews, and were able -- they were trying to take the live Jews out of Hungary, those that wanted to go and I guess we were supposed to go to Palestine, but we met at a certain place and we had to stay mum, we couldn't speak. We were not allowed to speak Hungarian. We were marching to the railroad station, into the railroad car. That was my mother, my father and two sisters and I. We marched into the railroad -- back off, I made a mistake.

My father and my sister and I. My mother and my other sister were to be left behind, because we weren't sure where we were going to go and as I found out later, my mother was expecting. I didn't know that then.

So we left and we escaped through -- we escaped from Hungary by the Zionist troops bribing the Russian soldiers at the border and we were -- we went to Vienna,

where we stayed for about a week in the palace, which was very fascinating, very exciting. From Vienna, we went to Salzburg.

At the border, German border, we were taken across the border by -- they gave us some false names and then they called the roster and everybody raised their hands whatever name they heard and next thing you know, we were across the border to Germany, when we went by train to a camp where we stayed, which was freezing cold -- where it was freezing cold there and we couldn't -- we stayed there for about a month and then my father found another place in town called Bamberg in Bavaria, where they had a lot of Hungarian Jews, and we went there and as soon as we arrived in camp, my father settled us down in the -- they were stables that were partitioned by something like rubberized paper. Everybody had a cubicle with a gigantic stable and this was our new home for over -- for about two years.

My father turned around and went back to Hungary to bring my mother and sister out. He is a very courageous man, he really was. He went through Czechoslovakia, actually went back to the communist zone, and my mother came out. It was much more difficult. She had to walk through the water, some kind of a river, and she had a miscarriage.

She was in the hospital in Vienna for maybe two months. She was already maybe 40 years old then, you know, and she went to -- she was sick and she had to stay in

Vienna for ~~I believe~~ ^{a couple of weeks} -- we were again without family, three children, living alone in the foreign country in a camp among strange people, because some of the people at camp were real strange. They had people that weren't married living together and there were people that were fighting all the time. You could hear every word everybody was saying and they had kids ^{and adults} ~~and everyone else~~, everybody in this gigantic place.

(There was a telephone interruption.)

Q: YOU WERE IN THAT DP CAMP A COUPLE OF YEARS.

A: Yeah, yeah. You could hear everybody talk and it was really very difficult for children. I was at a difficult stage myself and there were -- it was a very difficult time for children anyway, to make a long story short.

About three or four weeks later, after we hadn't heard from them, my mother and father and sister popped in and we were then -- we were living happily ever after. I was working in the DP camp and my father was a driver, my mother was worrying about her ^{Kashut} and I was working in the office.

By that time, I learned some English. I was very diligent, and so I worked for a commandant of the camp in the office, doing some census work, I guess.

Things started to look a little better. We were planning on coming to the United States. We spent about 20 months in the DP camp, but as it turned out again,

the tragedy -- again, life didn't go quite so smoothly, because the Hungarian quota was -- even though we were able to register to come to America, they didn't really do very much about our previous visa. We thought they might renew it, since we had a visa before the war, and it didn't go so easily, so again, we were separated.

My mother was born in an area that at that particular time, the quota system was established. It was Czechoslovakia, so ^{since} we were all minors, we were able to register and get a visa under the Czechoslovakian quota, and so pretty soon, that was about 20 months later, we were called upon, called up and said finally we can go to America, and my father couldn't come because he was definitely born in Hungary.

At that time, there was no Hungarian quota, so again, the family broke up. We left Germany to go to the United States and we arrived in New York and the relatives were very cold and we had all our hopes that as a woman with three children and again pregnant, arrived in the United States, maybe somebody will help us.

Well, the Jewish agency did give us some help. They helped us find a place, a rat-infested Lower East Side of New York, and so they gave us some very minor help, but I remember my mother and I were struggling. I had some training in handbag-making during all this wartimes. I did some apprenticeship part time, so we were making purses at night, and my mother was a seamstress. We worked all day

BOKOR -

and my sister was working all day.

(End Tape 1, Side B.)

*Indexed by
Bob Weiss*

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INTERVIEW WITH: Michael Bokor

INTERVIEWER: *Irene Rotenberg*

DATE: ~~2/24~~ 3/21/85 (from release form)

PLACE: San Francisco - Brisbane

TRANSCRIBER: Nancy Fisher

EXAMINATION

Q Tell us your name and where and when you were born?

A My name is Michael Bokor, and I was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1929 - March 10, 1929.

Q Could you please tell us a little about your family and the life in Budapest when you were a small child - what you remember about it.

A Yeah, we had -- there were -- I was a first-born, and then there was a sister born two years later, another one seven years later.

My father was a very ambitious young man, but he was at the age when the Hungarians drafted him in 1936, when I was about seven years old. And for most of the time that I remember between 1936 and the time the war was over, he was either in the army or in the Jewish Brigade, the Jewish Labor Brigade, which was the Jewish version of the Hungarian Army - whatever,

*born
Budapest
3-10-29*

oldest, 2 sisters

semi-slaves, you might say.

So we were living at home under relative poverty. I attended orthodox school in Budapest and so did my sisters. And I was raised under extremely strict orthodox rules at least my mother was extremely orthodox, and my father was going along with it whenever we saw him.

And times were difficult. And we lived in - we lived in a section of Budapest that is - that was prominently Jewish. So my whole youth was surrounded with Jewish life, Jewish culture, Jewish activities. I didn't even know any Gentiles. I can't think of anything else. Okay.

Q That was - what years approximately are you talking about?

A I'm talking about the time we grew up - let's say from 1936 to 1942, '41, '42, after which the war started - we started to feel the heat of the war.

Up to that time it was mostly - you know, dirty Jew, stinking Jew. They stopped us in the street and took our money, our belongings, and spit on us. But basically it wasn't - we could stand it, it didn't happen that often.

Orthodox schooling
" home

That's one of the reasons we lived in the ghetto area. We didn't expose ourselves too much to the Gentile community, because the Hungarian community is very anti-Semitic, always has been, and always will.

Q Could you tell us when you first noticed signs of more overt anti-Semitism than these things that you mentioned - in other words, things that were happening through - you know, through the Government and so on?

A Yes. Well, about 1939 they had - they started I was kind of young, but historically I know they had the - Jews couldn't get jobs. They had what they called numerous clauses, they had quarters for Jews.

They lost their jobs, they lost their right to go to college, university. And this was all around 1941, '42, when the Germans started to put pressure.

It was my understanding at that time and reading about it afterwards, that the Hungarian Government under Admiral H-O-R-T, he was the Regent of Hungary, was trying - while it was anti-Semitic, he was trying to keep it a Hungarian problem - away from the Germans,

knowing that the Germans would probably deal with it a lot stronger.

And I mean, you can verify history, and you don't need my opinion. I was only ten years old, ten or twelve years old. But I was very opinionated. As a matter of fact I sometimes got into trouble for calling the Nazis hooligans and gangsters - in front of other people.

One time I had a severe problem about that. But I noticed that after the Jews couldn't get jobs and they couldn't attend school, they started to put swastikas on businesses. And it was - we were really careful about going out on the street unless we really have to.

It started to get worse in '42, and then by 1943 there was very severe anti-Semitism. And I guess we'll go into those details later on as part of the story. But it gradually grew in Hungary to the point where it was becoming unbearable around '42, '43.

I finished eight years of school in 1943. I had my bar mitzvah in 1942. I had my bar mitzvah and at that time we were still joyous. All the people were there. Everybody

was still feeling - they could enjoy a bar mitzvah. They could enjoy celebration. I guess I just didn't know the real extent of the problem.

And as a matter of fact as you will find out in later conversation, as you found out from others, we really didn't know what was going on. We did listen to Voice of America from time to time. And it was forbidden for us. They even took our radios away.

But we had ways to listen, and we knew about what went on in the world, but not really - at least at my age level. I was somewhat sheltered from it, being my mother was more preoccupied with K-A-S-H-E-R-E-T-T-E than with politics. I think it was a little sheltered from it.

But I am aware that it started to get rough on the adults. They started - for one thing, by about 1942, they took all Jewish men of something like eighteen and up - took them into a labor force. They drafted them. Just like the Gentiles were in the Army, the Jews were drafted into a labor force, and they fought in Russia.

As a matter of fact, now that I think about it, one of my most beloved uncles was taken to Russia, and he froze to death at the River D-O-N-B-A-N. I don't know how to say it, Hungarian. But he froze to death, and some witnesses later verified that that was a fact. The Red Cross notified his wife.

And so they were taking the Jews out to fight in Russia - or rather dig fox-holes without weapons and without proper clothes.

I remember as the Jews were taken away, they spent their last nickle on buying warm clothes, and they bought themselves boots. And by the time they got there, they stripped them and gave them rags. So they were frozen.

They were not getting proper nutrition. They were - they had no way of defending themselves. Many of them died from the combat, and many of them died from just frozen. And to add to the misery, Russians captured them and treated them as prisoners of wars. And I can verify to that for Russia's later activities, as they so-called liberated us.

I guess we'll get to

later on.

Q If I'm not mistaken, Hungary was actually an ally of Germany and fought on the side of Germany. I mean, Hungary was not occupied by Germany until I think '43 or '44.

A Right.

Q So there were no Germans actually in Hungary, and all these laws against the Jews were made by the Hungarians.

A The Hungarians, as I mentioned earlier, are historically anti-Semitic. It's in their mother's milk.

But the Germans didn't come into Hungary until March 19, 1944 - they marched into Budapest, March 19, 1944. They marched into Budapest. To that time the Hungarian Government was the one that was doing all the activities.

Like I say, up to that time they weren't killing Jews in Hungary. They picking on us. What they did was, they took some Jews away - now that I'm refreshing my memory - back in about '41 they started to pick up Jews who were called Polish. What was Polish? Well,

Germans invade Hungary

*"Polish" Hungarians
Jews taken away*



if they couldn't prove their Hungarian lineage back to a hundred years or more, they were called Polish.

Now, my father, I remember this one quite clearly now all of a sudden, that my father spent a lot of time running around trying to prove that we were Hungarians. Indeed, our name Bokor went back a couple of years, he found out. And it didn't help anything, but at that time at least they didn't pick us up as Polish - although my mother would have qualified, because she come from a part of Hungary - they were quite certain they came from G-O-L-I-T-S-E-E or some place.

At that time we had - we were at least safe in that respect - in the 40's, early 40's. Later on when the Germans came in, of course it didn't make any difference. And that's a later conversation, I imagine. I don't want to jump ahead of it.

Q I don't know about jumping ahead. If you have anything to tell us what happened before '44, fine. Otherwise, we'll just go along and start what happened when actually the Germans came in. How did the situation change?

mother's from
GOLITSEE
(Hungary)

A Well, it's not jumping ahead. It's just that I want to have a sequence. I imagine you probably want an orderly sequence.

Q Yes.

A So 1942 came, '43, '44, difficult times, that many of our acquaintances and friends were taken away because they were so-called Polish. And they were no more Polish than the rest of us, but because they couldn't prove their Hungarian lineage back to 1860, whatever, they were considered Polish. And that was bad enough.

"Polish" Jews taken; need to prove Hungarian lineage

And we didn't know at that time, but our Polish brothers were already in concentration camp in Auschwitz. And we had no way of knowing that, but - As a matter of fact back in about - okay.

Early 1943, '44, when the Germans finally did occupy Budapest, historically they did that because the Hungarians weren't doing enough about the Jewish problem.

And it's not to the credit of Hungary, at least I don't think so. Sometimes I want to be a little bit lenient, because there must have been some good people there, but - I don't know. There must have been

somewhere.

Then when the Germans came in, I was watching them on the street. It was a Sunday and we were out on the boulevard. We heard about it, and we were watching them marching and the motorcycles. It was a sad time. We didn't know what to say.

It didn't even sink in. You know, it just didn't - it didn't seem like it was really much of a problem. I mean, we almost anticipated it. But it wasn't days before, I mean maybe by Passover, which was maybe a few weeks later, we were all wearing stars. And, oh, gosh, I could go into hours of details about how we bought the - we had to buy oil cloth, something like table cloths - yellow. And we had to make a star a certain size.

And we were so anxious to please. This is almost nauseating to think about it now. We were so anxious to do everything right and not to rock the boat. We were sewing, my mother was stitching them, you know, make sure it's proper, you know, and lined up right. We thought it might make some difference, but apparently it didn't.

Immediately thereafter we couldn't go out on the street. And it wasn't by - within weeks - within a few days that we had -- well, the curfew, I was just saying. We couldn't go out. But during that time we heard - oh, yeah, my parents were taken away. Oh, gosh, it's the sequence I have to think about.

First my father, his regiment was taken away, the military, whatever, you know, that he was in, this labor force - was taken away -

Q (Interposing) Excuse me, what do you mean by "taken away?"

A Well, the group was taken somewhere from Budapest, and we just didn't know where, okay? They were marched out and gone. I found out after the war they were in concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen or someplace.

And so they were gone, and then little by little we found out that - well, then they started to pick up men over eighteen to thirty-five and sixty. They took all the adults, took all the older people. Immediately after the Germans marched in, they took all older people - and all people, for that

*father taken
"Bergen Belsen
or someplace"*

matter, from all villages and towns except to Budapest.

Now before that happened, I'm jumping back a little bit, as the Nazi era started to get bad, say late '43, my grandparents who lived in what is now Romania, at that time it was reoccupied Hungary because at one time it used to be Transylvania is the area - they begged us to come to live there, because, you know, it's a small town, nobody is going to know you, nobody's going to bother you. And my mother insisted to be near where my father was and insisted on being in the City. And she just had the premonition that it wasn't the right thing to do, and low and behold, they were taken to Auschwitz.

Now, we know that, because we got a postcard from them. "We just arrived to Auschwitz and everything is wonderful." And I think by the time we got the card, they probably weren't alive. This was my grandparents.

Now, my uncles and cousins and other - a bunch of big family from all over little towns of Hungary, they were all taken away, never heard from any of them after the war.

*Grandparents lived
Romania
(reoccupied @
that time by
Hungary)
Used to be
Transylvania*

*Grandparents
Auschwitz*

~~the~~ protected
houses existed

But we - just a minute. Okay, so we stayed in the City and my mother was still with us. And I found out that there was really protected houses in the City - as Swiss protected houses in the City. So one day, when the curfew was on, I and a fellow downstairs in our apartment house decided to go out. He was older, he was a grown-up and I was just about fourteen then, I guess, fifteen maybe, whatever.

We tried to go to the part of the City where they had these protected houses and see if we can get reservation or somehow get in there. Because we didn't know what the story was, just that they had them at that part of the City, you know, the inner City.

So we went out and we found a place - or they told us if you can just make it there and just come in the door and then we'll be protected. So I was very excited about it. But on the way back we stopped at the Swiss Consulate to talk too. We heard about them. So we were standing in line trying to get inside the Swiss Consulate to talk about it, and there was a German raid and a lot of people were shot and taken and all that. So, we just ran and - ran back.

On our way back, just about half a block from where we lived, the SS on the bicycles stopped us. Now, I forgot to mention that I am an artist, so

I always have inclination to forge things. And I forged myself a document that I was a young - what is it called, boy scout - but it's a para-military boy scouts.

So I had the certificate and I remember taking a Hungarian coin with a crown on one side and some ink, and I stamped it. So the SS stopped us and told us he was a Hungarian SS, you know, they had the S-C-H-R-A-B-R-I-A-N-S. You know, you must have heard of them - the German Hungarians, the German ethnic Hungarians.

He stopped us for questioning, and this other fellow that I was with, since he was - for his own reason, he started to run. And he ran into the house which was where we lived which had a big star on it, of course. And so he took me - this SS grabbed me, and I went with him to the house. And he announced in the house that if everybody - that if this particular man doesn't come out within a couple of minutes, the whole house will be taken away.

And my mother saw me and my sister saw me upstairs - and that I was down to the third floor. And they watched me. And I was, of course, very frightened.

And a man came out, and then they took us - this SS man took us - I walked with him. He left

Picked up by
SS

his bicycle someplace, I guess. I mean, because we were walking, I remember distinctly. When we came to the cross street, boulevard where the trolley cars come, and they - he wouldn't let us stop. The trolley cars stopped instead of hitting us. And he shoved this rifle in our back and says, "You stop when I tell you." I remember distinctly.

So the trolley car stopped. He took us to a place called A-N-D-R-O-S-H-A Boulevard, Sixty, which was the headquarter of the Hungarian Nazi Party. The arrow, or something, I forgot how they say it in English. Well, they had a four-pointed arrow, on the green field, black arrow. That was their symbol.

They took us in there, and that was a notorious place forever, everybody knew about that. I was taken - the man that I was with was taken away, and we never ever heard of him again. Because people was killed in the basement of that building, Jews were killed.

I was taken up to the first floor and knocked on the floor. And I sat there, and this man came in - Oh, gosh, let me go back a little bit, because I lost something.

This Nazi man took us to the German headquarters. In the German headquarters they kicked

us upstairs. They kept kicking us and shoving us upstairs, and the Nazi officer asked this man, "What did they do?" And he said, "They were trying to escape." So he slapped me in the face a couple of times, hit the other guy in the stomach, and they roughed us up.

And then they assigned another man that was wearing grenades and bayonet on his rifle, and he was the one that walked us to the Nazi headquarters. He told them to turn us over to the Hungarian authorities. Okay, so he went down somewhere, and that's the end of him. We never, ever heard of him.

I was taken upstairs, and I was sitting there and my mouth was bleeding. I remember, my lips were cracked and my eye was black, and I was really beaten and crying. And this tall red-headed man came in, and I remember him. And he says, "What are you here for?" I says, "I violated the curfew."

So he - oh, while I was there, another Jewish couple was brought in, and then they were telling him something. And I heard the man say, "Take him downstairs and finish him." So I know that was what was going on downstairs.

So this man was there and he told me - this red-headed man, I remember his face, tall

red-headed man, he says, "Now, listen to me." He says, "When I come back, I'm going to yell at you." He says, "Listen quick, go out the door and just say it was a mistake."

So he came back about two minutes later, and he says - he started to yell at me, "Jew boy," or something, "Get the broom, go downstairs to the book store, get a broom and start working." I says, "Yes."

And I went out and walked out the door, and I saluted them, "S-A-K-A-R," or whatever it was, Hungarian - I think it was called, freedom, or whatever. And then I ran home, all the way home. And the policeman that saw me picked up, he looked at me but didn't say anything.

I ran into the house bleeding and everybody was delighted. It took until 1960 sometime, when I was working - I was an engineer in Los Angeles, and I was talking to a Hungarian man and I was talking about this story. And he told me that that man, his name was Joe R-O-H-T, and he's a Jewish man working in the underground. He's the one that got me out. I found that out later on.

Q The one with the red hair?

A The one with the red hair. There were Jews working with the underground. I didn't know much about them.

Freed (S)
by Joe Rohrt

I heard it from time to time - they took out German brigades, German groups, and take them out to the forest. They were dressed as officers, or something. But there wasn't enough of it, you know. There were not too many young people around to do that.

But anyway, I escaped that one. From that point on - let's see, we were there - Okay, so we managed to get to that building somehow during the hours we can be out. The details escape me. But my mother and my two sisters and I and my cousins and all, somehow we were all there. And we marched into this protected house, and we were there awhile. It wasn't but a few weeks before the Germans did not respect that protection and they started to come in.

We were at the window up on the third or fourth floor, so we could look down the street. And we saw them coming and picking up people. So we tried to either hide or go down the basement or run to the next house or next street. And we just jockeyed around as much as we could.

I remember when mother - because I was small, my mother parted my hair in the middle and dressed me in short pants, you know, to make me look about twelve. Because they started to pick up people from fifteen and sixteen up.

in protected house

And everyday it changed. They were always picking up younger and younger. When they run out of the middle-aged ones, they picked up the younger ones. So they - one of those times they picked up my mother. And they took her to the D-A-N-U-E, I don't know if I am in sequence. I'm trying to say it in the order it happened.

They picked up my mother in one of those things where we were separated. The children we managed to hide, but my mother wasn't able to. And they took her out - and this I heard the details. I didn't see it happen, although I knew they were shooting people into the river.

My mother was standing there, as she was telling us later on, she was standing by the river all lined up and then there was a priest there who said, "In the name of Jesus, shoot." And they were shooting people into the river, which is documented. You know, it's not something that I -- I mean, it's been verified since then.

And my mother was standing there and all of a sudden she decided to run. She just didn't want to get shot in the river. She started to run and another man was running - a man was running too. And they shot at them, and they shot the man, but my mother

got away. She came back to us. So she told us what happened. It wasn't about a week later, a couple of days later, they took her to concentration camp. So that was the end of that. We haven't seen her - we didn't see her until after the war.

And there I was with my two sisters. I was the oldest, and I had about two cousins, three cousins. And then later on my other cousin's mother was taken away, the one whose husband was frozen to death in Russia. She was taken away. I acquired another couple of kids.

And when all of us decided, well, we couldn't stay there anymore, so we went to the orphanage. There was a Red Cross orphanage. As soon as we arrived there, a bomb hit the building. Because we were also bombed by the British, almost twice, three times a day by that time. So - to add to our miseries.

We arrived there, and a bomb hit. So we survived that one. We survived the bomb, of course we didn't get hurt. But - let's see.

We didn't get further than that. But we were sleeping all over the floor in this building that used to be a factory. It wasn't very good, and it wasn't a good place. And we were home-sick. Everybody was crying, you know. Too many kids there, and they were

*mother taken
to camp - not
named*

sleeping on stairs and everywhere. I mean, it was just loaded with people. And it wasn't much longer - I don't think we were there a week before the Germans started to take the older children.

Q I have a question. Who ran the orphanage?

A Red Cross, International Red Cross. The Germans took the older children. And then...

Q (Interposing) They took the older children out of the International Red Cross?

A Oh, yeah. They didn't respect that place. It was just temporary.

Q There was nothing the Red Cross officials could do to stop it?

A No. They were threatening them. They don't give up. I know there was one lady who was trying to protect us, and as soon as - they took her away too.

And they took the management, and pretty soon they took everybody. So, somebody came for us. There was a man that we knew, a Hungarian, a Jewish guy. He was somehow outside all the time. I think he was involved in the underground.

And he knew about us there, so he came for us. And he took us away. Okay, we went to look for this lady that we used to know, used to be a tenant of ours when my father was away and my mother rented

*Intl Red
Cross
orphanage*

the kitchen for somebody to sleep in so we can have a little more money. And this is a Gentile lady. So all of us went to her house.

Now, at this time, it's the understanding we really couldn't go out in the street, but we tried anyway. I was the oldest boy, and the other ones were kids. And we could get away with a little bit, you know, especially my sister didn't look too Jewish. And I don't, I guess I looked - it's hard to say. I don't know how Jewish you look. But it wasn't like every minute everybody was watching. There were times when you could run around.

You watch - look the street, and you can walk a few blocks. Anyway he took us someplace, he took us to this lady, and the lady didn't have a place for us. She was afraid, she was afraid. So we weren't - oh, gosh, stop for a second, okay?

Interview with MICHAEL BOKOR
Date: Place: San Francisco, CA
Interviewer: Irene Rotenberg
Transcriber: Katherine Wayne

(Begin Tape 1, Side B.)

A: During the -- during this period that I'm describing, we had a friend in the house where I used to live. I had a friend, his name was Irvin Eisner. Irving Eisner. He was -- he was Communist. His whole family were Communists, and they were -- little by little, they were all taken away and he was the only one that was left.

He and I had fantasies about escaping and doing all the things. He wanted to -- he was older than me and he somehow managed to survive. I don't know, I think he was a tough individual. Very strong and very strong-minded and he managed to -- he managed to survive all during this time and he wanted us to -- he helped me get documents and the blanks and all that, so we tried -- we tried to go out and live as Christians while -- and tried to take care of the kids, you know, at the same time. It was like a fantasy, but, you know, kids are like that. We fantasized about being able to save the world.

And so with him, we tried to -- we went to live -- okay, while the children were taking care of themselves -- my sister was a little older -- I was outside and this took place within weeks or something. Within two, three weeks, but I went with him to try to live as a gentile, so we reported into the -- the two of us -- oh, my

*hiding
as Christians*

sister went with me, too, older sister -- and we reported to the authorities and told them that we just came from the northern part of Hungary, and the Russians had occupied the area and that we were refugees and my parents were taken by the Russians and so we wanted to get coupons so we could buy food and get some kind of identification that was legitimate, so maybe we could get away with it.

So we did that and we reported and the lady looked down at me and she knew that I was Jewish, I'm positive she did, but she gave us the coupons, she gave us plenty of coupons to buy food, although we had no money to buy food. We still had to buy it, but she gave us the coupons.

We went to this -- Irving and I went to this place and we rented a room from a lady. We had somehow -- maybe gave her coupons or food or something. The details escape me. Maybe we had a little money. She was alone, she was afraid. Her children were gone. This is a gentile lady, and she rented us one room in her place, the two of us. We assured her we weren't Jewish, and we were there a few days when a bomb hit the building and I mean, really shattered all the windows, and this lady -- this is as true as -- it's the most saddest part of my whole part. I almost forgot to mention.

She took out what was a part of a Torah. She asked us to cut it up and make windows for her broken windows. This was winter, this was cold, you know. Late autumn in Hungary, and we debated about it and I made my

friend cut it and I put them in. He was Jewish, but he didn't -- he didn't care that much. I mean, maybe he did, but it didn't matter to him as much as it did to me. To me, this was a horrible thing to do.

So we cut up four or five pieces and we nailed them into the window to protect it. It didn't last long because the next bombing attack blew it out too.

And then while the bombing attacks were on, we were -- we were not -- we didn't go down in the basement to the shelter, because we were afraid we might be recognized because there were all those people around that knew us. It's not a big city, -- it's a big city, but some people may have recognized us. We were just worried, so we were sitting through it and shivering and we were frightened. No way I can deny it. We were extremely frightened.

This couldn't go on too long, so we just abandoned the thing and went back to the children and all together -- I may be out of sequence, but we went into the ghetto. The ghetto was already in existence. It was a walled section of the city, maybe a few blocks, and as we went in there, there were dead people all over the place. They were dead in the park, they were laying on the street, they were half buried, there were stores where the bodies were piled, naked bodies like so many logs of wood, all over the place. It was a pitiful place and there was nothing to eat. Really nothing to eat.

We could go for soup. There was some kind of

ghetto
tomato soup. I hated tomato soup all my life and at that time, we were really -- there was one kitchen where you could get tomato soup and off the record -- a peculiar part of me I found in the ghetto, I found out -- I had an aunt that lived in the ghetto, my father's sister, an older lady, and she was -- I don't know where she got it. I think she was selling food for gold.

Her apartment, when I went to visit her, the first thing we did as soon as we walked in to visit her, because she was very enterprising always, and she had food. She gave us bean soup and some meat but then, we saw dead people in her apartment. There was one lady crawling on the floor and then she died as she was moving around. This is the first time in my life I really saw so many dead people. We were almost callus to it, but I found out from her and through her and through later experience that if you had gold rings or coins, that was not taken away when you were taken into the ghetto -- by the way, when you were taken in, they -- if they had to cut off your finger, they would have cut it off. They took all gold from everybody, including if they could knock out gold teeth, any way, they took everything away from everybody.

But for gold, you could buy white bread, you could buy chicken, you could -- you could have anything -- I understand just about anything you wanted, as long as you had gold. Some people in there, maybe they were dealing with the outside. Some people were able to go out, maybe

the guards, I don't know, but somehow or another, you could have it.

Needless to say, we didn't have anything to eat. All of us were sitting in these basements and the rain was coming in and it was just really miserable, and many people were crying and they were ill and we were hungry, and this was going on for maybe three, four weeks and I think -- later, I'll think of some more details, but as I gloss over it, this was going on for a few weeks, after which one evening, the shooting started to be very loud and so we -- and the one German soldier came into the basement apologizing for the interruption. We knew that something must be happening, and we shot a bazooka out the window into I think -- I found out later it was a Russian tank, and the Russians came through the basement walls. All of a sudden, they walked in, you know, they knocked the wall down and we were supposed to be liberated.

The first thing they told us, that Jews were no good, they were speculators. They made us carry our hands up in the air, which we couldn't hardly lift, those of us that were still alive. They -- one of them gave me some food and the other one knocked it out of my mouth, and then we were liberated. I'm sure there's more to it, but -- let me think about it.

Would you like a cup of coffee now?

(Pause in tape.)

A: I want to go back a little bit. During the time

*liberation
by Russians*

that we were -- that Irving and -- well, during the time that we were alone, the children were alone, I heard that if we become Catholics -- remember, I was only 14, 15 -- if you become Catholics, which would have been unheard of any other time, we would maybe be able to survive, so consequently I found out that we had to go to a certain address to some church, rectory, whatever, and that there is a way to take a course for a couple of weeks and then you become Catholic and then you don't have to wear a yellow star. You can wear -- I don't think you had to wear anything. So the story went.

So we went there and I stood in line with my sister and we kept talking about what my mother would think. She was already gone at that time. What she would think and all these other things, and finally we got inside and the man, the priest wanted us to -- we had to kneel. I just turned around and left. I was nauseated. I couldn't have done it. Anyway, that was the end of my experience of converting. Never did anything about it. It just that we went there and I thought that was significant that we took that step and I think it was --

(A phone interruption in the interview.)

A: So that was the end of the Catholic episode. Let's continue now at the time that the -- when there we were surviving the ghetto. All right, as far as I was told and as far as we found out, the ghetto was mined, completely mined all around. You asked me a question during the

intermission about -- let's see, what you heard how safe we were in the ghetto. Aside from the fact that lots and lots of people were dead and buried, we were mined. I found out that the walls were mined and the Germans were to blow it up when the Russians come in, and the Russians came in I guess -- may have been a surprise to me; may not have been a surprise to the Germans -- but they were attacked and as the Russians came in through the basements, you know, through walls and I guess they didn't have time to blow us up and all of a sudden, the Germans disappeared, and for days after that, the war was seesawing back and forth and for some good reason, lucky reason for us, we were not -- we were not re-occupied by the Germans.

One of the first things we did after the Russians came in, we broke -- we went under -- we went into the -- our house where I was staying was the very last house in the ghetto and as we run through the basement wall, it was outside the ghetto, and we found, as I poked through the wall as the Russians went around to the next building -- which they were only there for about 10, 15 minutes or maybe an hour, I don't know -- we went to the next building and we found some food.

This is where the gentiles were living. Actually, there was food in a coffin, that they were hiding food and I grabbed the food back and we all gobbled and gobbled until I think days after that, we had dysentary, but incidentally, *grandmother* my grandmother, my mother's mother, was in the ghetto, too,

and we were all together. I forgot to mention that. At that time, she was in her sixties. Let's see, this was six, 25 -- maybe about 70 or something, 65 or 70 years old and she too had -- she was very sick and we all had dysentary from gobbling down some unknown foods, maybe.

There were chozzerai and, I don't know, all kinds of canned food. And she was sick. I ran into a basement of the house -- we went into a neighbor's house, a neighboring house where there used to be a liquor store or a wine store, and somehow a couple of us were able to struggle and take a little barrel of wine and since the water was contaminated, we were drinking wine and felt happy about it, I guess, but it did help the dysentary situation and we felt better afterwards.

249 I have to say this. I'm going to go to unless you want to go back to the war situation.

When the Russians came in, they were a great disappointment to us. I was not prejudiced against them. As a matter of fact, we were praying and hoping that they would come in. During the pre-war years when I was still in school, we were involved, the children in the Jewish school, and the war was going on, there was there was ^{anti-Semitism} great interest in it and we were dreaming about someday migrating to the state of Birobidzhan, which is in Russia; it was a fantasy, which was a Jewish state there. It was a fantasy that we thought would be great.

So we looked to the Russians as liberators. We

263 weren't quite aware of all the ramifications of the Russian system and how they -- what they felt about Jews and some of the first words I mentioned were *Russian phrases* and we figured out that that meant, you know, "You're no good," and "You're speculators," and we had to walk around with our hands up and after they left, we ventured out to the streets and of course everybody was looting and greeting us and I managed to steal a telephone, which was for no purpose, but it fascinated me, and other people were looting other things, and we were all looting, and some of the looting that my sister did became handy, because later on, we were able to exchange it for food. Food was very scarce.

Now, the whole time after the Russians came in was really very difficult for us, because the Russians continued to pick up men that -- they treated Hungary of course as an enemy country, but the difficulty was that they did not discriminate between Jews and gentiles. It didn't make any difference who you were, every able-bodied man was supposedly taken to -- was a prisoner of war and we were picked up many times. I must have escaped from Russian capturing probably four or five times. We tried to take some clothing and everything we could steal and borrow and whatever we kids had, since the parents were still gone.

We took these things to little towers around the city and tried to exchange them for food, and as we were traveling -- for instance, one time I was traveling on the top of a flatcar, the train, on my way back after I received

*escaping
captives by
Russians*

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some sausages and maybe a or something in a bag and some flowers and we were traveling back to the city and Russian soldiers came up, took the food away and kicked us off a running train. It didn't matter to him that I was Jewish, it didn't matter anything. I told him I was sick and nothing mattered. They kicked us out.

So it was a great disappointment to us Jews that the Russians were not any -- really didn't treat us any better than -- at least not -- let me clarify, okay, because I'm going to go on with the conversation; I'm going to go into different aspects of Russian occupation.

But this was the Second Ukrainian Army, and as I found out later on, the Ukrainians are just slightly more antisemitic than Hungarians, so we had the bad luck of being occupied by the Second Ukrainian Army, who hated Jews and they didn't have many Jewish officers either. They were mostly kids from Catholic or anti-semitic background.

And so later on, as the Russian occupation went on and I was captured several times for many different things and kept running away and being questioned and not -- I can't say that. They never mistreated us. It's just that they just took many of us prisoners and of course, I was still very young and they couldn't take me as a prisoner, but they did catch me as a speculator or as a blackmarketer, which was very -- all we were trying to do is get some basic foods. We weren't selling anything.

As time went on, I found out that there was an

organization in Budapest who was taking Jewish children into the country to build them up and feed them.

I didn't know much about it, but things started to stabilize and we had some other friends and relatives that were taking care of us a little bit. My sister and I allowed ourselves to go to listen to what they had to say, what this Jewish organization had to say. We wound up different places, but I can only speak for myself. I wound up in a town called *Bekescsaba*, which is southern part of Hungary.

We were taken to a place which was a beautiful building, a large building. There were boys and girls. We were all about -- this is 1945, so about 16 years old, 16, 16 and a half, and we started to be -- we were introduced to the Zionist movement; frankly, against our will. I mean, we had no idea this had anything to do with Zionism or anything like that. Just like I said, we went to eat, we went to live well and to build ourselves up, because we were very undernourished and frightened and didn't trust anybody and it was difficult times for children.

I had the most wonderful time in my whole life since then and before then during this four, five months we stayed in this place. We were singing Hebrew songs, we learned the language, we --

Q: I WANT TO ASK A QUESTION. I WANT TO ASK WHO WAS RUNNING THIS --

A: *Hashomer* ~~Zair~~
Hatzair

*Hashomer
Hetzair
341*

Q: SO THEY CAME FROM PALESTINE?

A: That's right. This was a Jewish agency from Palestine. We didn't know it at that time, but the leaders of the group were Israelis, Palestinians of Hungarian descent, and we were learning Hebrew songs and we were living together, boys and girls. Of course, there was no hanky-panky, if you will. This was just children and we had our own newspaper, and that's the significant part it.

Aside from the fact I was introduced to Zionism which didn't turn me on terribly much, but we had a wonderful time and really liberated, free, happy. Next door to us was a building which was a Russian headquarters and they had some Jewish officers there and they were the kindest, friendliest type of people that spoke Yiddish and although we didn't speak Yiddish, we still learned a lot from them and they came over and helped us.

This wasn't an entirely Jewish brigade. It's just that they had several officers who were very friendly who did give us some food and so we had an overall great time. It wasn't until about May or June '45, my father surprised me. He came to find us. I was up there and he came up and we were very delighted to see him and he told me that my mother is found and that she'll be home.

It was maybe May or something, so they were both -- we all got together. The only thing, sad part of it was, was that after I saw them, I was so imbued is the word with this -- with this *Hushome* *Hatzor* ~~Zaire~~ propaganda, that I

*father returned
mother alive*

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didn't want to go back home with my parents, because they told us that our parents were bourgeois and they were no good. Their life is not the one we want to continue, but we want to become ~~the bourgeoisie~~, go to Israel and toil, work in the fields and do all those nice things, and I was -- I hurt my father very terribly, because I was happy to see him, but I didn't want to go home with him. And he made me go home, to our greatest delight. I mean, later on, it turned out it was the best thing to do.

So we went -- we were all together now and my father -- okay, at this point, I want to go back just for a few minutes to previous times.

In 1938, my uncles, two uncles, my father's two brothers, came to America from Hungary. That was before the war started. And so, my father took all the money he could and borrowed from his former boss and some friends, I don't know, and was able to bribe his way out of the Hungarian Army, got himself a certificate that he can leave the country.

We had the passport and we had the visa to go to the United States, to ^{settle} -- pardon me, with another sister that he had here and an uncle he had here since year ^{me} 11, I guess. 1900 something, early 1900's.

So we had all the papers and we were ready to leave. We were on the way. We were going to Lisbon, Portugal. First, we were going to go to Geneva. Genoa, Italy, and we had the tickets and the war broke out again.

Attempt
to
go
to
US
via
Lisbon
Genoa
Geneva

Then we were supposed to go to Lisbon, Portugal, and and my mother didn't like it, because she heard that they didn't have many Jews and the food wasn't kosher, so we dillydallied a little while until it was too late to go to -- until the borders were closed. So we couldn't go there.

As it turns out, I found out there were a lot of Jews stuck during the war in Lisbon and led a great life. Eventually came to America. But we weren't lucky, because this -- my mother's orthodoxy has not helped a lot throughout her life. It was difficult all along life, including today. I'm still -- I'm still a victim of orthodoxy. Shall I say this on the record? Fine.

Of the dogmas and the inhibitions and superstitions, but nevertheless, we didn't go there and it was too late. We tried to get out through Russia, to Vladivostok, and that sounded -- that fell through fortunately, as we found out later on. That fell through and so, we were stuck there during the war.

So when my father came ^{back} from concentration camp in Germany during -- in the Russian -- I mean in the American occupational zone, he either felt or knew or found out that it might be a good idea -- they were forming displaced persons camps for refugees in Germany, so as soon as he came back, why, he started -- ^{his} the wheels were turning, he started to think about what to do. He couldn't settle down, he couldn't get a job. They were -- Russian communists had inspectors at every house there watching what you do, what

*Tried to get
out via
Vladivostok*

you eat, how much money you have and it was very difficult and they tried -- this is already past the time when they were capturing the men, but the communists were interfering with our daily lives and he couldn't see -- all he had in his mind about going away.

So later that year, sometime -- well, it was in December, in 1945, all of a sudden out of clear blue -- actually, I was in the movies and my father came for me and the whole family escaped the country. We went -- how did we escape?

Apparently, we were -- he made contact with a Zionist organization, the Palestinian Jews, and were able -- they were trying to take the live Jews out of Hungary, those that wanted to go and I guess we were supposed to go to Palestine, but we met at a certain place and we had to stay mum, we couldn't speak. We were not allowed to speak Hungarian. We were marching to the railroad station, into the railroad car. That was my mother, my father and two sisters and I. We marched into the railroad -- back off, I made a mistake.

escape

My father and my sister and I. My mother and my other sister were to be left behind, because we weren't sure where we were going to go and as I found out later, my mother was expecting. I didn't know that then.

So we left and we escaped through -- we escaped from Hungary by the Zionist troops bribing the Russian soldiers at the border and we were -- we went to Vienna,

where we stayed for about a week in the palace, which was very fascinating, very exciting. From Vienna, we went to Salzburg.

At the border, German border, we were taken across the border by -- they gave us some false names and then they called the roster and everybody raised their hands whatever name they heard and next thing you know, we were across the border to Germany, when we went by train to a camp where we stayed, which was freezing cold -- where it was freezing cold there and we couldn't -- we stayed there for about a month and then my father found another place in town called Bamberg in Bavaria, where they had a lot of Hungarian Jews, and we went there and as soon as we arrived in camp, my father settled us down in the -- they were stables that were partitioned by something like rubberized paper. Everybody had a cubicle with a gigantic stable and this was our new home for over -- for about two years.

My father turned around and went back to Hungary to bring my mother and sister out. He is a very courageous man, he really was. He went through Czechoslovakia, actually went back to the communist zone, and my mother came out. It was much more difficult. She had to walk through the water, some kind of a river, and she had a miscarriage.

She was in the hospital in Vienna for maybe two months. She was already maybe 40 years old then, you know, and she went to -- she was sick and she had to stay in

DP camp
Bamberg

Vienna for I believe -- we were again without family, three children, living alone in the foreign country in a camp among strange people, because some of the people at camp were real strange. They had people that weren't married living together and there were people that were fighting all the time. You could hear every word everybody was saying and they had kids ^{and adults} and ~~everyone else~~, everybody in this gigantic place.

(There was a telephone interruption.)

Q: YOU WERE IN THAT DP CAMP A COUPLE OF YEARS.

A: Yeah, yeah. You could hear everybody talk and it was really very difficult for children. I was at a difficult stage myself and there were -- it was a very difficult time for children anyway, to make a long story short.

About three or four weeks later, after we hadn't heard from them, my mother and father and sister popped in and we were then -- we were living happily ever after. I was working in the DP camp and my father was a driver, my mother was worrying about her ^{Kashut} and I was working in the office.

By that time, I learned some English. I was very diligent, and so I worked for a commandant of the camp in the office, doing some census work, I guess.

Things started to look a little better. We were planning on coming to the United States. We spent about 20 months in the DP camp, but as it turned out again,

the tragedy -- again, life didn't go quite so smoothly, because the Hungarian quota was -- even though we were able to register to come to America, they didn't really do very much about our previous visa. We thought they might renew it, since we had a visa before the war, and it didn't go so easily, so again, we were separated.

My mother was born in an area that at that particular time, the quota system was established. It was Czechoslovakia, so ^{since} we were all minors, we were able to register and get a visa under the Czechoslovakian quota, and so pretty soon, that was about 20 months later, we were called upon, called up and said finally we can go to America, and my father couldn't come because he was definitely born in Hungary.

At that time, there was no Hungarian quota, so again, the family broke up. We left Germany to go to the United States and we arrived in New York and the relatives were very cold and we had all our hopes that as a woman with three children and again pregnant, arrived in the United States, maybe somebody will help us.

Well, the Jewish agency did give us some help. They helped us find a place, a rat-infested Lower East Side of New York, and so they gave us some very minor help, but I remember my mother and I were struggling. I had some training in handbag-making during all this wartimes. I did some apprenticeship part time, so we were making purses at night, and my mother was a seamstress. We worked all day

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and my sister was working all day.

(End Tape 1, Side B.)