INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE REVESZ

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INT: This is an interview with a survivor. It's January 29, 1997. Mr. George Revesz. And if you could just tell me where you were born, and your age, please.

GEORGE REVESZ: I was born 73 years ago in Budapest, Hungary.

INT: And you're married?

GEORGE: I was married. This is my second marriage. The first marriage, my wife died, after 41 years of marriage. Five years ago. No, seven years ago by now. And I married two years later to my current wife. And between us we have six children. Named Julie Feldman, who is a counselor in the school system.

INT: Okay. How old is she?

GEORGE: 1949. That makes her 48.

INT: Okay, and...?

GEORGE: And then we have Barbara Murphy, who is an insurance administrator, currently living in San Jose.

INT: Oh, okay. That's far away. And what about children? Do they have children?

GEORGE: Oh, everybody has children!

INT: Everybody has children. Okay, well, let's start with Julie.

GEORGE: Julie has two children, known as Peter Joshua, and Nicholas Revesz Feldman.

INT: And how old are they?

GEORGE: They are 21 and 19. And then we have got Aaron Gabriel Murphy, age six. And then we have got a second set of children.

INT: Okay. Well, did we talk about how old Barbara was? Did we mention that?

GEORGE: Barbara is 46.

INT: Okay. And what do their husbands do? What does Julie's husband do?

GEORGE: Ira Feldman is owner of a supermarket, a kosher supermarket, which supplies us all in food. And Don Murphy is an engineer.

And then we have the second set of children, who are Vera's contribution to happiness. They consist of Danny Friedman, who is a high school teacher in Baltimore, married with four children, named...you want the names?

INT: That's okay.

GEORGE: Bracha, Adina, Tsvi, and Moshe. And then we have got Joseph Friedman, Rabbi Joseph Friedman, who is also married and they have five boys. Their names are Tsvi, Avi, Yonah, Eli, and Zev.

INT: Boy, you do that very well! (laughs)

GEORGE: I have seen all of these kids being born, including my own children. I didn't mention that thing. Because Vera and I were married to people who were first cousins. And therefore we have known each other most of our life. So I mean, I was present at their children's birth, wedding, and everything, and she was present at mine. So this has been more of a merger than a marriage.

INT: That's interesting. We'll get to that. (phone interruption)

GEORGE: And then we have got Sharon Turner Friedman, who is happy owner of a husband, four children, named Aydan, Akiva, Maytal, and Zachy. And then we have got Yehuda, who hasn't gotten around to find somebody. And that makes six, with sixteen grandchildren.

INT: Wow. That's wonderful.

GEORGE: And this is a very large organization here.

INT: Yeah! (laughs) So where was Vera born?

GEORGE: Vera was born in Bratislava.

INT: Bratislava. Okay. And we didn't ask what you do for a living. What's your profession?

GEORGE: I am professor of radiology.

INT: Are you still teaching?

GEORGE: Of course I'm still teaching.

INT: And how would you describe your socio-economic status?

GEORGE: I am not on welfare, mostly because welfare has been cut. I don't know how to describe it.

INT: Middle class?

GEORGE: Everybody calls it middle class.

INT: Okay. Comfortable? Or a struggle?

GEORGE: I'm very comfortable, thank you very much. Other people will consider my income and assets as dire penury, and some people are convinced that I am a millionaire, which depends on the definition.

INT: Okay. But you're comfortable, you would say?

GEORGE: Well...I'm not hurting.

INT: Okay. And how would you describe your religious affiliation?

GEORGE: I am an Orthodox atheist.

INT: Could we talk about that?

GEORGE: Well, yes. I'm a member of an Orthodox congregation, of which at various stages I was vice-president, member of the board of directors, and various other chairmen of various committees. So I am, I guess, active in it.

INT: That's the Orthodox part?

GEORGE: That's the Orthodox part.

INT: Okay. Let's talk about the atheist part.

GEORGE: Well, actually, it is a grandiose statement. I have to tell you that one of the serious problems you will find is that you are facing a Hungarian. The problem with Hungarians is that they are rather theatrical, and their statements are not to be trusted. Actually, I have come from a family which didn't believe in anything much until we were pushed, at which point my father, a life-long agnostic, decided we will show them, and let us make sure that Hitler will not have his way. And lo and behold, I became Orthodox.

INT: But you weren't born that way. That's not how you were raised in the beginning.

GEORGE: I wasn't born that way, I wasn't raised that way. I became that for the simple reason, because if you ever do, and I once did a little study on the subject. At the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, there were 8,000,000 Jews in this world, most of them outside of Palestine, or whatever it was called at that stage. And if you allow something like three children per woman, which is probably an underestimated statement, and if you subtract from it all the people who were killed by war, pestilence, the Inquisition, the Byzantine persecutions, and Hitler, if you subtract all of these, you should have 150,000,000 Jews today. The fact that there are a tenth of that is our own doing. Because we have abandoned it. And nowhere is it clearer than in this country. There are probably within a few generations, the original two million Jews in this country will be down to probably less than a quarter million. And therefore, whether you believe in the taryag mitzvot, and following every one of them, or whether you believe in davening three times a day or not, if you want to thwart Hitler's wish, you'd better make sure that your children know where they belong.

I'm actually a classical case in point, because Barbara in college met this young guy called Murphy, a well-known Jewish name. And when things got very serious, she broke it off, saying that this was not leading to anything. And at this point Don disappeared and came back two years later, having on his own fought his way through Judaism, and got converted with the Vaad HaRabbonim in San Francisco, a proper, kosher conversion. And thereby I am probably the only man I can think of with a grandson named Murphy who now goes to a Jewish day school.

INT: That's amazing!

GEORGE: I also have Sharon, who married, I don't know if you ever met Weldon. They are regularly here. Weldon is...

INT: Oh, I've seen him, yeah. I know who Sharon is.

GEORGE: He is a graduate of the law school. He is vice-president of a major corporation at the age of 35. He's a tennis champion, a talmud chacham, and he is Black.

INT: Those children are gorgeous.

GEORGE: Oh, yes.

INT: They are just gorgeous.

GEORGE: So all in all, this is a classical example.

INT: It's an interesting family.

GEORGE: This is a classical example of what you can do if you in effect, now that I'm old and decrepit, I can see kind of, myself vindicated. Having met, I mean, my circle of friends -- ever diminishing by now -- all of whom were kind of on the liberal/Reform side of the spectrum, all of them have children intermarried, not Jewish anymore. And they complain with tears in their eyes that they won't have grandchildren who are Jewish.

INT: So what do you attribute the fact that your children...that **didn't** happen to your children?

GEORGE: Well, we raised them in a proper way, what I considered. Under those circumstances I **cannot** but become an Orthodox if I don't want to play a life of lie, right? If I tell them that you are not supposed to do that on a Shabbas, I cannot do it myself for a Shabbas, and therefore whether I really believe in it or not is beside the point. The point is that we live an Orthodox life. And we do maintain a kosher house, and a proper household, and my children learned it from day zero.

INT: Well, where does G-d come into it for you at this point?

GEORGE: Come again?

INT: Where does G-d come into it for you at this point?

GEORGE: There are certain things you cannot prove. I am, I have scientific training, which has got a very strong bias -- as my wife would say, "warped my mind"-- insofar as you can have things which you can prove, in which case you are obligated to do so. And there are things which you cannot prove, in which case it's futile to speculate about it. The question has never been raised in my mind, because I know that it is unprovable, so why am I going to think about it? Besides, does it matter, if you do what you are supposed to do? I always felt that believing in G-d and doing these things so that He can reward you is a little bit childish. That you do it for the reward's sake. It occurs to me that I am doing these things without expecting a reward, because I don't know about that. Nor does it matter.

INT: So then why do the practice? For Jewish continuity?

GEORGE: You cannot be an abstract Jew. You cannot say, "I'm in theory a Jew, but of course, I don't go to service, I don't light candles, I don't keep kosher, but I am a Jew." What kind of Jew is that? A Jew has to do certain things, and everybody has his own Shulchan Aruch, and I'm not sure how many of the taryag mitzvot I **do** follow, but all in all, we...

INT: Enough, to...

GEORGE: We have established what I consider a delightful family life, and a delightful life among not only my children, but their married appendages. And it's particularly interesting, given the fact that they are two different families welded together.

INT: Yeah. We're going to get into that more, I think, a little later on. But let me ask you a few more demographics before we go on.

GEORGE: So this is all preliminary.

INT: This is preliminary, right. Could you tell me your education level, and where you went to school?

GEORGE: I have a Ph.D.

INT: In?

GEORGE: In, I don't know in what. I created my own Ph.D., and I think the University of Pennsylvania never really acknowledged that they gave me a Ph.D. for no set curriculum of their own. It is really...a degree in...(?) recognition, which is a mixture of computers, neurology, electronics, and optics. And if you're interested, I can present you with my appropriate works on the subject.

INT: But you teach radiology?

GEORGE: Yes. Well, that was again one of those accidental things. You see, I bumped into a guy at a cocktail party. I said, "What are you doing?" And he said, "I'm really doing research in optical pattern recognition." And I said, "That's what I am doing." And I said, "How are you doing it?" He said, "I'm a radiologist." I said, "What do you mean by 'optical pattern recognition?'" And he said, "Do you know of any discipline which is more in detecting patterns and recognizing them by optical means?" And that was 25 years ago. And he said, "Why don't you join us?" So I was ever since on the faculty. Well, I have some vision problems, so I can no longer read films. But I teach, I am currently teaching six parallel courses.

INT: So you're pretty busy.

GEORGE: Yeah. I also happen to be a consultant, other than the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, I am also having my own consulting company.

INT: And your wife, she paints, you mentioned?

GEORGE: My wife used to spend, well, my first wife was a chemist, and was the original pioneer in chemical information system, which became a big business. And it was one of those sad things that it was really in the process of taking off at the time that she died. So Vera is about as non-scientific as you can get. She spent most of her adult life working in old age homes, where she ended up as a director of an old age home in New York, which was a dreadful experience for her, because if you do it, as most people do it, as a job, you have no interest in it. But she was more than that, and she said, "Today, I'll have a morning, I'll come to work, and find that old Mrs. So and So died the night before, because..."

INT: A little depressing.

GEORGE: It was more than she could handle. So she is now retired and she in between was doing all this painting.

INT: And her education level?

GEORGE: Well, she has a college degree in fine arts, I think. One of those useless fields, as I keep on telling her.

INT: All right, so I'd like to, if it's okay with you, go back to the beginning. And if you could tell me about the town that you grew up in, it was a big city, and who was in your family, and describe the people in your family.

GEORGE: Well, I was born in an environment which was destroyed, of course. And it's an interesting thing, because it's very difficult even to explain it. You see, we were, I guess you'd call it "middle class," which means something totally different from what you now consider middle class. We were a middle class family, who, if you please, didn't have central heating, didn't have electrical appliances, didn't even have an electrical refrigerator. Certainly didn't have a car. However, we had a maid, a cook, and a

governess. The governess's job was to look after one single person, and that was me. And we lived in the center of the city.

INT: You had no brothers or sisters?

GEORGE: No. I don't even have first cousins.

INT: Your parents were only children?

GEORGE: No, most of them...

INT: They were all killed?

GEORGE: My uncles and aunts are killed. Anyway, we lived all in this one big house in the center of the city, which housed our apartment, two of my uncles and their families in an apartment. It also housed, my mother and my aunt were running a major dressmaking outfit. It had 100 employees, a big place, also in the same house. My uncle had his law practice there, and my other uncle had his x-ray equipment and radiological practice there.

INT: Oh, really? That's interesting. Did you get it from him, do you think, the radiology?

GEORGE: I don't think so. Then of course, I had Grandmother, who was, of course, the ruler of it all.

INT: On whose side? Your mother's mother?

GEORGE: My mother's side, yeah.

INT: What did your father do for a living?

GEORGE: My father was a C.P.A. And was the controller of the bank.

INT: Could you tell me their names and where they were born?

GEORGE: Yes. My father was called Nicholas, after whom my grandson is named, and my mother was called Elizabeth. But so far I don't have any female grandchildren.

INT: Out of all those kids, there's no...

GEORGE: Oh, no, but they are not my...

INT: Okay, right. Not on your side.

GEORGE: On my side, there are only boys.

INT: Right, right. And where were they born, your parents?

GEORGE: They were all born in Hungary.

INT: Okay.

GEORGE: We have, we are a very old family. I have just finished a second volume of our family history, which goes back to the seventeenth century. And actually I have some evidence before that thing. It is basically written for my grandchildren, and it really started out in order to describe our life, you had to give a background. I mean these are long-gone societies. So I had to really extend that book, that now essentially involves central European Jewry history from Roman times to yesterday afternoon. And my grandchildren, of course, have no interest whatsoever.

INT: They will.

GEORGE: But you know perfectly well that by the time they are going to be fifty years old they'd wish they **had** listened, right?

INT: Well, you'll have it in a book and they can read it.

GEORGE: Well, that's right.

INT: So, but without going all the way back to the seventeenth century, or Roman times, even...could you just describe what kind of life that was in Budapest?

GEORGE: Well, as I've said, imagine a life where you had no appliances, no automobile, but you had three maids, cooks, governesses. The point was that these people didn't have to be paid. These were peasant girls who came from the countryside where they lived in **indescribable squalor**. Twelve to a room, including a goat and a chicken. And if you offered them a room of their own, you didn't have to pay them. You gave them a pocket, some pocket money for going out and buying themselves an ice cream on a day off. But they were overjoyed. This was, by the way, all of Central Europe's social background at the time of my birth. There was a thin layer on top, consisting of the Church and their dignitaries, and the aristocracy, who owned almost all of the arable land -- and Hungary is a vast, fertile country. I mean, vast in terms of output. And then you had the **huge** peasantry, who lived in squalor, factory workers who didn't live much better, and in between was a thin layer of professionals and businessmen, and they were overwhelmingly Jewish. They could afford, therefore, the luxury of hiring any amount of servants. The point is, you didn't **have** to have electrical appliances. You had manual labor, you know. In the morning they got up at 6:00, they lit the fire in the tile oven in each room, right? What do you need central air conditioning for, right?

The reverse side of this metal was that these people saw the middle class living in what they considered undescribable luxury, which included annual vacations in foreign countries, and all that. And it was the basis on which the whole Jew-hating atmosphere was nurtured. Of course, they didn't need it. I mean, the Church has spent hundreds of years teaching the illiterate peasantry who the Christ-killers were, and who poisoned the wells. And the aristocracy who lived normally in Vienna or other places, were normally gambling or hunting, had their lands supervised by overseers who were mostly Jewish. Now Count So and So simply wrote a letter to Mr. Greenberg, telling him that he needs another 10,000 ducats immediately to pay his gambling debts, so the overseer went out

and raised the money. Guess who the peasants loathed? The overseer. Right? The count was so far away, they didn't know **who** he was. But he was the bloodsucker.

INT: So you see the anti-Semitism as coming from a resentment of the underclass towards the professionals?

GEORGE: Nurtured by the government, who had a perfectly good excuse why, if anything went wrong, that it was the Jews who did it; by the Church, who told everybody who crucified our Savior; and by the landowners, who had a perfectly good way of raising money by simply writing a letter to good old Shlomo and telling him to send some more money, and if he didn't, obviously he mismanaged the estate, right?

So there was one thing to be added. That until the 1930's, the Jews were hated, but they were equal citizens under the law. So you couldn't very well touch them. Hating is one thing; persecuting them was something else. That has changed. When under the impact of Nazism, the Hungarians jumped the gun; long before Hitler and Mussolini were known, we already had a Fascist government, who then passed every year another law: Jews were not allowed to hold land. Jews were not allowed to own factories. Jews were not allowed to have positions in the professions. They were allowed only 2% of all the students in universities. And they weren't even allowed to have small businesses, above, I think 50 employees. In spite of that thing, remarkably, the Jews owned land, the Jews were representing about 90% of the physicians and lawyers in the cities, and the Jews were all in the universities when they were young. The difference was the age-old technique of the Jews, which was bribery. Everybody was being bribed.

INT: Who was bribing whom?

GEORGE: The Jews were bribing anybody who had to be bribed.

INT: To keep their jobs?

GEORGE: Well, you see, there was a standard joke which says, you know, a haberdashery store, owned by Count So and So, manager, Joe Greenberg. Right? I mean, you paid Count So and So to let his name...

INT: Stay on the sign.

GEORGE: You paid him $1.00 a year to have his name up there, and $1,000 to keep the hell out of the business and not mess it up, right? Then you paid the government officials who supervised these things to make sure that he followed it all right. Then you paid the registration clerk at the universities so that you could register at the universities without registering at the universities. There were various little tricks there which you could do, which I did all. After all, I had two years of college until the Nazis really took over. This was the way of life. Nominally you were not supposed -- in my book I have gone back to somewhere in the 16th and 17th century in a small town which I happened to have record of a town council meetings, which has entrances like, "On the subject of the application of Samuel the Jew for exporting wine from the neighborhood. The application is hereby denied, and in fact the council decided unanimously that all Jews must leave by the end

of the week the town." And five years later, there is another application by somebody called "Itzhak the Jew" who is denied. Well, I thought they left five years ago. But of course, they didn't leave, they just bribed the whole town council, right? Every time these things came up, it meant that they didn't pay enough, and they raised the screws a little. So that's the way we have been living all this time.

INT: Since the 20's, or the 30's, or even before then.

GEORGE: As I said, I have documentation going back to about 1680, when the town council denying the permission of Itzhak the Jew to export lumber, or whatever he was trying to export. He was denied, but of course five years later, he's still there. So something happened in between. So this has been a way of life.

INT: How would you describe the religion in your household? The religious belief system?

GEORGE: There wasn't any. My first experiences was, I was maybe five years old, and I was told later on by my father with some grin on his face, that I was asked by my cousin, aged six, "What is your religion?" I said, "I don't have that sort of thing. I'm just a little kid."

INT: That was your answer? (laughs)

GEORGE: That was my answer. I was then taught. And this is of course the point. That in the 1930's, this was going on until the early 40's when the Nazis, when the German brand Nazis, felt that the Jews were really milked, but not exterminated in Hungary. And they felt that the Hungarians are not doing a good job, because you are not supposed to make money on them, you are supposed to send them into a gas chamber. So they sent in their troops, threw out the government, replaced them by a proper government -- proper from their point of view -- and started to do the thing seriously. It was always one of the great amazement, the bizarreness of the Germans. This is 1944 we are talking about. The whole world of theirs was collapsing. The Russians were at the Carpathian Mountains. The Allies have landed in Italy and in France, and were bombing the Germans. (End of tape 1, side 1)

INT: And all they could worry about...

GEORGE: All they could worry about is the Final Solution, i.e., the extermination of the Jews. Why? And they measured all the performances of every one of their satellite countries on how well they executed the will of the Reich, as far as the Jews were concerned. The fact that Hungary has exported to Germany almost all of its food didn't count for anything, as long as they didn't do a good job with the Jews. And it is, you know, is that **all** they had to worry about? If you realize that Hungary had at that point something like close to 200,000 Jews. And they used their precious rolling stock, and railroad, for deporting them. Is that all they could worry about?

INT: They were obsessed with it.

GEORGE: Well, this is...this is incredible, when you look at it from this point of view. That's **all** they could spend their...

INT: They're losing the war on all fronts.

GEORGE: They're losing the war and one would say that they should be digging trenches in the Carpathian Mountains to keep the Russians out. No. They use their material to build concentration camps. Figure. Anyway.

INT: Let me just ask you. Could you describe the people in your family? Describe your father for me if you can. What kind of person was he?

GEORGE: My father was...

INT: What was his name?

GEORGE: His name was Nicholas.

INT: Oh, that's right.

GEORGE: And he was...on the surface of it a very...simple, colorless person. "What can you expect of an accountant?" my mother used to say. She was the flamboyant in the family. And this rather simple, colorless person, just to give you an idea, in 1914 when he was a young bank clerk, and World War I broke out, he was, of course, exempt, because anybody in financial position, however lowly, was exempt from the draft. He felt it was unfair for his fellow young men to shirk it, and he volunteered. Which presented a bit of a problem. The Austrian army was as anti-Semitic as any army I have seen. And they didn't know what to do with the guy. Clearly he was no peasant boy, so he couldn't be put in the infantry. So they created for this kind of people a special rank, called an ensign, who was an officer who wasn't a gentleman. And so Ensign Revesz went off to war. This was a naive thing, if there was one. If I tell you that the tunes they played as they marched were written by Johann Strauss should give you an idea of what the...

And a proper officer of the Austro-Hungarian army had to be in full uniform when he led his troops into battle, which meant this stove pipe black hats with golden cockades in front of it, and a long infantry sword with tassels on it. It was very good, because every sharpshooter on the Serbian side knew exactly who the officers were. The result of which was that my father became regimental commander after three months, because he was the only officer left.

INT: They were all killed?

GEORGE: Yeah. Every one of them. They were all regular officers, and marched off to war, as required. My father, who was not a gentleman, simply had a foraging cap and a bayonet, mostly to open the cans with, and finally ended up as a regimental commander. As such he was, his regiment took Belgrade, and he was then promoted to Lieutenant. He was given a medal, and was given R and R discharge for three weeks. So he went home, and at the station was stopped by a regular officer, who said that he is not in proper

uniform befitting to an officer and a gentleman, for which he was court-martialed. So within one week he was promoted, be-medaled, and court-martialed.

INT: What happened?

GEORGE: Nothing. The army was then sent against the Russians, who at that time were at the verge of breaking through. And he was promoted again. He finally ended up as a captain.

INT: Even after the court martial.

GEORGE: They never got to it, because the administration, it somehow got lost. I mean, you know, the Russians were coming through the mountains and...

INT: They let him slide.

GEORGE: So I mean, he went up and he described one of his moments when he led the charge in the recapture of Lwow, or Lemberg. By the way, as far as I know, Bracha's parents came from there. And he never forgot, as he once told me, somewhat embarrassed, because he wasn't given for emotional things. He was an accountant. As he led the charge, in front of him somebody bayoneted a Russian soldier, and the guy dropped and yelled "Sh'ma Yisroel." Shortly thereafter my father was wounded, and invalided out of the army, and that was the end of his career.

Except that it saved my life. Because in 1944, when everybody was drafted, including the Jews. Of course, Jews were not being given weapons. Jews were used in forced labor battalions. What that entailed is that you lined them up along the edge of a field and marched them across the field, and wherever there was a mine, one Jew boy got killed, but the mine was de-activated. Very few of my friends survived out of that thing.

Anyway, when I was drafted, apparently the document was misread, and his name occurred instead of mine. So he put on his captain's uniform, marched in, told the lieutenant who was looking at the draft board ledger to stand to attention and stop being an idiot. And what the hell does he think? My application was never processed. Which means I was not allowed to clean the minefields.

INT: And that saved your life.

GEORGE: That saved my life.

INT: You said he was colorless, that's how you started out.

GEORGE: He was colorless in the sense that all his virtues -- and they were magnificent -- were only known to his very closest friends and closest family members.

INT: And what were they?

GEORGE: He was a shining example of honesty. I mean, the kind of guy who volunteers into a war, because he thinks that it's unfair that he be exempt from it, even though it was not his war, even though it was run by a bunch of anti-Semitish guys, he still felt it was not his job.

In 1950, when he went back to Hungary from camp, and he made a magnificent career in two years, and became eventually the controller of the entire building industry of the country, which was of course all nationalized, so it was this huge organization. And he was basically the controller, and his large staff was asked to check the accounting of all these millions of small contractors, all over the country. And one day a friend, one of his underlings came to him and reported to him that he just audited the books of somebody, and there were dreadful discrepancies, but he doesn't know what to do with it, because the guy who ran the book was a local Party secretary. This is now Communism. So my father says, "Prepare your report," and signed it. And two weeks later, there was a knock on the door, and there were two guys with the obligatory trench coats. "Comrade Revesz, come with us." And he was prosecuted for anti-revolutionary, anti-communist activities. I was by that time living in the West, and of course, that was the main thing. Well, what do you expect with a man whose only son is now a capitalist? And he became a non-person. Which is a lucky thing; he could have been sent to jail. But he wasn't. So he just lost his pension, his income, his apartment, you name it. And he said you walk down the street, and your friends crossed the street, because they don't want to be seen talking to you, because it's a dangerous thing.

Until one day when a guy walked by him and said, "Stop at the next store and don't say anything," and he walked up to him later. He said, "There's a vacancy for a simple bookkeeper somewhere in a factory. And maybe you ought to apply. But don't you tell what you know. Simply say that you can have." So he reported, and he got a very lowly clerical job, which was far better than he had before. And he did it for about six months, until the end of (?) came around, and when he added up the things, he went to his supervisor and said, "There's something wrong about this." And he said, "Don't be silly. It's 9:00 at night. You're not going to worry about that thing." He said, "Well, you want to sign it, you are welcome to it, but there is something wrong about it."

So two days later, there's a knock at the door at 6:00, and there were the obligatory two guys in trench coats. "Comrade Revesz, come with us." And he was taken from this place, and there was a lot of people present, and someone in the back of the room, somebody said, "Oh, that's how they discovered it. I know that guy." It turns out that he discovered a major swindle. And he was immediately reinstated to his old job, was given his apartment back and everything else. Six weeks later the Hungarian Revolution broke out, and he quit. He ran. He said, he's not going to go through this roller coaster ride again.

INT: So a man of principle, really.

GEORGE: You see, every proper bureaucrat would let the guy hang. But he signed it himself, thereby putting his life...but that was perfectly normal for him. So that was my father.

INT: So he was quietly...

GEORGE: He was a very quiet, with an incredible sense of humor. He used to tell me, he lived to a ripe old age of 85. And he lived in New York in the last few years of his life, and he used to tell me these stories, including the fact that when he was in college, he was a member of a student club, which one day voted unanimously that there was no G-d. And he said, "And now I am father and grandfather of some Orthodoxes. Things have changed a little bit." And found it very funny.

INT: It's ironic.

GEORGE: Well, he saw a huge joke behind all of it, which he had.

INT: So he had a sense of humor.

GEORGE: He had an incredible sense of humor. He was also stone deaf. Which was remarkable. Because you see, he lived by that time with his wife and his sister-in-law, who were very strong-willed people, and he was the only male living in New York, Manhattan. And everybody knew that he was stone deaf. And if you told him, "Will you take out the garbage?" he said, "Huh?" But once a month I took him to the opera.

INT: Perfect hearing. (laughs)

GEORGE: It was much easier, rather than fight, to pretend that you are alas...

INT: That was his coping mechanism.

GEORGE: Severely handicapped.

INT: (laughs) Okay. And how would you describe your mother?

GEORGE: My mother was the emotional, temperamental. She was the one who created with my aunt out of nothing a large enterprise, of which I was supposed to be the heir apparent.

INT: The dressmaking business.

GEORGE: The dressmaking business. I mean, this was a place where, about twice a year Mother went to Paris to attend the fashion shows, and it was a large and very...it was designed only for the very upper class. It was all custom.

INT: And she started it herself, or with a sister?

GEORGE: Yeah. With a sister. And...

INT: That's unusual, wasn't it, for woman, a woman to...

GEORGE: It was not only unusual, but she did a magnificent job at it. Both of them did. I think my aunt was the more creative one. But they both did, thank you, very well. She

spoke about six or seven languages fluently. And read all of them. And she was also, had a serious heart condition. And when my father decided during the Revolution that he was going to flee Hungary, the doctor said, "Don't take your wife. She won't survive the trip." This was '57. She died in the late seventies. So his forecast was somewhat premature. But actually she survived on sheer willpower, because she wanted to see her grandchildren, whom she had never seen.

INT: How would you describe their marriage?

GEORGE: I figure they were very happy. How am I to tell you? See, I was eighteen years old when I left them, and I never really lived with them after that.

INT: But you lived with them up until you were eighteen, so you could see if they were....

GEORGE: Well, it was really a typical professional marriage, insofar as nobody was ever at home.

INT: She was busy in the business.

GEORGE: Yeah. And as far as I know, they were perfectly happy.

INT: What about affection between them? Did you ever see that expressed?

GEORGE: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They were very happy.

INT: Do you know why there were no siblings? Was there any reason?

GEORGE: Come again?

INT: Any reason for why there were no siblings, and you were the only child?

GEORGE: Yeah, my mother had a heart condition. And she had actually had another, there was another child, who was stillborn.

INT: After you?

GEORGE: Before. And after which the doctor said that she cannot have any more children. Which given the predictions of the medical profession in her case may not have been true. But there it is.

INT: Okay. But you had cousins. Did you have close extended family, people that you spent a lot of time with?

GEORGE: The relationship was all due to the center of the family, who was my uncle and my aunt.

INT: On whose side?

GEORGE: That's my mother's sister. So they were childless, and therefore they, having craved children, had simply had -- they were very wealthy. My uncle was a highly respected and very well-to-do lawyer. I'll have to tell about him later, because he was probably the most politically the most important person in our family. And they had, well, we had together this country estate, and all the children were there from everywhere. So I had sixteen million second cousins, all of whom I spent all of my summers together. And we....

INT: It was like the family estate, so everybody...

GEORGE: And these were, of course, fairly, the word cousin is a loose terminology. We were related, right? And of course this is, we are talking of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its aftermath, so half of them lived in Vienna. Some of them lived in Slovakia, and all of them came in the summer, so I spoke fairly fluently seven languages at a very early age, which didn't hurt.

INT: Could you just tell me how many siblings your father had, and how many your mother had?

GEORGE: My father had...four. All of whom disappeared somewhere during the war. My mother had only one, my aunt.

INT: The sister. Okay. And where was this country estate?

GEORGE: That was in the, well at that time it was out in the sticks. Today it's suburban Budapest, and there is no doubt a super-highway linking it to a traffic jam. At that time you had to take the train. It was out in nowhere. And it was a lovely place. Later on they bought another house up in the hills of Buda. Budapest consists of two halves, Buda and Pest. Buda is a hillside, which was a magnificent place overlooking the entire city. And I could see the fireworks. Well, there were two kinds of fireworks. On all the national holidays there was, of course, fireworks being done. And later on the bombings.

INT: It was pretty intense.

GEORGE: It was one of the most magnificent sights, standing on the balcony of your house, overlooking this, Budapest is a million and a half city. And watch it go up in flames. A magnificent sight. And I enjoyed **every** moment of it.

INT: Could we talk a little bit about what kind of person you were growing up? How would you describe yourself as a child?

GEORGE: I was an only child. And therefore I developed my own world. I have built my own toys, I have designed my own games. And this was not a small matter. I mean, I had a huge room of my own, which had like two ping-pong tables in it, on which there were little cities being built by me. Made up of cardboard and glued together. And this was a permanent exhibit.

INT: An ongoing exhibit.

GEORGE: An ongoing exhibit. And I had the key, and nobody was allowed to enter that. That was by the time I was about ten years old. But none of my friends were allowed to enter it, because they were crude slobs like all ten-year-old boys tend to be, and wouldn't handle it with delicacy.

INT: Were you lonely?

GEORGE: No, never.

INT: So that time alone building your city...

GEORGE: It was a real thrill. I'm still very happy when I'm on my own. I'm happy to say that Vera also realizes that she needs time for herself, so we have no problem, which may be a problem in some marriages.

INT: Right.

GEORGE: But...

INT: But with the two of you it works.

GEORGE: Well, it works fairly well. I mean, she goes away and does her painting, or whatever she is doing, and twice a week she goes down to the Fleisher School of Art, where she does her painting.

INT: But you're not building cities.

GEORGE: I'm not building cities. I'm now writing.

INT: You're writing books.

GEORGE: I'm writing a play at the moment.

INT: Oh, are you?

GEORGE: Oh yeah.

INT: Oh, that's wonderful. What's it about?

GEORGE: (Gets up to get it) According to Vera, it's trash. I think her statement is an overstatement.

INT: "The Silent Warrior. A Play in Three Acts." Wow.

GEORGE: And it's in verse, in case you're interested.

INT: Unbelievable.

GEORGE: It deals with a part of history which nobody knows about.

INT: Which is?

GEORGE: In the late fifteenth century, when the Hungarian king married an Italian princess, and sent one of his knights down to Italy to conduct her back home. Going through the Balkans wasn't any safer then than it is now. And it was something which was a major turning point in many Hungarians' lives, because it's the first time in the life where -- to paraphrase a statement, "How can you keep them on the banks of the Danube once they've seen gay Florence?"

INT: (laughs) Right.

GEORGE: So they suddenly discovered the whole world, which was a magnificent world of Renaissance Italy. And this is basically a story of a clash of a young Hungarian knight and a Florentine widow.

INT: It sounds very romantic. Or not?

GEORGE: Oh, I **am** a romantic. Even though the fact that I'm currently also writing a paper on "Magnetic Resonance Imaging."

INT: (laughs) Right. Okay. That's very interesting, that you can do both. You can do both those things. A Renaissance man.

GEORGE: You can do all of these things.

INT: But few people do.

GEORGE: They miss things. G-d, do they miss things!

INT: And you don't want to miss anything.

GEORGE: I have **very** little time left. And I'd better do it all. The reason I have little time left, is not because I don't intend to live till 95, but I may not be able to function. I am, I have had so far six surgeries on my eye.

INT: Oh, really? I didn't know.

GEORGE: I'm not doing terribly well. I mean, the fact that I can work at all, is...

INT: What about the other eye? Is the other eye okay?

GEORGE: It's gone.

INT: It's gone. I see.

GEORGE: So we have lots of things to do.

INT: So let me, do you have a few more minutes?

GEORGE: I'm at your disposal.

INT: Okay. I want to go back to this little kid in this great big room with the ping-pong tables. And what about friends? Did you have a lot of friends? Did you need friends?

GEORGE: I didn't need them. I had them anyway. I have maintained contact with those who survived for a long time, and it is very interesting. I had a second cousin who was a very close friend of mine. And he was, I always thought, the exact opposite of me, and then later he confessed that he thought I was the exact opposite of him, and we were both **fiercely** envious of each other. Because he was a very good-looking guy who made every girl swoon, and I used to walk down the street and watch him go down the street with at least two girls on his arm, and a tennis racket dangling. I went to the finals course of something or other. He considered the fact that I can do that studying as something enviable. I considered that he could play tennis and have nice-looking girls something enviable.

INT: So he was the jock and you were the scholar?

GEORGE: It turns out, of course, that the way things worked out, envy can cause certain accomplishments. Because after the war, he **did** get his Ph.D., and I **have** met good-looking girls who for some reason considered associating with me worth doing, for some unclear reason. So actually we all...

INT: You all made out okay in the end. (laughs)

GEORGE: We all made out okay. Except he had a heart attack. He died two years ago.

INT: So would you say that friends were important in your life growing up?

GEORGE: Everybody's friends are important to him. Anybody who doesn't admit to it is borderline psychopathic.

INT: But a lot of men don't admit to that.

GEORGE: Of course you need friends! Of course you have them, and if you don't have them, you are not normal. I'm not saying that you are non-functional, but you're missing a very important aspect of life.

INT: Do you have any special friend that you remember from that time?

GEORGE: I had many. I just described one. I had another one who was really the man I looked up [to]. At the age of eighteen, he had papers accepted in mathematical journals. And he didn't think -- I was a math major at the time. So was he. There was a world of difference between the two of us. And he said, "Well, you're not a bad mathematician. But don't try to **be** one, though." (interviewer laughs) And one of the embarrassing things was that when I went to college, and there was Professor So and So, who spent four tables deriving a theorem, which was manifest at the outside to be holding true. But after rigorous mathematical proofs, he finally proved that it was so, for something which was,

I was quite willing to accept it. So when he finished, I raised my hand and said, "Excuse me, sir, what can one do with this?" And there was this hush among the students. Half of them didn't understand the question, and the other half considered this outrageous. A statement like, "What good is a Bach cantata?" It's beautiful, **that's** what it is. So I sat down, and the guy said, "Come and see me after class in my office." And when I went to him, he said, "Tell me, do you ever think of changing majors and becoming an engineer? Now there you can make things that can be used." Well, I was an authoritarian person, and after the war, I indeed went over to engineering. And my very first -- that was in Zurich. And my very first class, which was in Mechanical Engineering 1, and the guy described in glowing detail things like gears and pulleys and things of great excitement, and he in particular described the peripheral stress of a gear, which I guess you're allowed to do if you don't want to strip your gears. And it was in a formula this long. And when he finished, I raised my hand. And I said, "Excuse me, can one derive that?" I said, "One is an experimental formula. Experimental nothing. You can probably go basic physical principle and derive it, can't one?" So the guy said, "Did you ever think of studying mathematics?" (interviewer laughs) So anyway, Nicky, my friend, was a real mathematician. He didn't survive.

INT: Could you talk a little bit about your schooling? What kind of a school did your parents send you to? Private school?

GEORGE: Of course private school. You didn't send a child to public schools.

INT: You didn't mingle with the masses?

GEORGE: No. The public schools were not acceptable. I mean, to get an idea of what middle Europe education looked like, first of all, it was compulsory up till sixth grade. After which it was free, but voluntary. Which gave the teachers an incredible weapon. When they said, "Joe, you're not doing your job. Send in your father tomorrow. Not your mother, you mother is too soft. Send in your father." So father, who had to take off a day from work, was of course suitable incensed about the whole idea, and when he said, "You know, he's not doing his job, and I think you ought to take him out and make him a shoemaker or something," there was a hell to pay at home, right? So the teachers had an incredible weapon in their hands. Incidentally, the result of which was, that you had a very good craftsman class as well, because bright kids who didn't want to go and study mathematics became shoemakers, tailors and carpenters, and had to serve an apprenticeship.

INT: Right.

GEORGE: And when you finished, you were a craftsman. Not like what we do today, where compulsory education demands that anybody who has neither the interest nor the aptitude to it, is dragged through and dragging down the class average to a point where it is useless and meaningless. You had 10% of the population graduating from high school, all of which were entered to college, because it was basically a college entry level examination. The result of which was that 10% of the population had a college degree. How many people have a college degree in this country? I don't mean had higher

education, because 50% of the population goes on to some higher education. But how many finish?

INT: I don't know.

GEORGE: 10%

INT: Really?

GEORGE: Yes. So we had exactly the same. (End of tape 1, side 2)

INT: So finish that thought.

GEORGE: The idea is that you have to be very motivated to finish your high school education. To get you an idea, the final graduation exam of high school is so severe that Freud, for instance, describes it in his "Psychopathology of Everyday Life," in the people whom he had as patients, which was the same background as mine-you know, middle class, central European. They had nightmares about their exam all their lives. I know I do. If I tell you that my exam, this is an eighteen-year-old kid, graduation of high school. There were six subjects, both written and oral. For instance, my physics exam consisted of the following question. Question number one: Given a hydrogen atom, by removing its electron from the K shell, to an I shell, it then relaxes and returns to a K shell. What is the emitted light color?

INT: You remember that?

GEORGE: Of course I remember that. I happen to teach it now. It's green, by the way.

INT: In case I wanted to know. (Laughs)

GEORGE: In case you wanted to know. Yes. And the other question was, that dealing with a rile of fifty centimeter barrel length, is two and a half...and given explosion velocity, exploding power, what is the exit velocity of the bullet? I ask you if any college kid would be able to answer that question.

INT: Right. So those were...

GEORGE: That's why you had nightmares all your life, you know? Including the question of, like history, which involved one question, was very simple. I'll never forget it. You can't. You relive them. "The year is 1686. Describe the economic, political and environmental conditions of Hungary at that year."

INT: Well, there's no consequence between European education and American education.

GEORGE: I also had to translate from Greek, Latin, German, into Hungarian certain selected passages.

INT: Did you enjoy school?

GEORGE: I loved it.

INT: You loved it. Were you good at it?

GEORGE: Why do you think I am where I am? I still love school.

INT: Right. Did Jewish kids go to school with the non-Jewish kids? This was a secular school you're going to? Or a Catholic?

GEORGE: Well, you see, there is a problem, which was that if you went to a secular school, you went with the great unwashed, which were no challenge at all, so you went to private schools. The Jewish schools were designed, they are basically, the Orthodox and the way is called Neolog schools. The Neolog schools, strangely enough, had classes on Sundays, and therefore father considered that outrageous that on a day when he is off he is not going to have his only son go off to school The Orthodox didn't go only up to four grades. Basically grade school. High school was only one school, and the Orthodox were so incensed at the thought of sending their children together with non-religious Jews into a Jewish day school, that they'd rather send them to the nuns, on the assumption that nobody is going to feel that they can convert. I have an acquaintance of mine who was the principal of a Jewish grade school, who had five daughters, all of whom went to the Notre Dame de Sion school; three of them converted and married out of the faith.

INT: But the theory was...

GEORGE: The theory was that they're not going to be tempted by Jewish kids. We still have it here, you know. I have heard of people who don't want to send their children to Akiba because there are no religious Jews. And may get the wrong idea. I'm not in the process of judging. I'm just reporting known facts.

INT: So what kind of school were you in?

GEORGE: I went to a Lutheran school, which is, of course, very remarkable.

INT: Where there Lutherans in Hungary? I didn't even know that.

GEORGE: A third of the population is. Actually, they are reformed. Reformed Lutheran. Lutheran or Calvinist, I'm not very clear about the difference. There is a difference. But about two thirds of Hungary's population is Catholic, and one third is Protestant.

INT: I see.

GEORGE: And it was a remarkable thing. One of the things was that there was no separation of church and state. Which meant religion was a mandatory subject. Except in this particular school, where we had three times two hours a week religion, at which point the class separated into three groups: the Catholics, the Protestants and the Jews, who

were taught separately. And we had a rabbi teach us. And frankly, I think I know more about Jewish history than most of my kids I know who go to yeshivas.

INT: Well, they don't teach Jewish history in yeshiva.

GEORGE: Well, of course they don't teach it. How the hell can you understand what Judaism is about? I mean, the other day I mentioned to one of them the name of Abarbanel. They never heard of him.

INT: But you learned all that.

GEORGE: I learned all of that. I also learned fairly fluent Ivrit.

INT: How many Jews in this school? What was the percentage?

GEORGE: Well, in my class-remember, this is a backward part of the world. You don't have funny limitation of class size. We had fifty-five in one class. And of course, everybody sat with their arms behind their back, and if you dared to blink, you were thrown out of class. No discipline problems.

INT: Why did you have to have your hands behind? Oh, so you wouldn't do anything with your hands?

GEORGE: No, they don't want to play...

INT: Fidget.

GEORGE: Yeah. You may get distracted from what goes on. So you sat like this all through the class.

INT: It's not very comfortable.

GEORGE: It's very comfortable. It keeps your back...

INT: It keeps your back supported.

GEORGE: It keeps your back supported, no slouching. And out of the fifty kids were maybe fifteen or sixteen Jews.

INT: Okay. That's a pretty good...

GEORGE: All of whom were non-observant Jews. And then came the Nazi era, when half the kids in the class converted. The other half-and it was not that they believed in it, but this was way of escaping. It didn't help them, by the way. And the ones who were left, who were about seven of us, were so incensed about that thing, that actually got pushed into Judaism by the sheer idea of its cowardice to abandon it. So I came out of a Lutheran high school more Jewish than I went in.

INT: That's very interesting.

GEORGE: I had a very decent Jewish education. I had...in fact, you see, I learned all I know about it at that time in religion. Ranging from the tefillot, to Gemora, to history, and Ivrit.

INT: What about Zionism? Was that discussed at all, in your house or...

GEORGE: Yes, in a general way. Except, of course, Father once said in exasperation, "Do you want me to go pack oranges in Palestine?" I mean, Palestine was an agricultural, very low-level state. Today he would be perfectly happy and probably would get a very nice job there. But that was two generations ago.

INT: Right. It was pretty rough-tough life.

GEORGE: I mean, unless you are really a devout believer in either the Moshiach will kommen, and he will enter through the Lion Gate, or else you believed that this is the way to save Judaism, and both of them are tenable positions, you have no business of going to Palestine. So we never did.

INT: But you talked about it?

GEORGE: Oh, yes. We talked about this all the time. That's why I also had private tutoring in Ivrit.

INT: Did you. I was going to ask you, you had tutors and a governess. So what were they teaching you?

GEORGE: Well, the governess was for kiddies.

INT: Oh, when you were growing up.

GEORGE: When I came out of grade school I had tutors, who enrolled tutor in Ivrit, a tutor in English, who was an Irishman. And he spoke a very elegant English. And I only loathed his guts because he was so violently anti-British, and so violently and vociferously pro-Nazi.

INT: Really.

GEORGE: Until the day he was arrested and shot as a spy.

INT: So you were tutored in English and Hebrew.

GEORGE: And French.

INT: And French.

GEORGE: The rest I had in high school. I had German, Greek, Latin.

INT: Unbelievable. I'm looking at all these dictionaries here. It's unbelievable. So tell me what the values were that your parents had for you. What would you say were their goals and values that they...

GEORGE: Exactly what I did. When I was born, my father, who was a very proper gentleman, took out an insurance in my name, so that when I'm eighteen I can go abroad and study at a Western university. He didn't count on the Depression, where the thing became valueless. Many years later I told him that, "You know, I still made it. Because I went to school later on in Geneva and in Zurich."

INT: So you fulfilled his goal for you anyway.

GEORGE: I fulfilled his goal.

INT: So education was a big one.

GEORGE: What else was there? That was the only tool you had. With one little problem, and that was Grandmother.

INT: Oh, yeah. You didn't talk about her.

GEORGE: Grandmother was about four foot six. Driven by twin Rolls Royce jet engines. She was an incredibly dynamic person. And she was also working in the dressmaking outfit. She was basically the works manager, causing endless consternation to her two daughters, because she dealt with the personnel the way personnel should be dealt with in her book, you know? "Stop yacking there and do your work!" kind of thing. "Shh, this is a Nazi. You can't talk to her. Her brother-in-law is the local Party member."

INT: Yeah. But she didn't care.

GEORGE: "They still have to learn how to..." That was Grandmother. And when I told the family counsel that I'm going to college and study mathematics, she said, "What kind of nonsense is that?! You are the only child in the family. You are going to inherit this wonderful business. You want to study mathematics?" We had major battles. It was one of the few things, few battles, I didn't lose.

INT: What about your grandfather? Where was he in all this? Was he alive?

GEORGE: My grandfather died at the age of thirty-five. And my grandmother raised her children on her own by working. She actually started as a seamstress. That's how the dressmaking business came about.

INT: That's how they started? She was a real dynamo.

GEORGE: It's very unusual, because we're talking about nineteenth century middle class. You know, the proper thing to do would have been to remarry an elderly and not particularly attractive widower with grown children of his own. She was twenty-nine years old when her husband died.

INT: Did she ever remarry?

GEORGE: No. And she made a roaring success of her life. She scrimped and worked at night, and both her children learned four languages. She imported governesses from Switzerland to teach them German and French while she worked at night.

INT: A remarkable person.

GEORGE: She was quite a girl.

INT: What was her name?

GEORGE: Gisella.

INT: And what about your grandparents from your father's side?

GEORGE: Let me tell you about my grandmother, because she was a very remarkable person. And so she was doing this big battle about what kind of nonsense is that, mathematics? You're living with mathematics. Here, I've got this whole wonderful business going, and you will get it. That's how you make a living. And besides, she said, "Imagine that there is going to be a war, and imagine that the war is going to end up in us losing everything, you still have a straight skill." So we compromised. I spent two days a week, three days a week, sitting and sewing. I have served an apprenticeship. I have a master's degree in dressmaking. And three days a week I was doing non-conform end space matting.

INT: Did you hate the sewing part? Did you hate it?

GEORGE: Well, let me...I'm ambivalent. One of the things was that you had to go to apprentice school at night, which I did. And they taught you things like if a bolt of cloth is fifty meters long, and you can make a dress out of three meters, and the bolt costs $50, how much will the material cost for one dress? That was after I did the non-conform matting.

INT: Right. (Laughs) You could handle that.

GEORGE: No. As a matter of fact, it wasn't easy. I could never multiply. That's why I have these things (pointing to the computer). But then came the great moment, when I had to have an exam, the master's exam. Which meant that I had to appear at the guild hall in the morning.

INT: To become a master of the craft.

GEORGE: Yeah. I had to have a bolt of cloth under my arm, and a pair of scissors, and needles and thread, and I had to cut it out and sew it together, and make a presentable piece to a group of (puts glasses down to the end of his nose and looks over them with eyebrows raised) elderly craftsman. Who had one look at what I have wrought, and he said, "Where did you serve your apprenticeship, Sonny?" So I told him. He said, "Mrs.

Revesz tolerates this kind of workmanship?" (Interviewer laughs) I said to him, "Not exactly, but you see, sir, she is my mother." "Oh. Well, I'll tell you what. Okay, you pass. Tell your mother to keep you the hell out of that place, because you don't belong there."

INT: (Laughs) So you were happy about that.

GEORGE: The next week, the Germans marched into Hungary, so the question became moot anyway. But still and all, I am a defrocked Dior of Budapest. I still used to sew my own things, like curtain material and things like that.

INT: So your grandmother was...pushy.

GEORGE: My grandmother was twenty-nine years old when she was widowed. And she had two choices, either to marry some elderly widow, or else to live under a beneficiary of her brothers-in-law, and they were good, well-to-do. Her brother-in-law was a physician. Good Jewish thing, a doctor or a lawyer. So she could have done that. But she wasn't going to do that. And we are talking now of pre-World War countryside. She lived in a small town in Hungary. And she decided she is not going to be involved in an undesirable marriage, and she is not going to be at the good will of however well-meaning relatives she had. And she raised her children and supported herself all her life. You cannot do that unless you have got, as I said, twin Rolls Royce jet engines to drive you.

INT: She was a very independent spirit.

GEORGE: Including the fact that she figured out that you cannot do that in the countryside, and you have to go to the big city, and that's how they all moved to Budapest.

INT: And she passed that on to her daughters, do you think?

GEORGE: Oh, yes. Very much so. My aunt, who was the last survivor, who died three or four years ago, she lived here in an old age home and my children adored her. In fact, when she died, they came to me and said, "Now who is going to tell those wonderful stories?" And that's when I started to write the book. Somebody ought to.

INT: Somebody has to do it. What was her name, your aunt?

GEORGE: Margaret. Anyway.

INT: Can you talk about your relationship with your parents? You can start with your father or your mother. What was that like?

GEORGE: No. Translation: I was totally subservient until the age of twelve, like bar mitzvah age, and then was an impossible teenager who rebelled and threw things any time somebody disagreed.

INT: Threw things?

GEORGE: I throw things, yes. And afterwards, I don't know, because we were living miles and miles apart, separated by an Iron Curtain.

INT: But growing up, did you have talks with your father? I mean, your father didn't want you to go to school on Sunday, for instance, when he was home. So what would he do with you on Sunday?

GEORGE: There was no question. Father was in charge. My son shall not do that. But remember, this is central European authoritarian way of running. My father was the least of the authoritarians, but to a ten-year-old kid, he sure as hell looked like one, right? We later on talked about these things.

INT: But your mother was authoritarian, also? Or not.

GEORGE: My mother was an emotional-I always referred to it later as emotional blackmail. "You can't do that to me."

INT: Oh, she guilted you into it.

GEORGE: Right. "You know that I can't tolerate the stress because of my heart."

INT: Oh, boy. (Laughs)

GEORGE: You know. She has her own way. She won.

INT: She won, yeah. You can't argue with that heart argument.

GEORGE: No. The only thing she didn't win, it was very funny, though. When I was maybe fifteen years old, she said, "I want you to marry an Orthodox girl." And I said, "Why on earth for?" She said, "I don't know. I think they make good wives." I thought that hilarious. I married one. Two.

INT: The two, yeah. But the relationship between you. Can you describe it?

GEORGE: Remember, this was when I started to really grow up, the world had gone to total collapse. And the results were that you couldn't anymore fight and argue, because it was a question of survival, right? I mean, we spent our rare moments of privacy glued to the radio, for which there was the penalty of death, of course, to listen to foreign broadcasts. But we were talking of World War II, and the world collapsing around us. It was a very artificial relationship by then.

INT: But before the war was creeping in, were they affectionate towards you, were they...

GEORGE: Oh, well, we had a very nice...I was an absolutely spoiled rotten kid, as only kids tend to be. And there was nothing I couldn't ask for which I didn't get. And later on, when I wanted to establish myself, the world had changed on me. You know, that was the era when you were beaten up regularly, twice a week, on the street, for being a Jew boy.

INT: I was just going to ask you, that was my next question. Was anti-Semitism growing up, before the war, and before the...

GEORGE: It was there since the Middle Ages and before.

INT: Did you experience it personally?

GEORGE: I was beaten up regularly. I didn't experience very much. I mean, I came home normally with a couple of loose teeth kind of thing. Otherwise...

INT: So it was a pretty regular thing.

GEORGE: Well, you see, this is what everybody reacts differently. My friend Nicky learned boxing. He was in superb physical condition and he beat anybody to a pulp who dared to approach him. He couldn't beat a machine gun, I'm afraid.

INT: How did you handle it?

GEORGE: I was class champion of the 800 yard dash. That took me to the nearest subway station. You see, I wasn't master of the 100 yards, and I hadn't the stamina for the mile run. 800 yards was just enough.

INT: So that's how you would...

GEORGE: My whole life consisted of running away from things. I have run away from everything, and I did reasonable well at it.

INT: Do you want to elaborate on that?

GEORGE: Not particularly. Let me put it this way-when we ended up in Belsen, somewhere along the line, that was a long story and...

INT: We're going to get to that.

GEORGE: Maybe we'll talk about it. And one day in walked the SS officer, and he said, "We need 300 people." Now this kind of thing they did all the time. Nobody ended up being gassed, so nobody volunteered. So he took off the list and marked out the people and I was among them. So I was marched out of camp, and a few days later I was in Basel.

INT: How did that happen?

GEORGE: Well, this is a story...

INT: We'll get to that.

GEORGE: My experiences with the Aryan Reich, and the Swiss. That's an "in" subject nowadays. You know, I talked about that ten years ago, when everybody still talked

about Switzerland as the country of the Red Cross and Nestle's chocolate. I have known them for the bastards they were when I arrived in Switzerland in '44.

INT: Okay. So if you could tell me, when did things start to change in your town? When were you affected?

GEORGE: I think there is a moment which is a turning point in my life, which was a gorgeous sunny March Sunday, and I was about to take my then girlfriend up into the mountains. And as I was walking down the street I met my friend and he said, "You'd better go home." And I said, "I can't go home. I'm expecting to meet Liz." He said, "She won't be there, either, because the Germans just marched into Budapest, and there's no public transportation, and everybody's ordered to stay indoors." So I turned around, little knowing that I will never see him again, nor will I ever see Liz again. And I stood at the street corner and watched those trucks roll by with these guys in strange uniforms in them, and that was the turning point.

INT: Nothing had changed before they invaded? That was 1944?

GEORGE: That was 1944. Nothing has changed because we had what is known in Israel as "protektsia."

INT: Which was?

GEORGE: Connections.

INT: Okay, so you were still bribing.

GEORGE: My father was a World War I veteran, which meant that he was exempt from all the anti-Jewish laws. My uncle was a highly visible lawyer, who knew anybody from the Minister of Justice on down. And my mother's uncle was a physician who had among his patients some of the most important influential government officials. And there was nothing they could do to us.

INT: What about the Jews around you? What was happening to them? Wasn't the Iron Guard out, or the Iron Cross?

GEORGE: It was called the Arrow Cross.

INT: Arrow Cross, excuse me.

GEORGE: Same difference, same thugs. Well, you see, Hungary until that point maintained a certain facade of legality. You couldn't shoot the guy on the street. What you could do, you could deport people whose citizenship papers were a bit treif. Now remember, we are talking here of the leftovers of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Which meant people were born in places like Galicia, which was part of the Empire, or Slovakia, or Austria. Nobody ever asked them what papers they had, right? And they were all a part of the Austrian Empire, only this was no longer the Austrian Empire. So now Vera, they

said, “Ah, you were born in Bratislava. Well, that’s not Hungary, so you aren’t a citizen.” So you get deported.

And this is where, of course, my uncle comes in, who was, as I said, probably the most important person in this connection, because, as I said, he was childless. And he was very well-to-do, and somewhere, that is piecing information together afterwards, he kind of made up his mind, what the hell does he need his money? He has no one to leave it. So essentially he gave up his law practice, and spent time in exploiting his connections in an illegal way, which meant that twice of three times a week he got on the train and went to some obscure border town, where the local police commissioner held a group of kids who fled from Slovakia somewhere. Hungary was relative safe at that time. That’s compared to what was going on in Poland, right? Except their papers were not in order, right?

So Uncle went out and knocked on some closed door discussion with the local police chief. The police chief felt that actually they were all right and let them go. Except where do you go then, because clearly they’re illegal in that country. So my uncle organized-he was not alone, there was a whole group of them, equally well-to-do people who...I wouldn’t call them humanitarians. I would call them that they had to have a purpose in life, and making money was no longer worth a purpose. So what they did, basically they bribed them. Only not for themselves. And thousands upon thousands of kids were smuggled out of Hungary, into Rumania. Out of Rumania, into Turkey, and from there down to Palestine. This is reasonably well-documented part of history. Right, and he was basically one of the guys who smeared the way through from the Slovakian border to the Rumanian border, where somebody else took over. And he had incredible connections.

INT: So he’s responsible for saving a lot of children.

GEORGE: He was responsible for saving tens of thousands of children. And then came the Germans, and among them was a person nobody had ever heard of, called Adolf Eichmann. Adolf Eichmann, you probably have heard of him. Nobody else heard at that time. And he didn’t want to deal with the local Jewish council. The Germans always appointed a Judenrat, whom they handed down the orders. But he never trusted them, and for some reason he trusted my uncle. And the kind of thing that happened was that eight o’clock at night there’s a knock on the door, and there were two SS guys standing there. And he says, “Herr Doctor, you have to come with us.” So my uncle kissed his wife good-bye and marched out. (End of tape 2, side 1) He studied the Bible and he wanted some Jew to explain it to him. My uncle was a violent agnostic and said, “Well, why on earth are you going to use me for it? Get a rabbi.” And he said, “No, Herr Doctor, I trust you, because you are an honest guy, you don’t cringe. I look you in the face and you don’t wilt.” So that was the strange relationship of Adolf Eichmann to my uncle.

INT: That’s amazing. Did he go there a lot to talk to him?

GEORGE: Well, any time Eichmann couldn’t, didn’t trust these Jews, because they were all shady characters, you know. That’s why the Final Solution. This is not an unusual thing. All through the Middle Ages, every ruler had his so-called “court Jew.” Well, my uncle was the court Jew of Adolf Eichmann.

INT: What does your uncle-your uncle survived the war.

GEORGE: He died.

INT: He died during the war?

GEORGE: He survived the concentration camp. He died shortly afterwards. He never recovered.

INT: Did he ever talk to you about these meetings, or where are you getting this information?

GEORGE: From my aunt.

INT: Your aunt would tell you.

GEORGE: She told me twenty-five years later.

INT: I see.

GEORGE: My aunt, who was madly in love with her husband long after he was dead, and never remarried, of course, kind of told. That was her therapy of being alone, telling these stories. She was a wonderful raconteur, and she used to tell me stories. "My man came home discussing theology with that butcher. Can you imagine?"

INT: What was your uncle's name?

GEORGE: George.

INT: So the Jews around you, though. You had this protektsia, and you had, everyone in your family was well-connected. But what about what was happening from 1939 on? Was there any, what was happening to your friends?

GEORGE: This is a very narrow circle of people, we're all the upper middle class Jewish elite. Everybody had connections.

INT: Everybody had protektsia. Okay.

GEORGE: Sure.

INT: So Jews weren't being taken away and dumped in the...river.

GEORGE: Yes, Jews were taken away by the thousands. Nobody until '44, it was normally people whose citizenship papers were not quite in order. And in fact, we all had dozens of people staying with us at our country home, until we figured out what the hell to do with them. These were Cousin So and So's nephew's relations. They were all Jewish. So we put them up until Uncle George figured out how the hell to get them out of the country. Which he did, because his main argument was that, you know, he went to the

Police Commissioner. “These are little children. Let them go. You don’t need them. They are not going to be a saboteur.” Adults...it was difficult.

INT: I was just going to say, how about getting yourselves out? Was that discussed?

GEORGE: Yes. Well, it came about by the fact that by that time the ghetto was being organized. And once you were removed to the ghetto, things were pretty much locked up. Also, there were every week posters on the street corners or on walls, starting off with, “All Jewish persons!!!” Three exclamation marks. And then came, you know, we had to wear the yellow star and you have to hand in your jewelry, and you have to do this, that and the other. And one of them said that everybody between the age of sixteen and sixty stood apart for defending the country against the Bolshevik menace. Well, of course we knew about the Bolshevik menace, but we also knew what happened to a forced labor battalion. So I went AWOL.

INT: How old were you?

GEORGE: Nineteen.

INT: In 1944 you were nineteen?

GEORGE: Yeah. So I quit and stayed home. And got slightly psychopathic staying indoors doing nothing.

INT: You couldn’t go outside.

GEORGE: I wouldn’t dare. So one day I said, “Is there anything we can do?”

INT: Where was your father?

GEORGE: My father was also at home.

INT: Okay. He also didn’t report. Or he didn’t have to?

GEORGE: He was exempt. He had a chest full of decorations. And besides, he was a captain. They didn’t recruit captains. They didn’t know what the hell to do with captains. Anyway.

INT: You were going crazy inside.

GEORGE: And so I kept on saying, “Is there anything one can do? I mean, rather than sit here and wait till they get us, can we do something?” So one day Uncle came home and said at a family meetings, “Yes, there is something, but it’s too silly even to mention.” “Well, mention it anyway.” So you see, people like my uncle and my father, they simply said that you said your affairs in order and then you have self-discipline, and die like a man when the time comes. There were, of course, many Jews who figured out the age-old Jewish solution: whom can I bribe? Is there anybody in the German high command one can bribe? Well, of course, that’s crazy. I mean, you don’t bribe SS

officers. “Yes,” said the man. “We’ll bribe the SS officers as soon as we find one.” Well, pretty soon he found-these are, by the way, rather shady characters. There were two lawyers, and one of them was actually disbarred. They were just the kind of guys to pull this kind of thing off. And they found an SS Obersturmbahnfuhrer. That’s elegant German way of calling a colonel. Who wanted two things-he wanted money, and he wanted an alibi after the war. I mean, he was quite aware in June of ’44 that this thing is not going to last forever. But of course, nobody trusted anybody.

So we decided therefore at the time, you may or may not have read when there was this attempted run, attempt at Hitler’s life in June of 1944, the result of which was the SS he put down with an incredible savagery. Even, he was an SS colonel, he wasn’t going to stick his neck out, because G-d forbid, something may happen, the internal security of the SS may catch you at it. So he said, “The way to do that, is that to organize a transport, just a regular deportation transport like everybody else, and somewhere we’ll throw a switch on the railroad and they’ll go somewhere else, maybe Spain.” Well, nobody believed that, because his had been done so many times, and it normally ended up where the guys pocketed the money and then they end up in Auschwitz anyway. In fact, my wife’s whole family, my first wife’s whole family ended up that way. That’s another story.

So nobody believed him. But he said, “Let’s build in some safety features. We’ll give you a third of the money down now, and a third of the money we put in the Swiss account, and a third of them you get when everybody is perfectly safe and we’ll also give you a testament after the war of how nice you were to us Jews.” That was a butcher, by the way, who killed whole villages before that. But now it was ’44, of course. So Uncle said, “Now, do you trust some crooked lawyers, and some shady SS officer?” And I said, “Yes, please.”

And so the family...joined the transport, voluntarily. Now there were three ingredients to this transport. One was the money people-after all, somebody had to pay for it. The other one were the young people, the Chalutzim for whom the whole thing was really designed. These were teenagers, so they weren’t children anymore, but you ought to save them. And a third one was the establishment people.

INT: And that was your family.

GEORGE: And that included my family.

INT: So who went on this transport?

GEORGE: Everybody in my family went. Everybody who wasn’t at that time in labor camp or some other...

INT: So who’s everybody?

GEORGE: Well, Grandmother, Uncle George, Uncle Francis, all their children, if they had any, and my parents and a couple of stray cousins who we could pick up because they happened to be somewhere.

INT: How about your mother's sister also?

GEORGE: Oh, that's Uncle George's wife. Oh yes, very much so. So we all went. And it was a proper deportation transport, seventy per boxcar.

INT: It was like a cattle car?

GEORGE: Yes. That's quite crowded. It was June, it was blazing hot.

INT: June, 1944.

GEORGE: Yeah. And we got to the border, and the SS sergeant in charge of the platoon of...sealed orders, and he didn't understand it, because this wasn't what he was accustomed to. He wasn't a mental giant, but SS sergeants were not designed for being able. So he said, "Well, to hell with that thing. Let's go to Auschwitz. I've done this trip twenty-five times, we always ended up in Auschwitz; why not this time? What's this business of changing at Linz and taking the southern track? Nonsense." So at this point somebody was very panicky, and how can you prevent that? Well, the trick was that in Continental Europe, trains go through, but they change engines at borders, for some reason. So at this point somebody said, "If we can bribe the engine driver to put us on the siding and then go back and report, there were bombs falling all over. This was a confusing...report back to the...train hadn't been delivered to the border, somebody can then sneak back to Budapest and get in touch with the driver with fifty bucks, which was brilliant. If you give them less, they won't do it. If you give them too much, he'll get suspicious. So they pulled us into the siding, and the engine disappeared, and we spent the next two weeks sitting nowhere. Which was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. Because I saw, the first time in my life, a total breakdown of authority, of traditions, of morals. You see, what happened is that the young people, and we were all in very good condition. I mean, we just came two days ago from a very well-maintained diet, right? And the idea was that we no longer accepted the authority of the elders and betters. And there was large-sized orgies going on in the countryside, which was a remarkable thing.

INT: So you got off the train and you were...where were you?

GEORGE: Where could you go?

INT: Where were you?

GEORGE: We were fifty miles away from the nearest railroad junction-nowhere. We are in a hostile atmosphere, and the whole Hungarian peasantry hated the Jews. If you wander in with a yellow star, into somebody's farm, the first thing you know that they are going to send you over to the local police for the reward, right? So there's no way you could go anywhere. Just waited. So some guys went back...

INT: Who were you waiting for, the other engine to show up?

GEORGE: No. No. Two guys went back and reported to the Obersturmbahnfuhrer, saying, " There's a foul-up and please send out somebody." Then a week later out came a staff car with new orders, and bawled out the sergeant, why he doesn't follow orders. "It was quite clear what you are supposed to do, wasn't it?" Unfortunately, in between a little problem occurred. The Allies landed in southern France on June the 6th. Which means it cut off our way to Spain. So...

INT: So I'm sorry to interrupt you, so tell me about this breakdown you were witnessing.

GEORGE: Nothing. It was basically the fact that young people, throwing over authority because they considered it irrelevant.

INT: Because they were going to die?

GEORGE: If anybody survived, it's an eighteen-year-old and not a forty-five-year-old lawyer or company manager, said they, and therefore don't give us orders. We do what we want to do. And what the hell, it doesn't matter anyway, does it, now? It was very remarkable.

INT: Is that how you felt also?

GEORGE: What?

INT: Is that how you felt also?

GEORGE: No. I never did. It may be difficult to believe, because I think it was kind of sleazy. Nothing to do with authority. I mean, I was the kind of a guy who sat down in a corner and read Lucretius in the original Latin. I guess today you'd call it "nerd." But...

INT: And what were you thinking while all this was going on?

GEORGE: It wasn't going to do it under the eyes of my family.

INT: But were they? Was there family with them, these kids? Some and some not.

GEORGE: Some did, some didn't. Some people did it because there was a family watching. But you see, it's interesting, because it told me something about civilization being skin-deep. An occurrence like this will break it. And these were upper class, educated, so-called civilized, religious Jews. There was a large section, about a third of them were Orthodox.

INT: And they were also doing this?

GEORGE: Yes.

INT: What did you think? Do you remember what you were thinking? You were sitting there for two weeks.

GEORGE: Yes. I think I thought it was far too crowded a sea. I mean, watching a football game with thousands watching is okay. Doing some things with thousands watching is not okay. That's what was probably my nearest that I can remember.

INT: But what about imminent death? I mean, were you thinking about that? I mean, what did you think was going to happen to you there?

GEORGE: I didn't think. I mentioned very clearly that I was trained not to speculate on things I cannot prove. I am not making wild guesses.

INT: Even back then.

GEORGE: Que sera, sera.

INT: Even then at the age of nineteen...

GEORGE: It has nothing to do with it.

INT: Surrounded by a hostile population and in the middle of nowhere.

GEORGE: It had nothing to do with it. You await developments and you don't make premature judgments, because your chances are that you are wrong.

INT: Was there anyone you could talk about this with? Were you talking to your parents about it? Was anyone talking to each other?

GEORGE: I'm sure they were, I wasn't. There was a point where I simply closed up, because it is the only way I can function for those circumstances, which is I don't talk about things, we don't do about things. We have to do what we have to do and to hell with everything else, and things will work out. I was convinced that I'm going to survive, there was no question in my mind.

INT: You were?

GEORGE: Yes, of course. At the age of nineteen? You feel absolutely powerful. There's no doubt. Physically I was probably in as good a condition as I ever was going to be.

INT: But all these things that were happening around you, I mean, you must have known in 1944 what was happening to the Jews in Auschwitz, and what Auschwitz was.

GEORGE: I certainly knew, because half my family was already, the Austrian/Slovakia branch were all in Auschwitz already.

INT: But you still thought you would survive, and you weren't...

GEORGE: Yes, of course. Everybody thought so. The one who didn't, there were kids who...died at that stage. It was very remarkable. I remember one young girl, she was a very good-looking kid, about sixteen. And the first thing the Germans did was they cut

off their hair before entering camp. And she died because of this. Oh, she nominally died of a virus, right? You know, a flu...she didn't want to live.

INT: So losing the will to live...

GEORGE: Yeah. So the only ones who died at that point were the ones who lost the will to live. I had never any doubts about it. I wasn't sure why, or how we were going to do it. But what happened at that point is that our beloved Obersturmbahnfuhrer decided they are going to put us on ice for a while until you figure out what to do, and that's how we ended up in Belsen.

INT: From this train.

GEORGE: Yeah.

INT: You went back on the train.

GEORGE: Yeah. And about a week along came new orders, and this time we were called for Celle. Celle is in Lower Saxony, south of Hanover. It's a railroad junction for Belsen. I didn't know that at that time.

INT: What about your parents? How were they feeling? Did they feel that you would survive?

GEORGE: There was no doubt in anybody's mind.

INT: Your parents also were strong in their belief that they would survive.

GEORGE: Yes. And we don't talk about it. We don't know how we are going to do it, but we are going to do it. So don't worry.

INT: Okay. Did G-d come into it?

GEORGE: It had nothing to do with G-d. The only remark I vividly recall was my father. He said, "You know why we are here? Because of our breakfront." You see, we all had visas in the late 1930's to Australia. Except what the hell can you do in Australia? And besides, we had a very decent way of life, the breakfront went, of course, the silver display in it, right? Which we did not want to leave behind. So Father, in his inimitable way, said, "We are here because of our breakfront."

INT: Because you stayed behind for the breakfront? Is that what he meant?

GEORGE: You weren't going to give up your very nice, elegant way of life. Right? To go to work as a garage mechanic in Sidney, for G-d's sake. That's what my father wanted to do, because he knew how to fix his own car.

INT: Did he want to go to Australia, your father?

GEORGE: No. Who wanted to go to Australia? It's full of kangaroos. Who wants to go there?

INT: Who got you the visas? Your uncle? How did you get those?

GEORGE: Some way we got it. I don't know how.

INT: Okay. So now you're on your way to Belsen.

GEORGE: So we are on our way to Belsen. And that's...I think...

INT: That's a good place to stop?

GEORGE: I tell you, up till this point my experiences were fairly individual. Once you enter Belsen, you became a mess. And there is no individuality. And therefore there is nothing I can report which is different from any other survivor's story. I mean, you know all about the damn thing. You know about the bathhouses with the showerheads, and the rest of the junk. There's no difference, except that I made it. (Tape shuts)

INT: This is a continuation of an interview with Mr. George Revesz. And it's February 3rd, 1997. And I had a few questions from last time, before we continue. And one of them was, you were in Budapest during the war, and I was wondering if you ever came across Raoul Wallenberg.

GEORGE: No.

INT: No. Did you hear of his activities in the city, or anything like that?

GEORGE: Not at that time. In order for any of these guys to function, they had to be nameless people. There were all kinds of deals going on. If you were doing a straightforward job, the chances of survival were very poor. So everybody had some deal. Some had a Swedish passport, fake. Some had a Swiss passport, obviously fake. The Consul General of Guatemala, me thinks, issued all kinds of visas, immigration visas to Guatemala, which nobody took seriously. It was the kind of thing which didn't really hold up to a serious scrutiny. But if you were caught on the street by a patrol whose political fervor was far exceeding their literacy, right, if you were good at it, you could wave this kind of thing in front of them and say, "I am practically a Guatemalan citizen, because I have Guatemalan immigration, and the Guatemalan consul general himself is going to protest if you do something," and maybe it worked, maybe it didn't work. It more or less depended on how much of an authority you had in your voice.

INT: But you didn't hear his name mentioned.

GEORGE: No. No. Everybody had something going on in order to...now this was kind of insurance. In fact, people had several pieces of documents, and you had to remember which pocket you pulled out the document, if anyone ever stopped you on the street, to make sure you said the right thing. Right?

INT: Okay. That was one question I had. The other question was, when we ended last time, you said that when you got to Bergen-Belsen, or when you got to Belsen, that's when your individual story stops, and you just become one of the masses. And I was wondering if you could continue with the story there, because your story continues to be an individual story, and tell me what happened from there, from that point.

GEORGE: Well, there are two parts of this story. One of them is what we knew at that time, and one of them is what we found out afterwards. And in a way I kind of have to mix it, otherwise it makes little sense. What happened was that our Obersturmbahnfuhrer wanted to make money, and this was his asset. So he was...we didn't know about that thing, but it was quite obvious in retrospect what happened. He couldn't send us to Spain, where he had some shady deals going on, because of the Allies landing in Toulon, which cut off, I mean, they landed in Normandy, and a month later they landed in southern France, and thereby they kind of cut off all transportation. So he decided to switch and try to sell us to Switzerland. In the meantime, of course, we had to be put on ice somewhere, and that's what Belsen was. So we were put on ice. What we knew is that here we are in a concentration camp, and nobody knows about what we are doing, and the local guards presumably deal with us like everybody else, which is what they did.

INT: So in other words, you had some guarantee from this Obersturmbahnfuhrer?

GEORGE: We had no guarantees, nothing. Right? Somebody said to somebody, and somebody may have known something. Who knows? All we knew that we were sitting in Belsen and it was no place to be.

INT: So tell me what happened on your arrival. Did you know where you were going, or what it was when you got there?

GEORGE: Not the slightest. We knew what Belsen was; we didn't know that we got there until we'd seen the wonderful sign over the gate. Right? This was our first inkling of where we were. So there we were sitting while everybody else was doing all kinds of finagling. Now dealing with the Swiss was very much more difficult for this guy than dealing with the Spanish, because the Spanish could be bribed. The Swiss, of course, could also be bribed, but not at that level. I mean, he needed a hell of a lot more money. So the Swiss Jewish organizations were Swiss as well as Jewish. They wanted ironclad guarantees before they forked out any money. It made sense. Right? So somewhere along the line they agreed to let him deliver a sample of the merchandise. All of this we didn't know, and of course all of this went on and on and on, and somewhere in late summer, early fall, a staff car pulled up in front of our...compound gates, and out came all of these elegant officers and once again we were lined up, which was something we did about twice a day before that. You know, they lined up and counted us. They couldn't count, which means they had to re-count every time.

INT: Were you together still or were you separated? Were the men and women separated?

GEORGE: Well, of course we were separated. So there we were lined up, and what apparently happened is the guy very simply picked randomly three hundred names. I was among them, my family was not. So we were marched off, and boarded a train, and the next thing I knew we ended up at the Swiss border.

INT: How long were you there before you were taken with these three hundred people?

GEORGE: Three months, four months. Who knows? Dates got kind of hazy at this point.

INT: What was happening there?

GEORGE: What?

INT: In Bergen-Belsen?

GEORGE: In one word: rain. It is on the Luneburger Heath, which is one of the rainiest parts of Europe, matched only by England, northern England, which is on the same level. So every day it was pouring. That's about all. Daytime it was pouring and nighttime we had bombers coming. Nobody hit us, but it was a great joy to watch them all go by. And...

INT: What did you do? How did you spend the time, the day?

GEORGE: Nothing.

INT: It wasn't a work camp.

GEORGE: It was not a work camp. Belsen was not a work camp, and by that time nobody really worked, because the whole thing were at the verge of, things were running down, right? Further east they used Jewish labor to build fortifications and such like. They built the famous Sachsenhausen concentration camp, was building the neighboring underground tunnels in the Harz Mountains where the V-2 was being manufactured. Well, this is a known story. But most of these people had no labor. There was nothing to do because the organization was breaking down.

INT: Can you talk a little bit about that time?

GEORGE: No.

INT: I mean, what were your thoughts and feelings?

GEORGE: There is nothing...to say, because I don't really recall. Everybody reacts differently to moments of stress, and my reaction is very simple: I close up and ignore it. And therefore I really have no recollection.

INT: You really don't remember.

GEORGE: Very little. Little fleeting snaps about the food and such like things.

INT: Do you care to share them?

GEORGE: No. I don't think so. It is nothing terribly exciting.

INT: But do you remember your thoughts or your feelings? Did you think that you would die? You talked about on the train, before, when you were on the train and you said, never for a minute did you feel that you were going to die.

GEORGE: I didn't. I still didn't.

INT: Did you feel that way also?

GEORGE: Yes. Every now and then you had this awkward feeling when you entered into the shower rooms of having this questionable feeling of what is going to come out of the shower head, but one dismisses these thoughts, because there is nothing you can do about it anyway.

INT: So you put it [out of your mind]? (End of tape 2, side 2)

GEORGE: Marched off and carted by train, sample merchandise, and we ended up in Basel. Basel, if you remember geography, is the northwestern-most tip of Switzerland, and it's the nearest to that part of Germany. You see, it was a very peculiar moment. We knew, of course, that you don't expect any pity from the Germans, and you looked forward to this moment when you entered the world's oldest democracy, the Swiss claim to be. And I...we wept. And the very first memory gave us a little bit of a peculiar feeling. We pulled into Basel's railroad station, on, say, Platform Two. And on Platform One another train pulled in, from which disembarked a large number of SS officers in proper uniform, high jackboots, peaked caps, each of them carrying a briefcase, in which the basic necessities of life were presumably, like false passports, a numbered Swiss account. They looked very elegant. We looked bedraggled and ugly. You see, we were used by the Swiss at that moment as a bargaining chip. Just as our shady SS guy was using us as a bargaining chip. The Swiss, who up till that moment were supporting the German war effort, to a probably little known, it's little known to what extent they did so. The entire Swiss precision industry, like Swiss watches, was entirely selling, manufacturing, and selling things like bomb sights and altimeter controls for the Luftwaffe. Which is one of the reasons why the Germans never bombed the Swiss. The Allies didn't quite know what to do with it, and just about the time when we arrived there, there was an interesting moment when the U.S. bombers bombed and literally wiped out the entire industrial district of Schaffhausen. I don't know if the name means anything. Schaffhausen is the major watch center of the world. I mean, Swiss watches are known, and Schaffhausen is it. It's at the German border. And what was remarkable is that the entire city was evacuated the night before, and they wiped out the entire factory, all the factories. And of course the American ambassador apologized profoundly for this dreadful mistake that took place. And offered reparation payment, which we did fulfill after the war. So the Swiss had a completely new set of factories built with American money. After having run that factory twenty-four hours a day for five years and getting nice income from it. I thought it was a pretty good deal. I didn't know that at that time. But I did, on the other

hand, realize at that point -- and that I didn't know at that time either -- after all these years being neutral on the side of the Germans as it were, it was time to be neutral on the side of the Allies.

INT: Because they were winning.

GEORGE: Because it was clear even to the most stupid guy -- and the Swiss are anything but, who's going to come out a winner. It was the fall of 1944. I mean, it was a question of months, right? So one of the things they had to show, of course, was how humanitarian they are. So they let in the SS officers, who brought valuable currency with them, and to compensate for that, they let in this ragtag bunch of Jews. But it was a very bad impression. I was later on shown news articles in the Swiss newspapers, who kind of wrote very shocked about the appearance of this. It was the first time they had seen, en masse, what it looks like when people are coming out of a concentration camp. I mean, I was fifty pounds underweight and I was the youngest.

INT: In three months that happened to you?

GEORGE: Yes. So none of us looked very elegant. So the Swiss didn't know what to do with us. It was quite obvious that they have put up for years with escaped Allies air force people, for instance, who were shot down and managed to flee into Switzerland. But that was okay, because a U.S., a major of the U.S. Air Force, his pay was paid into a Swiss bank, so the Swiss deducted upkeep for that, and it was perfectly okay. They put them up in very elegant hotels, but what to do with this bunch of people who have nobody to pay for them? Well, there was a lucky solution available. You see, one of the major disasters of Switzerland at that time was hitting the hotel industry. I mean, while the whole of Europe was collapsing around them, nobody was going to go skiing and gambling in the casinos. So what to do with the hotels? So the hotels were all shuttered and valuable assets wasted. Aah! That was a wonderful solution, wasn't it? We lease it to the government, who can put up these refugees, which are safely tucked away somewhere on top of the Alps, so nobody can see them. Right? So we were marched up to this place, which was a gorgeous place overlooking Lake Geneva.

INT: Who was marching you, the Swiss?

GEORGE: The Swiss, sure. Bayonets and all.

INT: So you were out from under the Germans at this point?

GEORGE: Oh, yes. By now the Germans had relinquished us. I never quite knew how they got through the German border. I guess a German colonel is important enough that local border guards salute and stand at attention. I guess that's what it must have been. But anyway, every morning we had, once again, a student parade, where the lieutenant in charge of the platoon or whatever it was guarding us -- and we were guarded, I mean, bayonets and all, lest we contaminate the Swiss population. And so this guy told us that this hotel in which we were staying is the same hotel in which Churchill stayed before the war, and that we get the same rations as every Swiss citizen gets, and therefore we are to be duly grateful. A couple of little things were not mentioned. The Swiss, the hoteliers,

when they handed over this hotel to the Swiss army, removed everything from it, like light bulbs, mattresses. So there was no heating, and it was late fall in the Alps. So I don't think Churchill stayed in a luxury hotel with no chandeliers and no mattresses. We did. Furthermore, the lieutenant in charge was in civilian life a local grocer. And he stole every bit of our food, which he sold on the black market in his store. It took us a while to find all these things out, and one of the things we did, a few of us, was organize raiding parties, and at night, we broke open the larder and stole back our own food. Next morning, of course, there was the usual hullabaloo, at morning roll call, and the lieutenant was screaming that he was going to get the security in to investigate this heinous crime. Of course, he never did, because it was difficult for him to explain how the food got there to begin with. So this went on for a while.

INT: Who was with you, Mr. Revesz? Who was with you in this group? Did you have friends in this group, or was this a random three hundred people?

GEORGE: This was a random three hundred people, but we were all friends. We were a group of youngsters, teenagers, who...

INT: So it was mostly young men and teenagers.

GEORGE: No, it was every age. There were older people, young children. But we were, of course, the young thugs.

INT: So you organized yourselves.

GEORGE: The first thing we did, we joined the KP. Because that's where the action was: food. How else can you steal if you don't have...so we were doing KP duty. And by that time the Swiss were beginning, news articles were spreading, and they realized that these people have had some difficulties, so they ought to be supportive. So every day, somebody came to our place, a good Swiss citizen representing some committee or another. A women's club of St. Galen, coming and bringing us things. Of course, they were Swiss. So they had to reconcile their willingness to do good with common sense, and what they normally brought is what they didn't need. We had high-heeled dancing shoes, ball gowns.

INT: Very practical.

GEORGE: Well, they didn't need them. Fashion. It was all out of fashion. So what happened, inevitably, is that once a week somebody came down and said, "There is somebody distributing clothing, food." My motto at that point was I'm not going to do any work. I'm not there to work, I'm there to do the minimum work which I can get away with. So immediately upon announcement of this kind of thing, I reported to the sergeant, who was also a cook, that I had to go to attend this thing. So this went on for weeks on end, and one day somebody walked in and said, "There is a young lady here who wants to give out scholarships." Ha ha! Would you believe that? Well, it was a good enough excuse. "Sorry, Monsieur Letemagere, I have to go." "Oh, once again. Who is going to peel all the carrots?" "Well, find somebody to peel the carrots. I'm sorry. Duty calls." Right? Off I went and met a rare, my first experience of middle America. She was young

and blond and rosy-cheeked, and terribly enthusiastic and terribly naive about things. She was a representative of Friends something or other fund.

INT: Friends, the Quakers?

GEORGE: Yeah. And I was one of the few guys who spoke reasonable English. So I had no great difficulty. And I had a major asset. I had documentation with me that I was in college at home, and I was a math and physics major. Well, this was a science major, and there were a couple other kids who were college background, typically English majors or Greek classical literature kind of stuff. But I was, I didn't realize, a prime candidate. So I got a scholarship. Now, of course, the mills of the gods grind exceedingly slowly and she said, "Well, I will favorably report on you, and you will hear from us." And I probably forgot. In the meantime, the Swiss figured out that there are young people there who are capable of work. By now they had been fed, and had put on some weight. And they ought to be put to work. So we were sent off, selected members of this bunch of people, to a labor camp. What really the Swiss did, they rented us, the army rented us to farmers to help them with whatever farm work had to be done. I was sent to the other end of Switzerland to pick potatoes.

INT: And you're not paid for this.

GEORGE: Oh, yes! The agreement was that you have basic, the farmer was providing you with food and shelter, and paid you in addition, not so that you would get terribly excited about it -- like ten cents a basketful of potatoes or such a thing. There were people who worked very hard in that place, and they made a couple of bucks a day. My rule was very simple: no work. I picked up my basket every morning, after having a double set of breakfast, I was really probably within a couple of months I was at the peak of my weight. I never since then was that heavy. I ate everything that was in front of me. And I went off, found myself a nice, dry spot to sit -- it was raining, it was late fall and pouring all the time -- and I sat there all day. And when four o'clock came, I picked up my basket, put half a dozen potatoes in it and marched back. The farmer, of course, said I was worse than useless, and I said, "Well, mathematicians are not very good at potato-picking. You want me to solve some math problems, I'll be very happy to." So by then I spoke Schweizer-Deutsch language.

INT: But what was your attitude? I mean, it sounds like your attitude was...

GEORGE: My attitude was: minimum work, maximum what I can get.

INT: Had you become very cynical by this point?

GEORGE: No, I was just trying to exploit the situation as much as I could. And I have a standard attitude: When in doubt, play stupid. I mean, I was known as being very stupid by the Swiss bunch. "You mean you are a mathematician? How can a mathematician be this stupid?" "Huh?" So somewhere in December, finally my papers came through, and I was allowed to go to college.

INT: Where?

GEORGE: Well, I started in Geneva, and that was when I realized that I'm really not a mathematician. I think I told you that story.

INT: Yeah. You told me that story.

GEORGE: And at that point I transferred to the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, which is the M.I.T. of Switzerland, which is in Zurich, and sometime in the spring I ended up in Zurich.

INT: In the spring of '45, after the war?

GEORGE: That was just about-in fact, I arrived there the day the surrender was official.

INT: Well, let me ask you, when you were spending this time in Switzerland, before you went to school, were you thinking about your family? I mean, did you know what was going on with your family?

GEORGE: Of course I was thinking about my family.

INT: Did you get any news from them?

GEORGE: Yes I did, eventually. They went back to Hungary after the war.

INT: They stayed in Bergen-Belsen till the end of the war?

GEORGE: No, they were first transported to Switzerland, and then they were in another camp, and from there they had a choice: either staying in camp or going back to Hungary. And they went back to Hungary.

INT: So your parents both survived the war. And your aunt and uncle? Your uncle died right after the war?

GEORGE: Look, my uncle was very serious. When he came out he was very seriously ill, and shortly thereafter he died. But nominally he survived the war. And so they all went back to Hungary.

INT: Did you think about going back to Hungary?

GEORGE: I hate the Hungarians. And besides, I was sitting in one of the best universities in Europe. Remember, Europe was destroyed. And there was this place which has got labs. Do you know what it meant? Nobody else had labs around there, right? I wasn't going to go anywhere. I had an American scholarship, I was admitted, which was another funny little thing, because I skipped a year, which was not an easy job.

INT: How old were you at the end of the war?

GEORGE: At that time, by then I was twenty-one.

INT: You skipped a year?

GEORGE: Yes, because I wangled all kinds of deals-half a year in Hungary, and three months in Geneva was accepted as a whole year. And it wasn't an easy thing, because of course there's a world of a difference between studying theoretical math or electrical machinery. I was at that time an electrical engineering major.

INT: So you switched. You switched over.

GEORGE: Well, that's when I was switched from math to engineering. And the reason I chose electronics, because that's really as close to mathematics as you can get. I mean, it wasn't the plumbing kind of thing with big generators which power engineering would need.

INT: And you left mathematics because it was more practical to go into...

GEORGE: I never really felt what good it was. I then found out that I'm not an engineer, either. Because I cannot do these seat of pants kind of things which engineers do. I wanted to understand the fundamentals. So I was really spending the next many years oscillating between the two extremes of being too theoretical or being too plumbing-oriented. And that's another story. So there I was.

INT: How were you supporting yourself? Or did the scholarship take care of that, also?

GEORGE: Well, the scholarship was 225 Swiss francs a month. That was equivalent to something like $75. Well, admittedly today it was probably, I mean, this is 1946 and '47 dollars, so call it three times as much. So it's $150 a month. It was too much to turn it back and not enough to live on. But you can live on it. I mean, I learned all of these lovely tricks of how to live on that thing. That wasn't the problem. As a matter of fact, normally it wouldn't be a problem, but I spent almost all of my money on books. That's when my library began. Not only did I buy books. You see, you could buy these cheap second-hand books from the stalls, you know? And when you schlepped it home, and I found a little old bookbinder somewhere, who probably a little bit out of sympathy gave me a very good price and re-bound all those books. I still have them, and they're very nice. I'll show you one day.

INT: Did you make friends at this point? Were there other Jewish students with you, or it was all Swiss?

GEORGE: Strangely, my friends were at that time all Swiss, which I did on a conscious basis. Because after all, you live in a country, you ought to know that country, and I made some very close friends.

INT: You didn't hate them?

GEORGE: This is one of those funny things: in every country you mention, you meet the individual and he is not the nation as a whole. When you put them together, they are SOB's. When you meet them individually...I remember I have spent many an evening

with some of my friends who were...interested in things. We used to go to, we always went twice a week to concerts. The Swiss, well, the Zurich concert hall had a rule that a quarter of an hour before a performance, all tickets unsold could be had by students for something like $1.00 a piece. So we went twice a week to concerts, and it's a place where I learned to love things which most people here don't even know about.

INT: Like?

GEORGE: Anton Bruckner. You ever heard Anton Bruckner? You like it?

INT: It's depressing. It's a little depressing sometimes.

GEORGE: It's...large. And of course Mahler.

INT: Well, yeah. Very depressing. (Laughs)

GEORGE: Which is very depressing, yes. And it was...so it was an interesting place, because it was the only time I had four years where I spent twice a week at a concert, for a dollar a piece. This was the point.

INT: So you could look at the individual.

GEORGE: I had individuals whom I was ever since very friendly with.

INT: And non-Jews.

GEORGE: They were all non-Jews, and quite remarkable people in retrospect. One of my very close friends subsequently became director of research at Phillips. Another one got the Nobel Prize. So all of us, we were quite reasonably competent people, and of course, there was a whole bunch of fraternity jocks who presumably were also around, whom we disregarded. But we had a close relationship to half a dozen people who were all...civilized people. And yes, Switzerland has civilized people, and quite a few of them.

INT: What about Jewish life? Was there any?

GEORGE: Well, eventually, yes, I got involved in Jewish life, mostly through the Jewish student union, which eventually I joined. And I have still maintained close contact with a number of those people.

INT: Well, what was it like to be, to be a Jew among all these Gentiles after the war, and were you hearing what was happening, and that six million Jews had been killed? And I mean, what were all your feelings at this time? Here you were sort of isolated.

GEORGE: Probably relief that I made it. One is very selfish, and one was relieved to learn that much of my family survived. And one was relieved to notice that oneself survived. And...(pause) We lived in Switzerland, glorious Switzerland. Alps where we went skiing and a lake where we went sailing.

INT: It's rather scenic.

GEORGE: Gorgeous. And once a month I got a letter from the foreign police, foreign department of the canton police, that I am to report at eleven o'clock on Tuesday. Of course, they always picked the worst moments. There was no argument with them, right? So you reported to them, and stood around for about three hours till the guy finally saw you, and he said he really wanted to check on what plans I had made to leave the country. Now, this was a game. He knew it and I knew it. He knew that there was no way he can deport me, because Hungary had no common borders with Switzerland. So he couldn't deport me, if he wanted to be...about that thing. Furthermore, as long as I had a scholarship, I wasn't going to go anywhere. And it was really meant for one thing: to imbue me with the feeling that this is not a permanent solution, and I shouldn't for a moment thing about...

INT: That you're welcome there.

GEORGE: That I am ever going to stay there, right? And this went on year after year. They called me in every month or two, and we played this game. And whenever he asked me, I very politely replied that my current plans are unclear because right now I'm facing my midterms, and that frankly takes up most of my time and interest, but I'll be willing to think about it after the midterm. Right? And then of course I was approaching the finals.

INT: You were just too busy.

GEORGE: Nobody meant it, that I really had to make a decision. But...

INT: It was just a formality. They didn't want Jews in there to live? They didn't allow Jews to live there permanently?

GEORGE: There was not such thing. You see, it's very difficult to understand that Switzerland was, up till World War I, the poorest country of Europe. It had nothing to sell. It needed a certain minimum amount of imports, like salt, coal. Some very simple things they needed. They didn't have anything to export. So for centuries the Swiss had only one way to pay for that foreign debt, and that was selling their sons, in a form of mercenaries. As you probably know, even today the Pope has a Swiss guard. Well, today that's an honorary position, but back in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Swiss had a draft. Every canton, which is equivalent to a state in Switzerland, and there are twenty-two of them, had to produce X number of able-bodied young men once a year, which the Swiss confederacy exported as mercenaries to the kings of France, Italy, Naples and the Pope. As a matter of fact, the French Revolution involved a famous moment of the storming of the Bastille. I don't know if you know that the Bastille was defended by the Swiss Guard, who fell to the last man. Because the Swiss were punctilious about delivering what they contracted to deliver. And if they were told to defend the Bastille, by golly, they defended the Bastille and they fell to the last man, right? Well, in 1848, Rome revolted against the Pope, they massacred the Swiss Guard...(end of tape 3, side 1)

During World War I, the situation had changed drastically, because Switzerland was basically a listening post to both sides. And everybody had not only great interest in leaving Switzerland alone, so they could have their spies in it. I don't know if you know, people like Lenin lived in Zurich until 1917, right? Switzerland was the international intrigue center of the civilized world. Made a lot of money, because everybody was hiding money there. And this, of course, was even stronger during the 1930's and World War II, when as you by now must have heard enough of, everybody who could was smuggling money into Switzerland and the Swiss were perfectly willing to have it.

INT: And forget who it belonged to.

GEORGE: Oh, they knew exactly who it belonged to. You had, the burden of proof was on you. "You mean you don't know the number? Sorry old boy." Right? That was of course the point. They knew exactly who was who. But this was not their responsibility. It was the depositor's responsibility to say the right code words or code number, so it can be released.

INT: So they profited very much by the war.

GEORGE: That's the point I'm making, that Switzerland became incredibly rich within two generations or one generation. They profited in World War I, they profited in World War II, and they profited in between. And that is where the wealth comes form. But it was a sudden wealth. You see, in this country we gradually grew into wealth. You know, I mean, great-grandfather was dirt poor, grandfather was making a living, father was doing very well and we went to an Ivy League school, right? Switzerland, it came suddenly. They were not prepared for it.

INT: Were they anti-Semitic, the Swiss?

GEORGE: No, they were not anti-Semitic. But I remember in one of the cantons, and that was a canton called Obwalden. There's also a canton called Niedwalden, upper forest and lower forest, both had 22,000 inhabitants and had about as much authority as a state in the United States. And in Obwalden I remember once I went to a county hall, which was a lovely sixteenth century building, and I noticed a sign which said, "Marriage license, $5.00 -- for foreigners and other county inhabitants, $10.00. As far as they were concerned, the guys from Niedwalden next door were foreigners. So why do you expect that they would look at the Jews in a different way? Jews were of course foreigners. But so was everybody else who wasn't in the same country or from the same side of the mountain, for all I know, right? Because they were narrow-minded, because they had been raised for centuries in the kind of poverty and drudgery of hard work, which doesn't enable you to give a global view of the world. As far as they were concerned, they have this little village, and nobody else was a foreigner, whether he came from the neighboring canton, or whether he was Jewish. And the Catholics hated the Protestants, and the Protestants hated the Catholics, and everybody hated the Italians. Switzerland has four official languages. And being Swiss, everybody learned at least three out of the four languages. But I don't have to like them. I mean, we all know that if you are a Swiss-German, that the Italians are slobs and the French are haughty. And if you happen to be a

French-Swiss, you know that the German-Swiss are unimaginative and stodgy. All of which was true, by the way. So this is the way...

INT: So you didn't experience any particular anti-Semitic incidents after the war in Switzerland.

GEORGE: I experienced a kind of dislike of foreigners which everybody would expect in this mentality. But see, it doesn't tell you much until you realize that the entire population of Switzerland is as much as the Delaware Valley, four million, right? And they're broken up into twenty-two cantons, each of them having as much independence as a state in the United States has, and heartily dislike everybody else. So this is, under the circumstances, I'm not surprised. And in fact, I was always surprised to notice how my friends never paid any attention to that.

INT: So you stayed in Switzerland for how long?

GEORGE: I stayed in Switzerland for five years.

INT: Finished your education?

GEORGE: I finished my education and in between got married.

INT: Could you talk about that, how you met your wife?

GEORGE: I met my wife, as far as I remember, in front of the rest room of a station.

INT: In Switzerland.

GEORGE: In Switzerland. She came, she was born about a mile from where I was born, and she came to Belsen in the same transport, and she got some other complicated deal, she and her family also got out, also to Switzerland, later, sometime in January or so.

INT: Could you tell me her name, and where she was born and a little bit about her?

GEORGE: Her name was Gabrielle Stern, and she was born smack in the middle of Budapest.

INT: Oh, she was?

GEORGE: She was born within a mile from where I was born. We didn't know each other. Of course I didn't know her, she was four years younger than I, and I wasn't going to talk to a little snot-nosed kid of that age, right?

INT: So you didn't know her family?

GEORGE: Oh, as a matter of fact I did. As a matter of fact, one of my very close friends back in the old country was a guy called Arthur Stern, who I was quite friendly, and we maintained our friendship. After the war he studied in Switzerland too. He studied in Geneva. And one day he came to Zurich to visit. We used to go visiting each other. And

he said, “Do you mind if I bring my kid cousin along? My aunt tells me I have to do that. You know, it’s a pain in the ass, but what the hell.” I said, “Is it a he or a she?” “It’s a she.” “Any looks?” “Yeah, I think she’s all right.” So that’s how I really officially met Gaby.

INT: (Laughs) As a little kid tagging along.

GEORGE: She was sixteen years old, something like that. She was hardly worth looking at. Actually, she was quite good-looking.

INT: So you met her in front of a station, officially.

GEORGE: Well, Arthur as usual was late, and said we are going to meet there, and I went there and I said, “You must be Arthur’s cousin.” And she said, “Yeah, I guess you must be...” And then we vaguely remembered that we had seen each other transitorily, but anyway.

INT: So what happened to her during the war? A similar story?

GEORGE: It’s a very similar story. She also ended up in the same transport to Belsen, and she came on a different transport to Switzerland.

INT: And what was she doing all those years in Switzerland?

GEORGE: She went to college.

INT: And did any of her family survive?

GEORGE: Yes. Yes. As a matter of fact, well, her parents are dead by now, but...her brother, I am still very closely in contact.

INT: Did she lose any family members?

GEORGE: Oh, yes, half her family was killed.

INT: But her parents and siblings were okay?

GEORGE: Well, she only had one brother. And Arthur survived, and his family survived. And Arthur is my closest enemy, insofar that we have known each other now most of our lives, and never stopped fighting.

INT: Really.

GEORGE: It’s a game.

INT: It’s not real?

GEORGE: Oh, well yes, it is real, of course. “How can you be so stupid?” you know, is the argument. I mean, “A person of your background ought to have a little higher I.Q.,

don't you think so?" kind of thing. I remember when Vera was first exposed to this thing, which was a visit to...they live in Los Angeles, in Beverly Hills, actually. He has made quite a career. And he is very well-to-do.

INT: What does he do?

GEORGE: Well, he was an engineer and he finally ended up as the president of Magnavox, Mangavox Systems, which is a separate group of Magnavox.

INT: And he was a friend of yours from before the war?

GEORGE: Oh, yes. And the reason I mention it, it may have some relevance to it. Arthur knows fully well that one of the things I resent is being called a survivor. Because I think I don't want to cash in on six million people's lives, to make a career out of it. So last time we visited them, which was the first time Vera was exposed to that thing, we went to shul together, where he introduced me to his friends. Beverly Hills happens to be somewhat on the upper socio-economic range, and he is a poor man; he is a multi-millionaire, but he is a poor man in that synagogue. And he used to go around, and said, "This is my friend, George, my oldest friend. He is a survivor." And I said, "As a matter of fact, we met before I was a survivor. We met when you were still a Trotskyite." (Laughs) So, in that circle, being a Trotskyite wasn't exactly a recommendation. He tries to deny it that he ever was; he was.

INT: Why does it annoy you so much to be called a survivor?

GEORGE: What?

INT: Why does it bother you to be called a survivor?

GEORGE: Because it has a connotation.

INT: Which is?

GEORGE: Which is that people who's...it's like, how shall I put it? It's like saying, "Here's a guy who survived a traffic accident." I mean, the accident wasn't my doing, my survival wasn't my merit, so why talk about it? Right?

INT: To what do you credit your survival?

GEORGE: (pause) It's a random event. I was no better or worse than many other people. It's purely random. Once you realize that it's a random event, it gives you a certain humility, you know. That it wasn't your capable management of the situation that did it.

INT: You never did anything in those months in Bergen-Belsen to help your own survival?

GEORGE: Well, yes and no, but mostly it was random.

INT: And what about G-d? Does G-d come into it at all for you?

GEORGE: I feel it is a certain amount of arrogance to presume G-d is going to guard me personally.

INT: And not the others?

GEORGE: I can't imagine, assuming that there was such a thing, which I have no way of proving or disproving, why should He have personally supervised my survival? I had no claim for it. I have known many, many better people than I who did not survive, and therefore it means...I mean, what has He got to do with it? Whatever His scheme is, I don't know, I'm not privy to it, therefore I cannot judge. So where I look at it, it's a random event.

INT: It's a scientific way of looking at it in a way.

GEORGE: It's the only way I can look at things, right? And as I said, I consider it an arrogant assumption to assume that I have a personal contact with the Kodesh Baruch Hu, and that is why I survived. That's either arrogant or childish, depending on how you look at it. Neither of them is something I particularly feel like doing.

INT: So it was a random event.

GEORGE: It was a random event.

INT: And so being called a survivor gives you credit for something that...is that what you're saying?

GEORGE: It gives you a kind of...cachet. Which I have no reason to assume I deserve, or have any reason to assume at all. So...

INT: So that's one of your fights with Arthur Stern.

GEORGE: No, my friend Arthur Stern, he knows fully well that I don't like it, just as I know fully well that he doesn't want to be reminded of his left-wing activities back in our student days. So this is the kind of thing. But we are, as a matter of fact, his grandson was named Gabriel, even though he denies it, and his daughter denies that he named after Gaby.

INT: Let's talk about your wife a little bit, though. What attracted you to her, and how long was your courtship, and why did you decide to marry her?

GEORGE: We were students together. It wasn't an easy thing, because we came from such a widely different background. I mean she came from a good Orthodox background. And of course at the age of sixteen she revolted and became a wild Communist.

INT: Really!

GEORGE: Oh, yes.

INT: How did that happen, did she ever tell you?

GEORGE: Of course she told me.

INT: Who influenced her, or...

GEORGE: Whatever the influence was at the age of sixteen. Anatole France said, "Anybody below the age of thirty who is not a socialist has no heart. Anybody above the age of forty who is still a socialist has no brains." So at the age of sixteen one can understand that you want to change the world. Frankly, the world does need changing. And every generation came to the conclusion that radical changes have to be done, and surely we understand that.

INT: So did she chuck the whole theology and belief system?

GEORGE: Oh, yes, she was a wild Communist. Which was very funny, you know, because I never was. And I considered it hilarious.

INT: Why weren't you political, growing up, as a teenager?

GEORGE: A skeptic, a political agnostic, just as I was a religious agnostic. You cannot take these things seriously, or I cannot take these things seriously.

INT: Why not?

GEORGE: Because people who take themselves seriously are pompous. Right? And probably nobody is as pompous as for instance a good Communist. I mean, not for nothing do we have the politically correct statement, right? I mean, they are so humorless about the darn thing. And there are very few people among Orthodoxies who have got enough sense of humor to see the possible justification of somebody else's religious beliefs. And...I may add that one of the interesting characters in my early life was a guy called Irvin Friedman, who was a cousin of Gaby's-their mothers were sisters-and he was one of the few guys who has never showed any judgment about my feelings or way of life, or what have you. The reason why it is interesting, because he married Vera.

INT: Oh, okay. That was her first husband.

GEORGE: That was her first husband. So Irvin and I have known each other long before Vera and he knew each other. He was very, one of the few guys who was not judgmental.

INT: He was religious?

GEORGE: Very.

INT: But not judgmental of people.

GEORGE: Not judgmental. We could get along very well, despite the fact that we had wide gaps between us. Which of course now comes in very good stead, because my children are willing to accept me, vice-versa, and we are getting along very nicely. I'm talking of the Friedman gang.

INT: Yeah. They're amazing. So your first wife, did she come back to a religious belief system after the war, or she always stayed as a Communist?

GEORGE: Oh, G-d, no! I mean, nobody can stay long as a Communist. I mean, she went back after the war to Hungary, and then came out again by various shady means.

INT: To Switzerland?

GEORGE: To Switzerland. And had seen-by then she was seventeen and she had seen all that was Communist, Stalinism, actually.

INT: She was disenchanted.

GEORGE: And it was basically, I think, I have a vague feeling, it's difficult to prove it, and I certainly don't think her...but I think it was really thumbing her nose at Father, who took himself too seriously about his...You see, Father was a very religious, but in a very peculiar way. The motto was, "What will people say?" See, he never objected to me not wearing a hat. "But in public, you know, my son, you have to wear a hat, because what will people say?" And I said, "I thought we're doing it for the sake of the Kadosh Boruch Hu, and surely He sees me, whether I'm alone or not." So anyway, Gaby was thumbing her nose at Father.

INT: So what made you decide to marry this woman?

GEORGE: For a very naive, simple thing: we fell in love.

INT: Did you. So it was a love story.

GEORGE: We never fell out of love. And of course, then came the moment when our children were born.

INT: Well, wait a minute. Wait a minute.

GEORGE: No, no. I have to tell you that thing, because that is of course when you have to make a decision of what are you going to do with your, how are you going to raise, what kind of family atmosphere are you going to produce? And this is when we became really Orthodox in the sense that we did all the necessary things to make sure that our children know where they stand.

INT: So that was a joint decision that the two of you came to?

GEORGE: Yeah.

INT: Okay. The decision to marry, did it take a while, was there a long courtship?

GEORGE: Of course it took a while. How can you get married on $200 a month? And I wasn't going to accept any support from my in-laws.

INT: And you were four years older than your wife?

GEORGE: Four years. And after, when I graduated -- and I did reasonably well -- and I went to one of my professors and said, "I need a job." I was just ready to get married. In my circles, you got married when you finished your education. Right? I was now ready to work and I was ready to get married, so I needed a job. "Well, you have no problem," said he. "And let me write you a letter or recommendation. No, as a matter of fact," said he, "let me call up this guy and you will report to him." So I went to see this guy, he was in Zurich. And he said, "Well, Professor Baumer thinks so highly of you, there's no doubt that we can use you. And your class standing," I was pretty much at the top of my class. "And as soon as you get a permit to work, because you are not a citizen." So I went to the canton police and I said, "I need a permit to work." And they said, "Well, in order to get a permit to work, we need a written statement from the company that they are offering you a job." So I went back and said, "I need a written statement that you are offering me a job." "Oh, no, I cannot do that. You first have to show us a permit." So Catch-22 in its Swiss version. I never got a job. I worked illegally at half the wages.

INT: Is this because they didn't want you to stay? Now that you had finished your education it was time for you to move on?

GEORGE: Well, yes, probably they would have gotten me, but there was this Swiss bureaucracy, you know. You cannot get, it says here, you cannot get a permit to work unless you get a written statement that someone wants to hire you. And we cannot give you an offer until...So at that point, Julie was on her way. So we decided that clearly Switzerland is no place to raise a child. This was, you know, it's difficult to understand, for instance, that you don't become a Swiss citizen. You become a citizen of a canton, and each canton had its own arcane rules.

INT: So you had to stay in that canton for the rest of your life?

GEORGE: Well, after a while the Swiss confederacy has a reciprocity arrangement that you can then move to another canton. But during the war and for a long time after the answer was no. A citizen of the canton Bern did not get a permit to work in Zurich unless he had gotten from the war effort point of view an important job to do or some such thing. You couldn't pick yourself up and move to the next canton. This has changed eventually, but at that time it was very strong. As a matter of fact, I had a friend of mine who was born in Switzerland. His parents were Polish and came some time during the 1910's and 1920's to Switzerland, where they settled. They never became Swiss citizens because of this back and forth thing. They didn't need it. He was a businessman and didn't need it. But poor old Alvin graduated from med school, and found out that he cannot practice, because his parents were not citizens, and therefore he was no citizen. And as no citizen, he could not practice. He was born in Switzerland. And so his parents,

with great hurry, became Swiss citizens with a lot of pull. He then had to take his exams over. This was a guy who was born in Switzerland.

So clearly, this was no place to give birth to a child. So someone said the place to go is England, because England is one of the few countries where, if you are born in the country, you automatically become a citizen if you so desire. So we smuggled Julie into England by asking for a visitor visa, which we got, and Gaby was in her seventh month, but she had one of these elegant voluminous overcoats which hid this small fact. And "Why are you going to visit England?" "I don't know, I want to see the Tower of London, sir, and Buckingham Palace, and such." So we got in, and eventually Julie was born in London. Now, since Julie was born in London, she was a British citizen and you couldn't very well deport her mother; after all, who was going to feed her?

INT: So this was all planned out. You had planned all this.

GEORGE: Yes, sort of, kind of. In a very general way. It was again more or less luck.

INT: Did you know anyone in England? Any contacts?

GEORGE: Yes. Yes. I happened to have a very good friend of mine, whom I had known before the war. It's a she. And we all knew about her, that she was somewhere in London. So one day we walked down the street and bumped into her. This may not be an important thing, except for the fact that she took one look at Gaby and said, "When do you expect? Do you have an obstetrician?" She said, "No." She said, "You are an idiot." She's a rather blunt person. "In this country, nine months and one day before your expected childbirth you have to choose your obstetrician and your hospital. Otherwise, you're not going to be able to get in. How are you going to give birth to this whatever it is going to be?" So I said in my best elegant way, "Huh?" And she said, "Well, let me tell you how to do that." So she told me how to do that, and we did that. And then she said, "Do you have the necessary things to clothe and bathe and shelter a baby?" And I said, "Does one have to do these things?" And she once again expressed her disapproval of our mental state, and organized it. She is basically, she claims that she gave birth to Julie. As a matter of fact, she's coming every year to us for Pesach. And we have a fight every time.

INT: Over?

GEORGE: Almost everything. (Laughs) So anyway...

INT: So Julie was born in London.

GEORGE: Julie was born in London. So somebody said that there is somebody here who used to be a big shot in one of the companies. I really don't know which one, but why don't you call him? So I called him. This was about as close as I got to connections. Of course, I didn't realize that there was a great shortage of skilled people in England at that time. It was the end of the war. So he sent me to somebody and that somebody turned out to be General Electric, their research division. And the guy said, "Well, you are here as a tourist, aren't you?" And I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "How are you going to do that?"

I said, “Here we go again. I have been through that in Switzerland.” (End of tape 3, side 2)

INT: [You were talking about] the difference between the British and the Swiss.

GEORGE: I went to the Home Office and there was this guy who said, “Oh, I say, this is rather difficult, you know. I think you ought to go back to where you came from, and then apply formally.” I said, “Look, I have a child born in this country and this makes her a British subject. What do you want to do with her?” And the chap said, “Well, I’ll tell you what. We’ll give you a six month visa. If you still have the same job after six months, we’ll give you a permanent visa.” So I said, “It’s a deal.” So I spent five years in England.

INT: In London?

GEORGE: No, Manchester. And after five years I was having a very important research position and I was starving. They don’t pay. It’s mostly prestige. By then I had several papers with major awards and all that kind of thing. It didn’t pay for the baby bottles. By then we also had Barbara, who was born in Manchester. And my in-laws came to, a couple of years before that, to this country, and told us, why the heck don’t I come to this country? Well, this is something which is difficult to understand for anybody who was born and raised in this country, like you, of what it means to come to the United States. And it’s now very easy, but at that time it was much worse. There was a quota system. It was called the McCarran-Walter Act, may they fry in hell, both of them. They were singularly disagreeable rashaim, and they formulated the quota system so that they matched the ethnic origin of the United States of 1870. That was before the great Eastern European immigration. The English quota a year was 60,000. The Hungarian quota was 900. Translation: if you were born in Hungary, you could never get into this country. If you were born in England, you could get here within twenty-four hours. My father-in-law was born in what is now Poland. And there was no Poland at that time. But that doesn’t prevent the idiocy of the McCarran-Walter Act to say he is a Polish origin by birth. And the Polish quota happens to be quite good. There were a lot of Polish immigrants around the 1860’s. And that’s how the Polish quota was very good. So he got into this country with no great difficulty.

And furthermore, he was able to bring in, of course, his minor children. So it turned out that one of his children was no longer a minor, but at the time of the application filled in, she was still a minor, and therefore she qualified as a minor child. By then, of course, when he came over, she was not only not a minor, but she was married with two children. But she still qualified under the Polish quota, a country she’s never set eyes upon. And furthermore, she could bring with her, her children and her husband, who had never seen Poland in his life, either. So this is the kind of thing which I have done all my life, of falling into situations without any merit of my own, and it was simply there, and lo and behold, I came into this country with no great difficulties at all.

INT: Let me ask you something, you started out in Hungary, you ended up in Switzerland, England and America, and each time you went to another country...

GEORGE: Don't forget five years of England.

INT: No, I said England. But each country that you went to, how did you adapt to life there? Did you find it difficult in each country?

GEORGE: It was fun.

INT: It was fun. Coping and adapting was fun.

GEORGE: Sure.

INT: Because you knew the language? Or did that help? I mean, some people did not find it easy, you know, you didn't have any difficulty.

GEORGE: No, and by the way, each step was an improvement over the previous step.

INT: Better living conditions, and better...or easier? Easier adaptation?

GEORGE: Not the living conditions. The feeling of belonging. You see, Switzerland was, of course, a major improvement over a Nazi country, anyway, right? Not that I have great love for the Swiss, but in spite of that, they are certainly better than were the SS, right? And as I said, the difference between England and Switzerland I just described, because they both played the same game, that you cannot get a permit to stay unless you have a job, and vice-versa. But the English didn't take it seriously, right? And as a matter of fact, England, even though we Jews don't have any great love for the English, happen to be a very decent people. I happen to have great admiration.

Just to show you the kind of people they are, rashaim though they may be, in 1956 there was a revolution in Hungary, and my father decided he had enough of Hungary -- I think I told you that story last time. I couldn't get them into this country because I was not a citizen. And the McCarran-Walter Act was still valid. And I could have gotten a priority immigration if I could have been a citizen, which I wasn't. So I called up a friend of mine in England and I said, "What can I do? Can I get them into England?" And the man said, "Oh, I say, old chap, let me look into it. Perhaps there is a chance." And what I didn't know, only much later, that he went to his MP and deposited if needed his entire assets to prove that these people should not be a burden to the state, and six months later my parents were in London.

INT: Was this a Jewish man?

GEORGE: Yes, sort of. Nominally so. It had nothing to do with Jewish. First of all, they went through several layers of bureaucracy, all of whom considered it perfectly normal to let these people come in, even though my father was seventy-some years old, my mother was seriously ill.

INT: Now during all this time that you were in England and Switzerland, were you in contact with your parents?

GEORGE: Oh, yes, we wrote to each other. As a matter of fact, I even visited them once by some shady deals, which I still shudder, of how I dared to do that thing of going through various borders without any valid documentation.

INT: What year was that?

GEORGE: 1948.

INT: And what was that like for you, going back to Hungary?

GEORGE: I went back to see my parents, and those of my friends who still survived. And as far as I'm concerned, the only good Hungarian is a dead Hungarian. But then again.

INT: So coming to America, what were your thoughts about America? Did you have any preference for the country you wanted to live in? And what about Israel? Did Israel come into it at all for you?

GEORGE: Well, Israel at that time wouldn't have been able to give me a job in my field.

INT: Not in the 50's.

GEORGE: Not in the 50's. And I remember very clearly, we came over with the Cunard liner, and we lined up on the side of the vessel as the morning rays hit what I later realized must have been Brooklyn. And two things were noticeable. One of them was what must have been the Belt Parkway, and watching this huge amount of cars at these incredible speeds. For somebody who came from Europe, where an automobile was an unheard of luxury, and streets were not designed for driving cars in, I mean, watching these guys' cars go by, if you remember that stretch of Belt Parkway, which goes right by what is Brooklyn's shoreline, Sheepshead Bay, it was an incredible sight. And the other sight was the neon sign flashing, saying, "No Calorie Beer."

INT: It was a little tacky, also.

GEORGE: Coming from a part of the world where people literally killed for calories, that somebody makes a virtue of selling something which has no calories, was something absolutely incredible.

INT: It was like another planet.

GEORGE: The idea that you are actually advertising that this beer has no calories -- what good is it, said I to myself, "How are you going to get calories?" Little did I know that my main problem was going to be how to fend off calories. But it is an interesting impression you get.

INT: What was your idea of America before you got there?

GEORGE: Oh, I can tell you exactly what my idea of America was. Two things. Number one, it was the middle of the McCarthy era. And knowing that I came from a country, and I still had family in a Communist country, I was petrified of what the FBI or the CIA, or whoever it is going to be is going to do with me as soon as I land. It came to the point that before I left, a friend of mine gave me a bottle of vodka. And I said, "I can't take a Russian drink to America."

INT: It was a scary time.

GEORGE: Well, yes. And when I arrived it was in the middle of the baseball season, and I found that nobody, the headlines of all the papers involved whether the Yankees were going to win the National League or not. And nobody mentioned the name Joe McCarthy. And I realized that we in Europe had a totally different idea of what America looked like. And nobody here cared a damn about this guy. And we were petrified of what is going to happen to us.

INT: So where did you settle?

GEORGE: In a place called Philadelphia.

INT: Oh, you went straight to Philadelphia.

GEORGE: We came straight to Philadelphia. Well, I had a job with a company which was a subsidiary of an English company whom I had some contacts with, and gave me a letter of recommendation.

INT: So that's good. You didn't have to come here jobless.

GEORGE: Well, but it wasn't as simple. Because we landed, and a week later Gaby was in the hospital with a gall bladder surgery, and two weeks later both of our children had the measles. One thing I did not have was health insurance. And I paid it off for years. It's something which is again difficult to understand, of what it is like when you have no health insurance.

INT: So where did you settle in Philadelphia?

GEORGE: Elkins Park.

INT: And the kids were how old?

GEORGE: Julie just started first grade.

INT: So they were still very young.

GEORGE: Oh, yes.

INT: And they knew English, because they lived in England.

GEORGE: As a matter of fact, they didn't. As a matter of fact, Julie arrived here and spoke an absolutely brogue Lancashire. (Imitates it) The first thing they did, they sent her to a speech therapist. Six months later, she spoke Philadelphian, for G-d's sake. (Interviewer laughs)

INT: So adjusting in this country was easy also?

GEORGE: It is difficult to understand what this country is like compared to Europe, until you have lived in both. We lived in Manchester. Actually, not in Manchester, just as we don't live in Philadelphia. We lived in a suburb of Manchester. And for four years the only connection I had with my neighbors was saying, I say, "Good morning, nice day." And you didn't have, couldn't go any further. Strangely enough, when we decided to leave England, somehow somebody found out and all of a sudden several people came to visit us, saying, "I say, I understand you want to go to Yankeeland? And just when we are so close." And I realized we were actually liked. Now this compared to arriving in Elkins Park, it was a place called Linwood Gardens, I don't know if you know that place. It is basically, at that time it was a very nice developed garden-type development. And it had the great advantage, everyone was about the same age. And we put down our suitcases and five minutes later somebody came in and said, "I see you are moving in. Come and have coffee." And from then on we were never alone.

INT: Did you like that?

GEORGE: After Europe, it was a mechaya. After a while it came a little bit, it became a little too much of a good thing, because we really had very little in common with those people. But the fact that we arrived in a strange -- and I've been a stranger in many countries and in many cities, it was the first place I literally didn't have time to put my suitcase down when somebody was already at the door and asking us to have a cup of coffee with us. And that is an incredible feeling. And the great openness and friendliness, which you take for granted, because you lived here all your life, is incredible.

INT: So you enjoyed it.

GEORGE: I felt at home. I have never felt as much...as I said, every step in my...

INT: Is a little better?

GEORGE: Much better. I mean, I felt at home. I belong here. And I felt so forty-eight hours after I landed. That's now true; I first had to go through that whole business of hospital stuff.

INT: That must have been awful.

GEORGE: Actually, it wasn't long. We arrived in May, in this country, and July 1st I had a job, and July 15th we all had an apartment, and lived together happily ever after. So it wasn't that long, but of course, it did look a long feeling of insecurity.

INT: Could you talk a little bit about your relationship with your wife? How would you describe the marriage over the years?

GEORGE: It's very difficult to explain that we were in love for forty-one years. Till death did us part. It's particularly difficult to realize, because I am in love with my wife again, which is...I don't know how to explain that.

INT: It's very wonderful.

GEORGE: I don't know.

INT: Well, they say that people who were happily married the first time can be happily married the second time, too.

GEORGE: Yeah, well we both have the same advantage in that respect, right? We have been very close, Vera and I, all of our lives, or half of our lives. It wasn't very surprising.

INT: Can you describe your first wife, what kind of personality she was?

GEORGE: She claims she was five foot tall. I think she lied a little bit.

INT: On which side?

GEORGE: (laughs) I don't think she quite made five feet. She was short. And she was the typical Jewish mother. She ran our family with an iron fist. She was a superb cook, an extremely well-organized housewife. She was at one stage, at the peak of her career, a vice-president of a major corporation where she worked sixty hours a week. She was also at that time the chairman of the American Chemical Society, one of the largest organizations, professional society of the world. And she did all this at the same time.

INT: That's quite amazing.

GEORGE: And one day she said she had enough, and she wants to stop and do her own thing. And a year later she got sick.

INT: What was her "own thing" that she wanted to do?

GEORGE: Well, we still do it. I mean, I'm still running her company. It's called Info Consult, and it's an information retrieval system company. And while it was running by her, it was doing quite well. It's really a part-time job for me, so I don't take it too seriously. I have a full-time associate of mine who runs it, and I have a couple of consultants who I can farm out projects to if I need to. But it's, well, we aren't doing badly, but it was really her doing, and I really continue because it was a good thing, and why would I want to give it up?

INT: It sounds like she was a very dynamic person, if she could do all that, and juggle all that, that's pretty amazing. Did she have a sense of humor, was she a good foil for you? How did that work?

GEORGE: Oh, yes. That is of course what's so wonderful with Vera. Vera is exactly the same. We used to fight every hour.

INT: Which, your first wife?

GEORGE: Both of them. But this is a kind of sparring. Gaby's last words to me were, she was by that time, well, it was thirty-four hours before she died. I said, "You know, it's very difficult to do," said I to Julie. She opened her eyes and said, "Oh, George," and those were her last words. And strangely enough, Vera refers to me as, "Oh, George," all the time. So I guess they all got me straight. Anyway.

INT: So it was a very good relationship.

GEORGE: Oh, yes.

INT: Who made the decisions in the family, would you say?

GEORGE: Well, let me put it this way. Last birthday of Vera's, I bought her a little brooch. She used to go around and say at the top of her voice, "I am like a lemmele. I always follow what you are doing." So I bought her a brooch of a little lamb. Of course, everybody knows that I am under the thumb of the women in my life, and I had plenty of them, because my life was run by my grandmother, and then by my mother, and then by my wife, and my children, all of whom are of the female...

INT: Female persuasion. (Laughs)

GEORGE: And so I feel naturally into situations and they tell me what to do. She claims I am bullying her, and I claim she is bullying me, and a great lot of fun is being had by all.

INT: But when you were married to Gaby and you were raising your children, who would make the decisions about the kids?

GEORGE: I have no idea.

INT: Oh. It just got done?

GEORGE: I have no idea. We probably argued it vociferously. Ira told me that it was one of the most shattering experiences when he first had dinner with us, long before they were married. He said, "It was the four of you sitting and talking in half-words, mostly insulting each other. And I had to figure out who is saying what to whom and whether they are fighting or whether they are being nice to each other." He learned very rapidly.

INT: That that's just the way it is, that's the way you communicate.

GEORGE: Yes.

INT: What about education for the kids? You talked about how you and Gaby decided to raise the children with a Jewish lifestyle. And whether a belief in G-d came into that or not was irrelevant, basically. Is that right?

GEORGE: We were doing it because that's the way it's done. And it was really funny. My first impression of how these things really work came when...Julie was a very nice girl. Barbara was always a rebel who fought every inch of the way. She is like her mother. And the moment came, they went to Akiba. And Akiba, of course, has a large number of non-practicing Jewish kids, and inevitably, every social event took place on Friday nights. And there was huge fights. "Why can I not go?" "Because we don't do that." You know, door slamming.

INT: This is with Barbara?

GEORGE: That's Barbara. Julie also did a lot of door slamming. Everybody slammed doors all the time in this house.

INT: Did you slam doors? You said you threw things.

GEORGE: Oh, yes, I also slammed doors, yes. Anyway, "I wish I were dead," kind of remarks were flying. But you know, what did you say when you were sixteen? You were sixteen years old not very long ago. What were you to your parents?

INT: I was doing the same thing. (Laughs)

GEORGE: Yes, of course. So, "Everybody is out there having fun and games, and I am supposed to sit with this stupid Friday night! I wish I were dead!" Bang. And this went on for about two subsequent Shabbasim. The third Shabbas there was a knock on the door, and in walked a couple of young gentlemen and said, "Well, Barbara doesn't want to go out, so can we come here?" At the height of this activity I once counted -- Gaby of course said, "Take your shoes off. It's raining outside." And at the height of this activity I once counted twenty pairs of shoes on a Friday night.

INT: So your house became the hangout.

GEORGE: We were the center.

INT: So you didn't give in. You didn't give in and say, "Go ahead and go out."

GEORGE: No, of course not.

INT: So they came to the girls.

GEORGE: And what is very interesting, some of those kids I still have contact. They all turned frummies. Several of them made aliyah. In a way it was really our contribution to kiruv, or whatever it was.

INT: So what were your goals and expectations for the girls? What did you want for them?

GEORGE: I don't know.

INT: Was education a big one?

GEORGE: Education is not a goal. Education is a tool. You cannot survive in this country without a specialized education. Because this country...I mean, gone are the days when you are a seventh grade dropout and become a millionaire after ten years' time. Yes, it still exists but the odds are heavily weighed against it. You cannot survive unless you have a skilled trade, and it doesn't matter whether you are male or female. It so happened that both of my children, it was really saving their family life that they had a skilled trade, salable commodities. Because both of them helped their husbands through college. And Ira, when he started out in his business, and of course, nobody makes money in the first two years. And if Julie wouldn't have had a quite well-paying job, they would have had difficulties. So in fact it was...

INT: It was very practical.

GEORGE: It was exactly as...

INT: Okay. So that was not a goal. That was a tool.

GEORGE: That was not a goal. That was necessary, because without that thing, you can't live.

INT: Okay, but what else did you want for them? When they were little, and you thought in terms of the future?

GEORGE: I never did.

INT: You didn't think.

GEORGE: I never did. And later they all developed very, very differently. And...I disagree fully with both of them, as a matter of fact with all six of them. Bu they all seem to be doing okay.

INT: Why do you disagree with them?

GEORGE: Because it's not the way I want to live, and they live their own way, and I can't blame them for it. But I don't have to approve of it.

INT: What do you not like about the way they live? You can't say?

GEORGE: Well, they are all very nice kids. Not only my own kids, but my larger, general...

INT: Well, let's talk about Vera a little bit. You've always known her, right? For a very long time?

GEORGE: For the last thirty years or so.

INT: So after your wife passed away, how soon after that did you marry her? Had her husband passed away first?

GEORGE: Her husband passed away five years earlier.

INT: Okay. And then was it just a natural thing?

GEORGE: Well, it was a very funny thing. Our courtship lasted exactly three hours. I called her up one day, I said, "Would you like to have dinner with me?" She says, "How do you do that?" I said, "Well, I'll come to new York, provided you find a place, because I don't know New York." She lived in New York at the time. So we went to this place on the Lower East Side, which was an American-Jewish place. It has gone out of business since then. And I said, "Would you like to have a glass of wine?" And she looked at me and said, "What's wrong with a bottle?" And I was hooked.

INT: (laughs) That was it.

GEORGE: And we knew it. That was it.

INT: It just clicked.

GEORGE: Yes. Well, you see, it wasn't very difficult insofar as...the point is, of course, that when you are...we had been spending twenty years going together to places and everything else. But I mean, she was my brother's...(End tape 4, side 1) And we realized we liked what we saw. End of story.

INT: We started off the interview where you were saying that she's very opposite to you as far as you're very scientific and she's very artistic.

GEORGE: But so was Gaby.

INT: And that was okay. And that works.

GEORGE: What has that got to do with it?

INT: Well, you look at the world differently, don't you, or not?

GEORGE: Yes and no. We arrive at the same conclusions most of the time. But I don't know.

INT: So her children were all married already?

GEORGE: Oh, no. As a matter of fact...oh, when we got married, yes, they were all married, except one.

INT: Right. And he's still not married.

GEORGE: The little baby who cannot make up his darn mind.

INT: Well, give him time. How old is he?

GEORGE: Very old. Twenty-nine.

INT: Oh, please. He's got time.

GEORGE: Oh, yes. Well, anyway.

INT: The families all blended together very well?

GEORGE: Well, I was at every one of their weddings. That's not true. I wasn't at Joey's wedding. Although I had the airline ticket, because that's when Gaby was in the hospital. The other ones I all attended. As a matter of fact, I attended their bris, or whatever, from there on. I know those kids since they were born.

INT: So that made it very easy, I guess. I just have a few more general questions. And one of them is, how would you consider yourself, an optimist or a pessimist?

GEORGE: I don't know what that means. (Doorbell interruption) You were asking an unanswerable question, whether I'm an optimist or a pessimist, and I don't know what that means.

INT: Do you look at life hopefully?

GEORGE: I don't know what that means, because according to all the wives I owned, I have been a worrier. The official statement is that I always see the hole in the Swiss cheese. And my statement is, "If you know the Swiss, you will see the hole in the cheese anyway."

INT: So your worrying is a practical worry. It's based on...

GEORGE: My worrying is very simple; it's a defense mechanism. If you assume that don't worry, things will get screwed up, there are two possibilities. Either you will get the feeling of, I told you so, or else things come out better, in which case you are very happy things came out better, so you can't lose in that process. But I don't know what that means.

INT: Okay. But you are a worrier, you would say.

GEORGE: Of course I'm a worrier.

INT: What do you worry about?

GEORGE: Just about everything. But it is not really deep-down worrying. I don't know.

INT: Okay. Why do you think the Holocaust happened?

GEORGE: It was almost inevitable, given the combination of what Europe stood for, for hundreds of years, which basically consisted of governments who, wherever they screwed up things, had a perfectly good excuse, and that was all the Jews' fault. The aristocrats who felt that it isn't they who are exploiting the peasantry, it's the Jews. And the Church who, well, the Catholic Church, of course, had a reputation from Constantine the Great onward as being of firm opinion that the Jews who are the Christ-killers, and as a matter of fact, they in a way got hoisted by their own petard. Because according to the Church dogma, Christ will return to this earth when the last Jew saw the light and got converted. On the other hand, the fact that the Jews are the Christ-killers, they should all be killed. But if you kill them all, then who is going to be converted? So the Messiah will never be able to come back. So they had a schizophrenic position. And they solved it by the simple expedient of killing half the Jews. As a matter of fact, Pope Paul IV figured out a way of doing it, and that was to form what is now called an Indian reservation, which is that he collected his Jews in a place which originally was a foundry, and foundry in Italian is "ghetto" and that's where the word ghetto comes from. So the ghetto was really an attempt, trying to preserve a few Jews so that there's someone to convert. Given this attitude of the Church, it is not surprising that they contributed their little best to it. And it had to happen somewhere, sometime, sooner or later, as it happened all the time. The only difference was the Germans were so damn efficient.

INT: So you see it as a continuation of history, just on a larger scale than pogroms in the past.

GEORGE: During the Emperor Justinian, we have been...you remember that's the time when they sent spies to every congregation to watch if they are preaching against the Holy Trinity. And one of the problems was what to do with the Shema, which clearly says that He is one, not three. So they moved it in the order of davening to the end of the Mussaf, when they hoped the spies had got bored to death and went home. I mean, that was 500 something A.D. And you know, if you look at the figures of the number of people they killed, they were a very appreciable number.

INT: Why do you think people have hated the Jews all through the centuries?

GEORGE: We are different. What is really surprising to me is that we survived it. And that is really the miracle about the thing. It's not that we are being massacred, every hundred years there is another...If you have ever looked at the story of the Khmelnytsky pogrom, there were 300,000 Jews killed. That represented something like 10% of the Jewish population of the world at that time.

INT: In horrible ways, also.

GEORGE: Oh, yes. So you look, every moment there was something somewhere going on.

INT: So do you think it can happen again?

GEORGE: Of course it can happen again. Where is it going to happen is something not clear to me at this point.

INT: Could you tell me, looking back on your life, how would you say you've coped with the difficulties in your life? How did you cope getting through the war, how did you cope after the war, moving to strange countries, and how did you cope with difficult losses? What is your mechanism? What do you use to get through it all?

GEORGE: I told you when I was in my first student year I collected my first books in preference of buying food. And one of the things I bought was the collected works of Voltaire, which at that time I read avidly, and I still think it's one of the best things written in modern history, even though he was a damn anti-Semite himself. And in particular I'm thinking of Candide. Have you ever read Candide?

INT: Yes, but in college. I don't remember.

GEORGE: Do you remember the last scene in Candide, when Candide, old and scarred, is puttering around his house and his friend Pangloss comes to visit him and asks him, "You had this dreadful experiences, one after the other, all your life. What did you learn from it?" And Candide says, "We have to cultivate our garden."

INT: You go on living?

GEORGE: You do what you must do. And things will take care of themselves. You have no control over it anyway, so you might as well go on doing what you must do.

INT: What about memory and nightmares? What do you do with that? Did you ever have nightmares after the war?

GEORGE: All the time.

INT: Do you still have them?

GEORGE: Yes.

INT: How do you deal with that?

GEORGE: Wake up. I'm sleeping with my radio next to my bed. Turn on the radio, listen to a little bit of the night concert of WFLN (classical music station) for about half an hour, fall asleep again. It doesn't matter. It is part of our baggage.

INT: Do you have the nightmares more frequently at some times in your life and not others? Or was it more frequent after the war?

GEORGE: It is difficult to say. I try to forget it. Do you ever remember your dreams? No, you don't.

INT: I do.

GEORGE: For how long?

INT: It depends on the dream, I guess. Some of them I still remember.

GEORGE: Oh, well, yes. But if you are a healthy person, you forget it. And if you are a healthy person, you get over these things. These are scars which are known as life.

INT: What do you do with the memories of what you went through in the war? What do you do with that?

GEORGE: Memories are a very useful thing. They represent basically a summary of your experiences. One way I did is I wrote it down. That's how my books are being written.

INT: That's right. You wrote some books.

GEORGE: The way Vera is handling it, she paints. And one day I want to show you her paintings. I want to show you when she's not here, because when she's here officially and formally I have to describe them in dreadful terms.

INT: (Laughs) What have you written, though? What have you written about your experiences? Have you written an autobiography?

GEORGE: Yes. Didn't I tell you? I have so far finished volume two.

INT: Does that help, to write it down?

GEORGE: No, but it's important for my children and mostly my grandchildren, so that they know what the background is. And that they have to know. They don't think they need it now. They will need it thirty years from now, and I won't be around to tell them, so they might as well have it.

INT: So in summary I think what you said is that to cope, you go on cultivating your garden, and you continue with your life and you don't look back?

GEORGE: You have to. Well, you cannot avoid looking back. But you cannot have it control your life. You have to continue and do what you have to do. End of story. I know people who were caught up in that Holocaust business and never got over it. They never lived after it. They just went around. I have a cousin of mine, actually she's Gaby's cousin, who had a very nice husband who suddenly and unexpectedly died very young, and she has converted her apartment into a shrine to him. And it's goose-fleshing to enter the place. I don't know how she can live. Of course, she doesn't live. She's just a curator of the museum. And that is a dreadful thing to do. I mean, both Vera and I have got, what Julie calls, we came with baggage, right? And it is a very...delicate matter, not to try and hurt the other one through the memories, right, and make sure that you say the right thing and not accidentally bump into it. Because we all have, after all, we spent, what, she thirty, I forty years with our first spouse. And...

INT: It's difficult.

GEORGE: No, it isn't. But it needs a certain amount of...

INT: Delicacy.

GEORGE: Delicacy. And this is what we call love, you know, that you understand what the other one is thinking, and are careful not to bump into it. It works.

INT: One more question, I guess, and that would be, looking back on your life, what would you say are the successes and what would be the regrets, if any, that you have?

GEORGE: I have no regrets. I never had any regrets, or if I had, I've forgotten.

INT: Success?

GEORGE: Well, it's difficult to say what success means. I mean, I have a reasonably successful professional career. I still have a successful career, and I intend to keep it as long as I can. I have nice children. It was very interesting that Saturday night and yesterday everybody called up checking up.

INT: To see if you're okay here by yourself?

GEORGE: Yeah. Julie called yesterday morning. Every Sunday morning we sit down and Vera reads "The New York Times" to me. I have trouble reading newsprint. So Eli called and said, "Can I read the 'The New York Times' on the phone for you?" So that was nice. And Sharon called, and Julie called, and Barbara called, and everybody called, and I wish they would leave me alone a little bit.

INT: It sounds like a loving family.

GEORGE: Yes. It's a nice family. We're all very happy together. Which is interesting. I have seen so many dreadful family problems, especially when you are trying to weld two families together.

INT: It doesn't sound like there's any resentment in this family at all. So is there anything that you'd like to put down for the record, or say, that we haven't covered, or anything that you'd like to add to the tape?

GEORGE: I think I talked too much. So there it is, for what it's worth.

INT: Thank you very, very much.

GEORGE: It was an honor. (End of tape 4.)

INT: This is a continuation of an interview with George Revesz, and it's February 9, 1997. And I had just a few more questions, even though we thought we finished the interview. I had a few more questions that I wanted to ask you that occurred to me. And one of them was your health. If you could talk about any health problems you've had

over the years, and your eyesight in particular, because I saw in looking back at your autobiography that you mentioned hurting your eye in the factory when you were very young.

GEORGE: Well, longevity, like health, is genetic. Since my evidence shows that my great-grandfather, my grandfather, and my father all died well in their mid-eighties, and they furthermore died of what is today a preventable disease in each case, therefore my survival chances, my estimate is that I'm going to die of a steeple-chasing accident at the age of ninety-five. This excludes the possibility of going to work every morning through North Philadelphia. That's not the problem, going to work; coming home is the problem. There is nobody on the street at 7:00 in the morning who can do me damage. But 7:00 at night is something else. Well, it is a peculiar thing, because it really, in one respect, because of course, it was a traumatic event in my life. In retrospect, it probably saved my life.

INT: So could you talk about it, because we didn't discuss that at all.

GEORGE: During the Nazi era, of course, everybody was conscripted into the army. There was certainly no exception made for Jews, except you wouldn't trust Jews with things like weapons. So they were used in what is called forced labor battalions. Their contribution to the Nazi war effort consisted basically of clearing mines, which was simply accomplished by lining them up along the field and ordering them to march across the field. And whenever somebody blew up, the regular army was told to march across by then. The survival rate among those people was very low. Since I had this eye injury, I was exempted in the original draft, as they wouldn't take. I'm not quite sure why, but of course, regulations are not quite clear. I understand why you wouldn't want to take someone who has trouble seeing with both eyes and firing a rifle, but since they wouldn't have entrusted me with a rifle anyway, it didn't make any sense to me, but there it is.

INT: It kept you out.

GEORGE: So it kept me out.

INT: So you weren't sweeping mines.

GEORGE: I wasn't sweeping mines, as compared to most of my buddies.

INT: Well, what happened to your eye and how old were you?

GEORGE: Well, when I graduated from high school, of course, there was no way for me entering college because of the restrictions on admissions by Jews. And I therefore have done a number of things. And one, being an over-achiever one cannot do enough. One thing I was doing, I was entering college without entering college, which was by auditing the courses. But there was a limit of how many classes you could take under those circumstances, so I had to fill up my time. One thing I did is I have a master's degree in dressmaking. And furthermore, I felt this wasn't enough, because it didn't fill up my time, only about fifty hours a week. So I also had once a week gone to a machine shop to learn such things as lathe work and such like. And I wasn't terribly well-trained, nobody

really cared, and nobody ever told me that you drill aluminum with a high-speed drill, but brass is a very low-speed drill, because brass grabs, and it did, and the drill broke and went into my eye.

INT: How old were you when that happened?

GEORGE: I was eighteen and a half.

INT: So what happened to your eye?

GEORGE: Well, I was blind in one eye at the age of eighteen and a half.

INT: Did you have any operations?

GEORGE: Oh yes, several of them. But today they probably could have saved it. But that was wartime Hungary, and it was fifty years ago, and surgery has not been what it is today. So probably today I could have done better.

INT: So how did you deal with that at eighteen, losing your eyesight?

GEORGE: Well, it's very interesting. Again, apart from this little fact that it probably saved my life, it had also positive aspects. At the age of eighteen, boys are basically macho. Anybody who isn't macho is clearly a nerd, a wimp, or whatever the proper term is these days. I was not exactly in the position of being macho. So I have developed in a different direction, and that's when I, for instance, got fond of music, and of reading, and such, such very un-macho activities as chamber music and poetry and anything in between. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing is difficult to tell.

INT: So in other words, you were pretty much exempt from sports or any kind of "tough guy" activities.

GEORGE: Well, it's very difficult to do many of those things with one eye, you know? And furthermore, I was, of course, short-sighted. And incidentally, it wasn't the drill that went into my eye. The drill hit my glasses, my glasses broke and the glass went into my eye. So one is a little more shy playing things like football or other macho sports. Because I cannot do it without glasses because I cannot see a ball coming, and I can't do it with glasses, because one was afraid of what will happen. So all in all, one didn't.

INT: But did you have, you had these intellectual proclivities before the accident, right?

GEORGE: I don't know. I guess one has a birth defect by being born more interested in these things. But you see, you compensate for it. When you are fifteen years old, you don't want to be known as "the nerd" who sits there reading poetry, so you do what you don't necessarily feel like doing. And in fact, I have a very sneaky feeling that many of the aggressive male characters really do need to prove something. It's very difficult to prove this thing. Or disprove it. But I had a perfectly good excuse why I wasn't going to do it. So I didn't. Who knows?

INT: And now you're having difficulty with your other eye?

GEORGE: Well, that has been ongoing for a number of years. It's a steady process, and actually they did very well to slow things down. Probably all you can do with it. And occasionally I have a vague feeling that I may conceivably have done it myself, because at one stage in my career I was doing research involving lasers. And you can only align lasers by one method, by visually. I'm not talking about lasers. I'm talking of an optimal bench which has colorimeters and diffractional lenses and gratings and whatever. You have to align those things. And I remember a number of times when I was hit by a laser, and I talked about this thing to various people, and of course nobody knows. I'm not even sure that it matters. Because, you see, there's no evidence in my family.

INT: It's glaucoma that you have in the other eye?

GEORGE: Yes.

INT: So how are you dealing with that? Are you still able to read and work?

GEORGE: Do I have a choice? Or do I curl up and die?

INT: Well, that's what we're interested in knowing. Why don't you curl up? Why do you keep going, and what makes you do that?

GEORGE: Because life is very exciting, and I don't want to give it up. I mean, I am now planning to go this spring to Greece, sightseeing. Which I always thought is a little bit of a laugh.

INT: Why?

GEORGE: The word "sightseeing" itself is a little bit funny, right? I wonder how much I will see. Still and all...again.

INT: You're cultivating your garden, as you said. You're continuing to do that.

GEORGE: By the way, I've found you an English copy of "Candide," if you want to read it.

INT: I have the English copy, yes, thank you. It's the Anatole France that I'm looking for.

GEORGE: By the way, there are some very unlikely events listed in that book, all of which happen to be true. This is interesting, that most people don't know it. For instance, Candide at one stage ends up, among all places, in Uruguay, where he finds a kingdom run by Jesuit priests. This happens to be a historical fact. In the early eighteenth century, Uruguay was run by a group of Jesuits. This was really a social revolutionary movement. In South America, many Church members are highly revolutionary, and they in effect objected to the systematic massacre of the Indians, and that's why they ended up, the Church subsequently, with the aid of the Spanish army, have ruthlessly extirpated the

Jesuit rulers of Uruguay. But it's in that book. The other one which is in it is the Lisbon earthquake, which also is supposed to be a historical fact. And there are several of these things which are historical facts. So it sounds extremely...

INT: Far-fetched.

GEORGE: Far-fetched. It happens to be exactly a fact.

INT: So I have to re-read it.

GEORGE: That's why I'm mentioning, it's difficult to understand. Of course, his scathing humor of what he says about the characters involved is his own. But the facts are real.

INT: I have a few more questions. The big one is -- there's two big ones. One of them is, how did you communicate about the war to your children? Did you ever talk to your kids about the war?

GEORGE: Well, it's very funny, because my daughter Barbara told me once, "You know, you were talking to me about what happened to you when I was about," she was about twenty years old, "and not until then." And I never really noticed that. The reason why I probably did not notice it, because it is not an event which is high on my list of thoughts. So back in those days when my children were small, my main interest in life was such things as, am I going to have a job, am I going to have a promotion? What happened to the car? And later on when the kids were getting a little bit...self-organized, we have spent much of our summer traveling, both with and without them. Which to my mind was a hell of a sight more important than these old stories.

INT: But it wasn't a conscious effort on your part to...

GEORGE: It was very simply, I never thought that it was worth talking about. Barbara, strangely enough, said she resented it.

INT: That you talked or you didn't talk?

GEORGE: That I did not. And I said...it's a question mark. I know that Julie, on the other hand, reacted very peculiarly. Because there was a few years ago, I'm not sure if you remember, there was a session in Lower Merion Synagogue on the subject of children of Holocaust survivors, of which there were three speakers: Sue Gordon, Bracha Goldfein Hollander and Julie. And I was of the impression that the audience resented Julie, because everybody talked about the fact of how it affected their parents so very seriously, which it did -- both Sue's and Bracha's parents were severely affected by it. And Julie said, "As far as I'm concerned, I never even noticed anything else, but the fact that my parents, of course, being immigrants, may have had a little difficulty of fitting into the fabric of our society. But it never occurred to me until fairly late in my life," like in her teens, "that there was such a thing as a Holocaust survivor, or that my parents were it."

INT: Were you there?

GEORGE: Where?

INT: At the session?

GEORGE: I don't go to those things. That's for somebody else.

INT: To what do you attribute that? Are you saying that...

GEORGE: It wasn't an event worth mentioning.

INT: But are you saying you weren't affected the way those other people were affected?

GEORGE: Apparently not. Well, I know that Sue's father, who was a very competent lawyer back in the old country, came here and could never practice, because he never got to the point of being able to pass his Bar exam or anything else. Now this is a typical problem of new immigrants. And if you, today, listen to, for instance, the large Russian influx, you'll find that many of them cannot practice in the profession that they were practicing back in the old country. So that is not unusual. The reason behind it is, among others, because this country, professionals are really far advanced than anything that Eastern Europe can produce. I mean, a dentist from Eastern Europe, G-d help you. You don't want to be treated by him.

INT: (Laughs) Right. Or a doctor, either.

GEORGE: I have a very close friend of mine who is doing volunteer work at JEVS, Jewish Educational and Vocational Society, and one of his jobs is to interview Russian immigrants as to what suitable jobs there are. One guy said he was a cardiac surgeon back in Kiev or wherever. And he wanted to practice as a cardiac surgeon. And this friend of mine, through his connections, sent him to one of those well-known cardiac surgeons in the city, and asked that he allow him to attend some of the surgery. And afterwards the guy said, "I'm not going to be able to do that." So what I'm saying is that many of these people came out here, were simply unable to perform their professions where they were trained, because there is a vast difference.

INT: Do you think that affected them more than the Holocaust affected them? It's more an immigrant problem?

GEORGE: Well, let me say, nobody has ever studied the problem in depth. But I think the answer is yes. But the answer is that many people then turn around and say, "It's because of my experience in the Holocaust," which I think is...which I can't see a correlation. I can see if somebody comes here as a lawyer and cannot pass his Bar exam, because clearly American law has nothing to do with law is Slovakia as practiced back in 1940, right? Besides, I guess he was a little too old to make the transition. See, my major advantage was that I have been trained in countries which had a reasonably well-established vanguard position in my field, so I didn't have to suffer. I wonder how I would have fared. As a matter of fact, I know how I would have fared, because I know

people who were, for instance, engineers and came out of Hungary. And they weren't very good in it. They just couldn't quite catch up.

INT: So you think you did better because you were trained in a profession that you could translate into America?

GEORGE: I was luckier. I was lucky I was at the age of twenty when I started to have an engineering training in a country which happened to be reasonably advanced; for the simple reason it wasn't destroyed by World War II, right? And before I came to this country I spent five years in England, where I had done reasonably interesting work in my field. By the time I came here I was well-prepared.

INT: Right. So that helped you a lot.

GEORGE: Well, it must have.

INT: What about the level of trauma, say, or the losses, say, that these people maybe lost...

GEORGE: Well, you see, it is very funny how selfish one is. One can get over it.

INT: Yeah, you said that before. You got over the losses, you mean?

GEORGE: Yes. Well, I don't know whether it is my selfishness, or whether it is my...positive attitude to life or what. But you know, I have lost many people in my life, and I never forget them. And I think of them. But it doesn't apparently influence my ability to live.

INT: And enjoy living, it sounds like.

GEORGE: I know one person, and I shall not mention the name, who never got over it, and who is still mourning her husband, her previous life, her...her life. And whether this is normal, or mine is normal, I don't know. My suspicion is that we are all very selfish. And we, how should I put it? We never really verbalize it. But there is somewhere deep down a little voice which says, "Thank G-d it wasn't me." Of course, it is immediately suppressed by everybody, because it is a dreadful thing to say. But you know what? It's probably there. So you can get over it by this thing. And the people who did not get over it, I am not necessarily sure that it is because they are mourning their dead, or because they would have been bruised by all the other things that happened in life. Look, how many people do you know who lost their spouses, their children? Look, you are accustomed to bury your parents. I mean, you expect in the scheme of things...

INT: It's the natural order.

GEORGE: The natural order of things. You grieve, you mourn, you feel sad, but it is natural. When you are mourning a spouse or a child, it is not in the nature of things. And how many people do you know to whom it befell? And some of them never got over it. Some of them have carried the scars, but succeeded in living subsequently to what all

intents is a normal life, scar or no. Does that answer the question, or is it a very circumstantial answer? The answer is, I got over it because I'm probably self-centered.

INT: Okay. But there's certain things you won't talk about. (Pause) Is that self-protective?

GEORGE: No, I don't think so. There are certain things which I have nothing interesting to say. Nothing worthwhile saying. There are certain things which have been said over and over and over again.

INT: And you don't think that your experience is any different?

GEORGE: And my experience is no different, so I don't see any purpose of repeating. How many times do you want to hear about what happened in a typical German concentration camp? We know that.

INT: So it's not the painfulness of the memory that you're avoiding.

GEORGE: No. Besides, probably there is a little bit of a defense mechanism which I try to eradicate it from my mind; I mean, in fact I probably have difficulty recalling it.

INT: I wanted to ask you that, because you said that you don't remember a lot of it.

GEORGE: It's probably difficult to recall, and the point is, should I? And the answer is, why? Right? Look, there are people who go through psychoanalysis to uncover hidden aspects of their lives, traumatic events which affected them. And you have to do that if you cannot function. If you cannot function, you must...

INT: Dig it up.

GEORGE: Dig it out because it's the only way to, it's like a malignant tumor -- it has to be removed or it will destroy you. I don't see I have great difficulty, so why worry?

INT: This is working for you. It works for you. You're enjoying life and you're able to go on...

GEORGE: I have got a large number of other people whom I know who have told me for whom it also worked. I mean, Gaby had the same problem, and she never felt severely constrained by it.

INT: Did you ever talk to your wife about any of this? Is there anyone that you could talk about that with?

GEORGE: I'm sure I could, but what for? There are so many interesting things you talk about.

INT: Okay. I have another question, which is, do you think the war changed you at all? Do you think you were a different person after the war than you were before?

GEORGE: This is a question which is almost unanswerable. Because, of course, in the process I would have changed anyway, because I would have become older, and one hopes a little more mature, right? There are all kinds of events, fringe events. The mere fact that I left the country where I was born and whose language I spoke fluently, and the next stop where I lived was a country whose language I had to make great efforts to quickly learn it to be able to be functional, because it was in Geneva, and my French was very minimal at that point, and I was thrust at the middle of the semester into a college-level course in a language I wasn't terribly good at. Now did that affect me? Of course it affected me. Did it affect me more or less than other traumatic events that may have happened? Who knows? In the year between mid-1944 and mid-1945, I lived in four different countries with different languages which I had to learn, and learn pretty damn quick. And get used to the environment, which was totally different. I mean, let's face it. I mean, Zurich in 1945 was a long way from Budapest 1944. How did that affect me? I'm sure it has affected me. So what I'm saying is...

INT: How can you sort it out?

GEORGE: That's right. I was different; for what reason, who knows? I was also living a very sheltered life in a family cocoon, and in 1945 I was on my own. That alone should affect one markedly. It was probably a very healthy thing to happen. I was probably far too spoiled back in the family cocoon. It was just as well. Here I was, not even able to figure out where one finds...Can you imagine the scene? I arrived sometime in January of 1945 in Geneva in the middle of a singularly nasty blizzard. And I didn't speak the language, and for the first time in my life I had to face the problem; what do you do when you arrive in the station in a strange town? The first step is to find a place to live. How does one do that? Remember, it's easy when you happen to be financially sound if you go to the nearest hotel. But I realized that my financial support was very, very limited. So how do I find a place to live in? How do I find a place to eat, right? You know, little things. Like I never forget the first couple of weeks after I lived in this place, I succeeded in mislaying my house key. Now you have to find a locksmith. How does one do that? By the way, what do you call "locksmith" in French?

INT: (Laughs) So how did you do it?

GEORGE: I found a locksmith. So what I'm saying is these are things which make you grow up very rapidly.

INT: So you can't sort out what it was that...

GEORGE: I was, by the way, very miserable, need I tell you, in that phase of my...

INT: Were you?

GEORGE: Well, it was basically the question of money at that point. And the question that you are in a strange town. Today I would have probably no problem in arriving in a strange town, and know exactly what to do. First thing you do is you get yourself a map. I didn't know those things at that time. Next step is you walk up to places and say, "Which

is the area where you can get a decent accommodation? And is that area..." Well, in this country...

INT: Safe? (Laughs)

GEORGE: You would say, "Is it safe?" In that country you would say, "Is it a run-down slum area or what?" Of course, you go there and ask that from somebody in Geneva, and he looks at you with...

INT: Like you're nuts.

GEORGE: Incomprehensible. There's no such thing as a slum in Geneva, right?

INT: They're very tidy there. I understand your point.

GEORGE: And I had to go...(End of tape 5, side 1) Again, the same thing. You arrive with a totally different language. I spoke German reasonably fluently, because my family was, I told you, split with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Split in the middle. So I spoke German from my childhood. But I did not speak Schweizer-Deutsch.

INT: It's a whole different dialect, huh?

GEORGE: It is incomprehensible for anybody speaking fluent German, right? And strangely enough, if you speak Yiddish, it's easier, because it's about the same.

INT: Did you know Yiddish?

GEORGE: Not a word. As a matter of fact, I learned Yiddish because I knew Schweizer-Yiddish (laughs). Anyway.

INT: All these things helped you to grow, and affected your life.

GEORGE: Yes. So now did it affect me? Of course it affected me. What had the war to do with it? Who knows? Does it matter?

INT: Are you less trusting of people, do you think, after the war than you were before the war, for instance? Or suspicious, or less optimistic?

GEORGE: I don't think so. I see no reason why I should. I happen to have met many people in all of these experiences. Some of them were not very nice people, some of them were nice people, some of them were life-long friends of mine. I'm still corresponding with quite a few of them.

INT: One other question, which is your family. Do you think you got this love for life, and optimism, and easily adaptable nature from your family? Do you think your family's like that, or it's just your personality?

GEORGE: We are now talking of a very complicated problem, whether it is genetic or nurture.

INT: Yeah. Well, what do you think?

GEORGE: I don't think about things I have no evidence for. By the way, my father happened to be a very...positive person who loved life. Now whether it is in my chromosomes, or whether I followed him as an example.

INT: It's not clear.

GEORGE: There are things I have no reason to think about, because I can't answer it anyway.

INT: But your father was optimistic.

GEORGE: Oh yes, very much so.

INT: Okay. Okay, I think those are the questions, and I really appreciate it. Thanks again.