

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

JOSEPH SCHWEIGER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Meta Joy Jacoby
Date: April 3, 1988

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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JS - Joseph Schweiger [interviewee]

MJ - Meta Joy Jacoby - [interviewer]

Date: April 3, 1988

Tape one, side one:

MJ: Okay, we're talking to Joseph Schweiger on April 3, 1988, side one. Mr. Schweiger, can you tell me, when were you born?

JS: I was born November the 9th, 1912, and don't forget it. I like presents.

MJ: What'd you say?

JS: I like presents, this is why I say my birthday, sure.

MJ: You like presents. Wonderful. I like that.

JS: November the 9th, but I may not be here.

MJ: Where were you born?

JS: I was born in Hungary. It's a very small town, called Isafiret [phonetic]. And from then, that's very interesting what I will tell you here. From then, my father, who was an electrical engineer, moved to other parts of Hungary, and he built a electric plant and he was the president of the whole *meshugasim* there. And I started school there, when I was five years old. And this time was an Orthodox *kehillah*. And the Gentiles, and the Jews naturally, sent their kids the first four years to the Jewish school, the Gentiles who were rich enough to can afford to pay. The reason was, this was 1918, when tuberculosis was the number one killer all over the world, including here.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And the Jewish kids was much cleaner, better fed, less chance to be, get TB. But, when we came out from school, I was five years old, in the meantime the Catholic kids came out from their school, from Catechism, they throw stone at us. Well we got then, "Bastard Jews killed little Jesus."

MJ: Yes.

JS: I was five years old. As a matter of fact, my father finded out that thing, and the next time always a man waited, one of his men waited, for me. And all of us, including Gentiles and Jewish kids, five, six, seven, eight years old, lined up behind him. He was a tall guy. And those goddamn Catholic prejudice conditions, [unclear] prejudice because to be, [unclear] to be prejudiced against Jews through their Pope and the nuns and the priests and the other bastards. And that's how it started with antisemitism. And so can you imagine when you go home and you ask your father, "Dad, why the, I didn't kill nobody!" How can my father explain? This was Hungary. This was Europe. Every Catholic country is hatred and prejudiced against Jews. And they [unclear] another thing. I was junior high school, and one of the bastard teacher started a Boy Scout. For months he tells stories the Boy Scout, you know, walk over to help for the old ladies and everything. And my father said, "No, no, no, forget about it. Nah, it's no fun." "Yes, I

want it!” They didn’t take me. They didn’t take Jews.

MJ: Oh.

JS: Just Catholics.

MJ: How many Jews were in your class then?

JS: Oh, well, in the town had a very fine Jewish *kehillah*. I don’t know, around 20, 30 kids in first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade?

MJ: Did...

JS: I go to fourth grade, and after then I go to the public school.

MJ: Yes, I...

JS: The Jewish school go only to the sixth grade.

MJ: But when you were in public school were you such a minority? When they let you [unclear].

JS: Oh, I was always minority. [unclear] I don’t know, around five, six.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: But you know, it’s a funny thing, when I came to the United State, I find out something very, very funny. I didn’t even tell my wife. It’s a funny thing happened. This time I was a tool and dye maker. Oh, excuse me. My, I have to check my coffee.

MJ: Oh, I’ll turn this off for a moment. [tape off, then on] Let’s see, it’s going now.

JS: I know where I was. Yes, I...

MJ: Yes, you were telling me...

JS: I came to the United States in 1949, with my wife and my mother-in-law. The Jewish Family Service bring us over.

MJ: Yes.

JS: It’s a funny organization, you know? Since 1949 they never asked me once to give them a donation, not even once. And they did for everything, to come over here. And what I’m doing, and I have nobody in the world, I mean, a relative, nothing. And anything what I have will go to the Jewish Family Service.

MJ: How about that.

JS: Anything.

MJ: How about that.

JS: Anything. I have a lawyer friend who will take care of this thing.

MJ: Isn’t it, that’s so lovely.

JS: But they are not Jewish! Can’t be Jewish! They never asked me once! “Listen, Mr. Schweiger, we need a donation. [unclear].”

MJ: They’re Jewish. They’re Jewish.

JS: They’re Jewish? Yes.

MJ: May I get back to earlier days?

JS: Yes, anyway.

MJ: Can you tell me a little bit about your family? You told me about your father.

JS: I'll tell you what, before I do this I want to tell you something about this antisemitism in Hungary.

MJ: Yes.

JS: You know?

MJ: Yes.

JS: The Boy Scouts didn't take me and throwing stones. I came to the United State. I was a tool and dye maker, and I worked in the shop [unclear] three, four years here. And one of the men came to me lunch time, said, "Jew, I can talk to you, you know." You know, I can talk to him. But those goddamned Catholics, they are so strong, demanding in our country. Naturally he was a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. And then I was speaking and started to laugh. He was [unclear]. The Catholic and the bicycle drivers, "Why the bicycle drivers? Why the Catholics?" The guy never talked to me again. In Hungary, the majority was Catholic, was against minority. In America, remember, in Hungary a Jew wanted to change his religion he never changed to Catholic. Protestant.

MJ: Yes.

JS: Is minority. Here, the Catholics and the Jews is very closely against the White Anglo-Saxon bigots. The McCarthy, the Ku Klux Klan and the rest of those jerks.

MJ: Yes, yes.

JS: And Reagan and the rest over that thing, you know. Well anyway, what you wanted, you wanted to say, ask me? Oh, my family.

MJ: I'd like to know a little about your family.

JS: My family, they were very nice. We had a lot of laughs. I have two sisters, mother and father. Nobody came back. Everybody was murder. And I can, you want to see pictures?

MJ: Not now. I'd love to later.

JS: All right then.

MJ: I'd love to later.

JS: No, only one.

MJ: That would be...

JS: Only one picture.

MJ: Yes, please.

JS: Okay, but drink your coffee before. Otherwise you will lose...

MJ: It's wonderful coffee.

JS: You will lose your appetite! This is such an interesting picture. I'll find it for you. That's...

MJ: Oh my God.

JS: I had a friend here-- you can get these pictures if you want-- I had a friend

here who was photographer, a army photographer with Eisenhower.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And he was the first wave went into Auschwitz.

MJ: Is that, not, is that picture of Auschwitz?

JS: Yes. This is a picture in Auschwitz.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: You see the GI walked there and that...

MJ: Oh my God, yes.

JS: Yes, that's it. Anyway, my family [unclear]. My father was a very intelligent man. And my mother was also. She had junior high school education, my mother, which is, you know, turn of the century that was a big thing. [unclear] Jewish family, both of them. My father was an engineer. He finished engineering in Hungary. And he never went to the synagogue, my father. My mother went all the Jewish holidays, the high holidays, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and you know, so on.

MJ: Yes.

JS: That's *meshugasim*, she always went. But we, you know, for every *seder* I went to his friend's house, all three kids or two kids was there, went to this friend's house who had *seder*, and I mean we bring up in Jewish way. Then I went to the synagogue every Friday, you know.

MJ: And you went to a Jewish school until...

JS: The first four years only.

MJ: Yes.

JS: Yes.

MJ: When your mother went to the synagogue did she take you and your sisters?

JS: Oh, they went. Oh yes, we went, yes.

MJ: But your father...

JS: Because [unclear]...

MJ: But your father was never there.

JS: Yeah, but my father had a friend. I learned that, I find when I was already around 14, 15. And he donated to the synagogue every month, but they never know this was all about Schweiger.

MJ: Ah.

JS: This was a friend of his that I find it out once, you know. And he was strong. Well you see, I had an early bad experience with rabbis. I started 1942 in labor camp. I was around 30 years old. And I, 1942, June one day, June the 26th I think, and I liberated 1945, May the 5th, from Gunskirchen. And in three years, I never find a rabbi. And we had lots of rabbis. Never find a rabbi who stands up and tell us who should be friends, and it will be all right, God will save us, and then, and that God really was there. Not, never. I was in Gunskirchen.

MJ: May I, may we hold that just for a while?

JS: Yes.

MJ: I would love to hear. What, we'll get to it of course.

JS: Mmm hmm.

MJ: But, can I, I'd love to hear more about your early life. You had, your two sisters were younger than you? Older?

JS: Oh yes, yes. I was their oldest. I was the chosen.

MJ: [laughs] Okay. And, I just want to know what life was like before the German invasion of Russia in '41.

JS: Oh, German...

MJ: Yeah, when Germany...

JS: You mean Hitler? Yeah, Hitler.

MJ: In '41.

JS: But Hungary never was invaded by Hitler. Hungary always was with Hitler.

MJ: Yes, I know. I know.

JS: You know, they were buddy-buddies. Well, we had a very good living.

MJ: Did you feel comfortable? Was your, did your family feel comfortable?

JS: Okay, we were Hungarians.

MJ: Uh huh.

JS: Sure. I guess we were a middle class Jewish family, or something like this. Let's see how you call this in America, you know. We were very comfortable.

MJ: And you felt secure?

JS: Say, what do you mean secure? Secure in which way?

MJ: Not afraid. I'm talking about...

JS: Why should I be afraid? I was in the Hungarian Coast Guard. I had, I was a sergeant there.

MJ: But...

JS: My father was in First World War.

MJ: There was much antisemitism. You spoke...

JS: Hmm?

MJ: You spoke of...

JS: Antisemitism, it's can happen with us. No, not with us. This can't happen with you, American Jew. No! No! I mean, I-- am Dr. Bar-, Baruch is Jewish? The Baruchs? Dr. Baruch?

MJ: I don't know.

JS: What's the name of this guy? I don't know, the big Jews. No, they're buddy-buddies of this Ger-, I mean this president, Nancy Reagan and her husband Ronnie, you know? No! No! It's never happen with him. Sure it will! Even here where the goddamn McCarthyism started. And I asked my wife, "Now where are we going

now?” And the same thing happened. And all of a sudden McCarthy went down. And I said...

MJ: Thank God.

JS: “Hey! I like it! This is happy. Oh, everything’s all right here.” No, that’s good. You see? Different. If it can happen here, anywhere!

MJ: Yes.

JS: Anywhere.

MJ: But your family did feel comfortable and secure?

JS: Oh yes, oh yes. We were Hungarians.

MJ: Yes.

JS: Our religion was Jewish. And right now, I’m American...

MJ: Yes.

JS: And my religion is Jewish.

MJ: I understand.

JS: In the meantime, I work for the Jewish underground, not the *milhama* [Heb.: war] after the war.

MJ: I know. You told me and we’re, I’d love to hear about that. But we’re gonna hold that for a little while.

JS: But my religion is Jewish. I’m Jewish.

MJ: I understand. What were your relationships with non-Jews? Did you have non-Jewish friends?

JS: Oh, oh. I am color blind, and I’m religious blind.

MJ: Yes.

JS: My closest friend is, happened to be Roman Catholic here.

MJ: Back...

JS: My closest friend.

MJ: Back then.

JS: Back there I had friends, period. I didn’t have Catholic friends or Jewish friends or Pro-, I had friends. The same thing over here. My closest, well, I have very close friends who are Jewish. And I have a very dear friend who happens to be Catholic.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And...

MJ: Did your parents have non-Jewish friends?

JS: Hmm?

MJ: Did your parents have non-Jewish friends?

JS: My parents had friends, the same with, that’s what I learned home. My parents had friends, period.

MJ: Okay. Well you spoke what language in your home?

JS: I, home we speak Hungarian. We not, we never speak Yiddish. The first time I heard Yiddish I was in labor camp. I don’t know what the hell they talk about.

MJ: I see.

JS: And they, believe me, the whole Holocaust I don't speak Yiddish. The stupid? Northern Jews, Bukovina and Poland and Ukraine, and Lithuanians, wow, by God they have one kind of sp-, only Yiddish. I had a driver in the green car who tell me, "Jóska, *red nicht Polish. Red Yiddish!*"¹

MJ: I don't speak it.

JS: Oh, I'm sorry. "Jóska, I don't speak Polish. I speak only Jewish." They're Poles, *Polak* people didn't speak with us. I was a Jew. A Polish girl, if I look at her, and she look at me, they beat the hell out of me, you know. This kind of thing, I mean. It was the town where they lived, you know. That's the problem.

MJ: There were pogroms in Hungary. Did your family...

JS: Oh yes! Oh it was nice, yes. You know, in Hungary, you can't, you don't have Manischewitz, *matzah*.

MJ: Yes?

JS: In Hungary, every synagogue had a little machine where they crank it and made the *matzah*, and had an oven where they, where they baked the *matzah*, only for Pesach. Before Pesach, two months before Pesach, they started, and every Jew in our town, give an order how many he want. He want 10 kilo or 20 kilo or 30 kilo, and that's how they did it. Well, in the little town in Hungary, a young Catholic girl disappeared. And there was a pogrom. You know what happened with her? The Jews, this was before Passover, the Jews grabbed her and drained her blood to make their *matzah*. And afterwards, and was a big headline in the Hungarian paper, you know, they are antisemitic. And after this...

MJ: What year was this?

JS: Around the First World War...

MJ: Yes.

JS: The First World War, before [unclear]. But yeah, but anyway, after some six months a little tiny article was in the same goddamned paper. They find that goddamned girl. She making a fortune. She's a prostitute in Budapest.

MJ: Yes.

JS: You know. Oh, yeah sure it was pogrom. And I don't know how many Jews was hanged and killed. The same thing like here they hanged the black, not long ago.

MJ: Well this was far more hateful. Was your family affected by the pogroms?

JS: Hmm?

MJ: Was your family affected?

JS: I don't know. I was very young.

MJ: You never heard talk about it?

¹Yiddish: "Joseph, don't speak Polish. Speak Yiddish."

JS: No, no, no, no.

MJ: Did you, you were, certainly you were old enough. Did you ever hear any discussion about the territory Hungary lost after the First World War?

JS: Territory Hungary lost after the war? No, no.

MJ: It was not...

JS: No.

MJ: Not discussed.

JS: No. I'm sure, I'm sure my parents didn't like it, but they were Hungarians. I don't remember.

MJ: When some of this territory was returned in '38 and then in '41...

JS: Oh, '3-, oh yes, I was a soldier there.

MJ: Yeah. How did you feel about that when the territory was returned?

JS: I didn't feel-- I was mad. They called me in, and I was in some two months if the Czechoslovakian [unclear] in case we have a war, when Hitler gave back this thing to Hungary. Yes, nothing happened. All right, I didn't give a damn.

MJ: Mmm hmm. You were a soldier? You were in the Hungarian Army?

JS: Yes, for two years I served and after I mean they called me in when they, when Hitler gave back Czechoslovakia and they didn't know if the Czech will resist or not. Oh yes, I was the Hungarian, I was in the Danube River in the ship. I was a sailor, Coast Guard.

MJ: You said Coast Guard, right.

JS: Coast Guard, yes.

MJ: You were in the Coast Guard, not the Army.

JS: It's the same thing, Army? Navy? This is one...

MJ: As a serviceman.

JS: Oh yeah, I served, I was in the Hungarian Service.

MJ: What years were, what were those two years?

JS: Hmm?

MJ: What, when was this?

JS: I was the first Jew in the Coast Guard. They made a mistake. My name was Schweiger, I think, you know? And they see my religion and they called me in. And they, I was, and everyone was shocked. A Jew in the Coast, you know, I said, "Call the Navy." And Horthy, this other jerk, you know, the leader of Hungary...

MJ: Yes.

JS: He was a Navy officer.

MJ: The Admiral.

JS: You know? Admiral, Admiral, yeah, Admiral Horthy. And they were, how do you call this, where the soldiers, they, Horthy, the building, how do you call this thing where the soldiers ...

MJ: Barracks?

JS: Huh?

MJ: Barracks?

JS: Barracks, yeah, that's what it's called, the Horthy building, everything, you know? And I was the first Jew there. Only I had the brains.

MJ: What year was that?

JS: I don't know. From what year was this? '28 or '30. No, no, '2-, '30, I don't know. It was around '30, 1930, for two years, yes. And you see, they took me. I was a radio operator.

MJ: Ah ha.

JS: And then we had the Czechoslovakian, they called us in for the Czechoslovakian eight-day war. Then they, they dropped me from the radio. A Jew can not be on the radio. I mean, it was a secret. [unclear] they transfer me to the, how do you call those things, with the big lights, you know, on the sky, the big, big lights in the sky, watching the airplanes come in, you know?

MJ: Radar?

JS: Not radar. Was no radar this time. The...

MJ: Search lights?

JS: Search lights, yeah, that's right. That's what I was in. I was a Sergeant. But they, they like me because they cannot read and write there, you know?

MJ: Yes.

JS: In Hungary, to be a State Trooper, you know what the first qualification? Have only two years school.

MJ: Oh.

JS: [laughs]

MJ: I didn't ask you about your education. How we got through grade school, actually.

JS: Grade school and junior high school...

MJ: Yes?

JS: And then I had high school, but more of a high school education. I learned a trade, but this was, I went to three days in so-called some kind of college, and three days I was working. And I did this for three years. And when I finished I was a qualified, how do you call this in English? A fine mechanic, model maker, engineering, things like this I did [unclear].

MJ: Did you ever work with your father, then?

JS: Yes. Later we had a company together, and I worked with them. And then this *meshugasim* come up, you know, and then everything is down the drain.

MJ: In 1938, when the first anti-Jewish laws came in...

JS: Yes.

MJ: How were you and your family affected?

JS: Well, a lot a stores didn't buy products from Jews. But everybody liked

my father, and some people liked me too. You know? And they, you see in Hungary you had two sides to this Jew. Everybody had a favorite Jew. He, he is okay, but they, the other one is no good. You know?

MJ: The "good" Jew, yeah.

JS: Yes, the good Jew. And same thing in the United States, but please don't forget it. You, you American Jews don't know about this, but believe you me, he is okay.

MJ: Yes.

JS: Oh, Joe, you are okay. And I [unclear], "If I'm okay, then you can kiss my ass," then I tell him, if I am okay. But now, "He's not okay? Oh, I don't need anything, well never mind." No, no for me it's no, no, "He's okay, he's not okay." That stinks. It smells, for me. But I am, I had a different experience. You're a beautiful girl, you know that?

MJ: You made my day.

JS: Sure, you know.

MJ: But in '38 when the, when the first anti-Jewish laws came in, you said people stopped trading in Jewish stores?

JS: A lot of them. Well, I had this very, very dear friend, very dear friend, his name was Paver Difari [phonetic]. He was Roman Catholic. The first, I don't know, 5, 10 years, every midnight mass in Christmas, this 12 o'clock night, I was in the church with them. His father died but his mother had three brothers and I think two sisters. And we lived near the Catholic Church.

MJ: Yes?

JS: And he lived all [unclear]. And I tell you when he, every Sunday he went to church. And when he finished church, he came to us and, "And Schweiger, I'm, I'm hungry." And he was eating, I mean he was a member of the family.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And one Sunday he walk in, "The bastard, son of a bitch." "Now what's a matter?" "You know what this bastard's preaching, the priest? Don't support Jewish-owned stores."

MJ: Ah.

JS: You know, he [unclear] going to church...

MJ: From the pulpit.

JS: From the pulpit. [unclear], "That son of a bitch." Oh, excuse me. This man...

MJ: That's quite all right, no.

JS: Oh, it's all right then, I don't give a damn.

MJ: Nor do I.

JS: If he don't like, I don't give a damn.

MJ: Nor do I.

JS: And, example is, the Second World War, this Nazi Pope, they call it Nazi

Pope, the Pacelli, Pacelli of Berlin, later Pius the Twelfth, and we got another one here now, that guy from Poland.

MJ: Paul.

JS: Yeah. Well, I...

MJ: No, no, it was...

JS: John.

MJ: John, right.

JS: Yeah, but he has a problem. You know? You know, he finded out something about Jesus. I think they will drop Jesus.

MJ: He's Jewish.

JS: Artificial insemination.

MJ: [laughs]

JS: [unclear].

MJ: [laughs] I know they've said that's not legal. [unclear]. But it's funny.

JS: But that's what they used.

MJ: From the pulpit the priest was preaching to the people, "Don't support Jews. Don't trade with Jews."

JS: Yes, yes, yes, oh yes.

MJ: And what happened?

JS: What happened? Then a lot of people would follow them. Listen, I was in labor camp, this was in the Ukraine, the other side of the Carpathian mountains. You see, I never touch Red Cross. Red Cross for me is dead. [deep sigh] I had 50 men. I always have this luck, I started in, in *Zwangsarbeit* [Ger. forced labor camp], labor camp, was 200 men. And then it's 50, 50, 50, 50. And 50 men had one leader, a Jew. And I was, I had 50 men.

MJ: Yes.

JS: We had a officer who was a killer, and two sergeants was also killer. 1942 they call, 1941 he went to Ukraine with 200 men, and he bring back about six.

MJ: Six.

JS: Yeah. What they did there, you know in this time there was no mine detectors, you know. And the Jews had to crawl and, hand and foot, to find the mine, the mine field, you know?

MJ: Yes.

JS: Normally they run cows or pigs through the field, you know, and they probably step on it and blow up in it, you see. In 1942, I was in his outfit.

MJ: Wonderful.

JS: It was wonderful. After the war I finded out, they hanged all three of them: Mutchkashi, Chickar, and Biki [phonetic for all three names]. Well, can you imagine in labor camp, in our, in our rucksack, how you call this thing? Backpack. We have to carry up to the first line the ammunition and bread and, and sausage.

MJ: To the army.

JS: And rum, to the fighting, for up there.

MJ: Yes.

JS: You know, I started with 50 men. Was no SS with us, was nobody SS. I was on my own.

MJ: Yes.

JS: They were afraid to go out. And we started around four o'clock, and we reached up. It was dark, you know, but the Russian can see in and they can send the mortars, you know, and bomb us. And then we went up. Then we sit on the bread, you know, when we stop. And the bread was all crumbs and they didn't need it, this. And we were, we had the bread, you know to eat, divided the bread crumbs between each other. And we went between the two line. They supposed to send now the, the soldiers there to bury their dead, you know? When it's summertime and the fall they smell like hell, you know, after a few days.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And the Captain said, "Schweiger! Send four men out!" [unclear] smell. And I never sent four men out. I always sent three volunteers. I asked three volun-, I was the fourth one. We crawled between the two lines with shovels and then...

MJ: To cover them.

JS: To cover them a little bit, to cover, [unclear], you know?

MJ: Oh, oh.

JS: When we hit the rock, you know, with a can, a [unclear], then both sides opened fire with the machine guns, you know? This wasn't a happy, anyway.

MJ: When, I do want to hear all about this, of course.

JS: Yes.

MJ: But I'd like to get some of this early history in, if you don't mind.

JS: Early, which was, when is early?

MJ: Well I'm, we're, we were talking about '38, '39, when the anti-Jewish laws came in.

JS: Oh, '38, '39. About '38, '39, '40, the Hungary had a leader named Szalasi.²

MJ: Yes.

JS: That was the, that was the Nazi leader, Szalasi. I think he hang him too. I think he hang him. Well anyway, and this was Nazism. Every company have to, have to-- example, I work for, for the Philips, the Herman Philips [unclear]. It's a very big factory, some 5,000 people worked there.

MJ: As a tool and dye maker?

JS: No, no, yeah, no, no, it's a little bit higher position. I was the head of one

²Ferenc Szalasi - leader of Arrow Cross Party. Became head of state of Hungary, October 1944. Fled to Germany with the Nazis. Extradited by Americans to Hungary, sentenced and executed October, 1945.

of the departments there.

MJ: I see.

JS: And, and we had to hire Gentiles. Well too many Jews was there, you know? If we have three Jewish in there we have to hire maybe three or six Gentiles, even if you don't need them, you have to fire them, I mean hire them.

MJ: Was that because of quotas? [unclear] quotas?

JS: Well we were, well, Hungary had the *numerus clausus*³, which mean six percent, example, in 1938, 1930, and 1920, the university, only six percent Jew...

MJ: Yes.

JS: Was taken. And once a year they beat up the Jews, the six percent, girls and boys, you know, that nice, the students with their funny cap you know, and thing like this. And lot of professor tell me, he says, "Please don't come tomorrow. Please stay home tomorrow." A lot of them stay home, otherwise get beaten up. I mean this is, this was before Hitler. Before Szalasi, wasn't different in Hungary. They were all bastards. The whole thing is run from Rome, a direct line. Every Catholic country a direct line from Rome, and they were-- look at today, the Pope. Israel is not exist today as a country for this Pope. This goddamned Pope who they took, they build a, build a nunnery in Auschwitz.

MJ: They did? No they did not. There was a convent in Auschwitz. But they're take-- they're moving it now.

JS: Yeah, but I find it hard to believe not build that. If they build it on, then I want to, I've sent him a letter and asked him when they dig up my parents' bones, this bastard, send it to me and I will bury it. But you see, the crematorium, the bone, the heap, wasn't high enough. And only the flesh burned. The bone was there, and they pulled out the bone from the oven, you know, and bury it in around Auschwitz. And this bastard building a nunnery there.

MJ: I think he changed his mind.

JS: Bastard.

MJ: In late in the '30s, or even in the early '40s, were you aware of what was going on with Jews?

JS: Oh yes, everybody aware.

MJ: What did you know?

JS: Well, antisemitism, you can't get a job, a good job, and they fire you, a lot of company if you are a Jew, if your religion is Jewish. You know, in, in Hungary, the people of Germany or France, it wasn't no Jews. Religion was Jewish. And they...

³*Numerus clausus* - a Latin term meaning a restricted number which refers to a policy of restricting admission of certain people-- usually Jews-- to an educational institution. It was common in Czarist Russia. After World War I, Hungary also took on this policy limiting Jews to 5% of the total student population. Other countries took this policy on as well. (The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia, Cecil Roth, Editor in Chief, Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York: 1959)

JOSEPH SCHWEIGER [1-1-14]

Tape one, side two:

MJ: Joseph Schweiger, and this is side two. We were just talking about, you said people were losing their jobs. Jews were...

JS: Oh yes.

MJ: Fired.

JS: Of course. By 1936, they started smell everything. The Jew, goddamned Jews, and, you know, but not my friends. No, no, no, my, no. I did have one friends, friends I mean, who, who, who wasn't ashamed what's going on.

MJ: Gentile friends.

JS: Gentile friends, yeah. Exactly, well I had one frie -- I don't know friend, he was a friend but he was drinking, sitting in my table, and we went to the university. And later was a lawyer, eating my food, drinking my wine. And when I came back after when liberated I find out Dr. Kizsh Jusie [phonetic] was a very big Nazi. Dr. Kizsh Jusie was a lawyer. And when I walk in Main Street-- I lived in suburb on Budapest-- I lived in a hou-- friend's house where I didn't find nothing and nobody. And all of a sudden they scream, somebody came, "Jew! Oh wow! Jews!" He say, "Oh! I love you! [unclear]." And then Jusie stopped there. "If you see me again, you turn around and you run. Otherwise you are dead. Get the hell out of here." And he turn around and run. And my friends asked me-- you know, I had the power, I can take him down the police station, and I have the power from Mauthausen, I'm liberated, and I can beat the hell out of him; but I can't do that. And my friends ask me, "Why do you do it? Why don't you? He was a big roach, a big Nazi." "Now listen, somebody have to stop. I can beat him up now, and 20 years from now, he will beat me up again. No, I don't want to beat. I, I want to forget the whole thing."

MJ: It's your humanity.

JS: Yeah, well, it's me.

MJ: Yes.

JS: Yeah.

MJ: Did your parents live in Budapest? I don't think you told me.

JS: A suburb in Budapest, yes.

MJ: Yeah. Were you aware in the late '30s, the early '40s, what was going on with the Jews in Central and Western Europe?

JS: No. No.

MJ: No news.

JS: No. Well, in 19-, that was 1941, a transport, a cattle car, you know, in the train, came through in my town, Vashtazi [phonetic] where I lived. And they were Italian Jews. Mussolini shipped them to...

MJ: Through Germany?

JS: Through Germany. Through Hungary, yeah [unclear]. They have to be

going through Hungary, and then Austria and up, you know, the Polish border, somewhere on, I don't know, Dachau, who knows where. But we, I don't know, we don't know the gas chambers. No.

MJ: Did you -- how did you know they were Italian Jews?

JS: Oh we talked to them. We gave them apple and bread and everything.

MJ: Yes.

JS: That's why we know, from Italy, yes.

MJ: And you had no knowledge of what was going on in Central and Western Europe then?

JS: No.

MJ: Other than this transport.

JS: No, well we heard things which is bad, you know.

MJ: What did...

JS: But not in Hungary. It will not happen there.

MJ: No, but what did you hear? What was going on in...

JS: Antisemitism and beat up Jews and things like this. But they always did it in Poland. The, in Poland and the Ukraine they, the Jews was a second rate citizen always.

MJ: Yes.

JS: Always.

MJ: Did you know anything about Western Europe, what was going on with the Jews?

JS: No, I didn't know. As a matter of fact, when I, when I landed Auschwitz, I mean in Mauthausen, I can see the cars, what's going on here. And the gas chamber, and-- you know, a funny thing, I was in Mauthausen 1944. And we [unclear] bought the house with my wife here in Wudwesteran [phonetic] around the corner and I'm sitting, it was summer, and the door was open. I'm sitting inside and talking or something. And I, and I, all of a sudden, I was back in Mauthausen.

MJ: Oh.

JS: Meat, burned, meat, I smell, meat burning.

MJ: Yes.

JS: My next door neighbor barbecuing the-- and then, you know, I, and that, you know it don't bother me anymore. This, the memory came back in Mauthausen. You know, the gas chamber can't take the bodies. Business was too good, and they throw it in the holes and burn, and bury them. And then you know where this kind of thing, the *meshugasim* which is, but that don't bother me anymore. I don't barbecue but I don't, I don't eat steaks, only fish and chicken, dark meat. Any time if you make turkey drum you can send me a piece. I like turkey drum.

MJ: Oh, I'll really do that some day.

JS: Well done, well done.

MJ: Well done, yes.
JS: Yeah, everything is have to be well done.
MJ: Did you hear of any of the anti-Jewish killing actions in Hungary before '44?
JS: Anti- what?
MJ: Killing actions.
JS: Killing actions? What are killing actions?
MJ: In Hungary before '44 there were some. Did you know of any?
JS: No. You see, and my memory is a little bit old too, you know...
MJ: Your memory is wonderful!
JS: Being my age.
MJ: You're not...
JS: Nahhhh.
MJ: Many people didn't know. They hid things, you know. But we're just trying to find out what, what you knew.
JS: No, I don't know about it, killing Jews.
MJ: Was your father's business affected after '41?
JS: Well, I went away '42, and I never see, I see them once, '42 Christmas. I don't know, I get a leave. I don't know how I get it. I don't know. I just, and I went home for, I was home I think two weeks. And afterward I went away and this was, I never see them again. Never. And they shipped them away in 1944.
MJ: '44.
JS: Eichmann.
MJ: Yes.
JS: Eichmann did it.
MJ: I know.
JS: You know Hitler sent a order not to ship any more Jews, and Eichmann disobeyed them. I heard about it. And that's why they died. Oh God. This wasn't nice, no, no. This thing is not nice. Next question. [both chuckle]
MJ: What was happening then to your father's family, your mother's family? You had all these people, were they all in Budapest?
JS: Oh in Budapest, Debrecen, you know, and then other towns. No, is nobody.
MJ: What was happening then...
JS: I am the only one.
MJ: In '41, '42.
JS: I don't know.
MJ: You were away in ...
JS: No, but I mean they took everybody out to Auschwitz.
MJ: Oh, and I know, but...

JS: Oh, hundreds.

MJ: I'm talking, I'm not talking about '44. I'm talking about '41, '42...

JS: '41, '42...

MJ: '43?

JS: Everybody tried to exist and make a living. My father had to get rid of that business, and he worked for somebody, I know that, for somebody. And I don't know what happened after that.

MJ: He had to, he had to go out of his own business?

JS: Yes, yes, he went out of business.

MJ: He was forced to close it or did someone take it over?

JS: Well, well, you know, people didn't supported the Jewish [unclear] very much.

MJ: He was an engineer.

JS: Yeah, but this time...

MJ: [unclear]

JS: This time he inherited his mother business, who was a, you know this pickle, sauerkraut?

MJ: Oh.

JS: This why, we had big, big basements, you know, and it was...

MJ: In barrels?

JS: [unclear] sauerkraut, and with the big barrels was...

MJ: Yes.

JS: And then that sort of business, and then we had to get rid of it. I guess some Gentile took over or something, bought it or, I don't know.

MJ: And he went to work for someone else?

JS: He find somebody, yeah. Well, I don't know. I just get some letter and he was, he was telling me, when I can get letters.

MJ: Yes. You were then in the Coast Guard?

JS: No, no, no, no. Then I was in labor camp.

MJ: What year did you go to labor camp?

JS: 1942.

MJ: '42.

JS: Till '45.

MJ: That's when you had 15 [actually Joseph has earlier said 50] people working for you.

JS: Yeah. And there was 200 people, and I find end of the war maybe five who came back. Those bastard killed the rest of them. And another bastards, too.

MJ: How did you hear, how were you drafted into this labor camp? You had been in the Coast Guard.

JS: And, this was a funny thing. Everybody called in 1940. All my friends

went into, and then came home. And they called, called in. They never called me in. My name was Schweiger, and I was a sergeant. It cannot be Jewish for in the Coast Guard.

MJ: Yes.

JS: In 1942 somebody find out and right away they grabbed me. My father was in 1940 in labor camp. They called him in when I was going...

MJ: Oh, as early as 1940.

JS: 1940, oh yes, 1940 my father was in labor camp.

MJ: For how long?

JS: I don't-- some three, four months, then something, somebody interfered...

MJ: Oh.

JS: From Switzerland or something, a Swiss or somebody interfered and they let the Jews over, who knows where, over 40 or 50 or something, you know, they let them go. And but 1942 they find me, and then asked me my military book I have to give it to them and then that's how the whole *tsores* [Yiddish: troubles] started.

MJ: How long were you in that labor camp?

JS: Labor camp? 1942 to 19-, oh, '4-, end of '44. This was my first death march, from south Hungary to Bals/Belz⁴.

MJ: Yes.

JS: Belz. This was, you heard about Belz?

MJ: Yes.

JS: You heard about Belz? How? Where?

MJ: I've just read about it. I don't know [unclear].

JS: Oh, you read about it?

MJ: You tell me.

JS: Yah. Here we built whatchyamacallit, tank traps. Was cold and water, and from there we went to Mauthausen. When the Russians started to push we went to Mauthausen. I don't have number in my arm. You see, while, they didn't have time to put it in. They was too close, you know? The B-17 came over from Italy, Italy, you know? And then the SS was scared to death. They were running. Even we had French guys run the show there, you know? And they were vicious, beating, even the French!

MJ: Vichy? Vichy French?

JS: Hmm? Not Vichy, vicious! Vicious! Nasty. Bastards.

MJ: What were conditions like, like in the labor camp?

JS: This was no condition. You, you get up, I don't know, 5 o'clock, and stay in line till 7 o'clock. And you get some, some shit to eat, some black water. And then you go to work digging, building airfield and anything. And it's rain and shine, you know, and evening you go in, get some food, and you lay down in the same clothes, the same

⁴Bals [phonetic] possibly Belz, a labor camp in Ukraine. We could not corroborate precisely as we have no listing or other indication of the places that this interviewee was interned and there is no personal history sheet for him. We have elected to indicate this place as Belz throughout the rest of the transcript.

shoes, everything. In the morning you get up, and, and line up and this, and that's it. Day after day. And you have to be a tough son of a bitch to survive. And I think I was a tough son of a bitch, but I, but I probably I, I can't lie. And if something have to be said, I say it. 1942, I was with these three killer, this Mutchkashi was a lieutenant and two sergeant, Biki and Chiget⁵ [phonetic]. In 1943, two Swiss men, some kind of a idiot who came in, to investigate the killing people, people in the Jewish faith, in 1942. Saskilance [phonetic] 1-0-9. Well, 33, this was the number of that, the outfit. Saskilance, yeah. This was the number of the outfit. And then, 1943 they investigated. I was-- the Mutchkashi wasn't there, this killer. But one of the sergeant was there. And then I was working in the kitchen, which...

MJ: Where were you then?

JS: This was in labor, it's all labor camp. Labor camp, near Budapest. From there then we went to the Ukraine and all over that, that north. Well anyway, and they investigated, and first found that teaching have been called in. "Well we have to go back to cook," and I, I was, was everything to save my life. I was a cook. I was an engineer. I lived every day so far. And then they asked the first guy, [unclear], "If you ever see example, if this biggie, the sergeant, beat you." And I walked in, and, "Joseph Schweiger labor camp." "Yes, sir." "You, sergeant biggie ever beat you?" "No, never beat me." "You ever see he beat somebody?" "Yes." You can't say that.

MJ: Oh my God. What happened to you?

JS: I had a three-day, two-day leave, Saturday to Monday morning, before. And then, Damiesk [phonetic], the doctor, one doctor, he beat up very badly. And I, I talked to him. I said, "Idiot! Why do you say it?" I have, I can't, I had to say that what this was the truth.

MJ: You were calling yourself an idiot.

JS: Yes.

MJ: As you said it?

JS: Sure. I talk to myself.

MJ: Yes.

JS: When I want to be in good company I talk to myself, you know?

MJ: [laughs]

JS: And then I saluted and went out. Finally later they called me in, "Give me your pass. You're tossed from the kitchen." You know. I lost my job. I lost my pass. You know, [unclear].

MJ: Thank God that's all they did to you.

JS: Well, and after that, you know, he tried everything to get even with me. But he was afraid a little bit, you know, by this investigation well, you know. And he looked at me, he can't, and I see he is over there, I went to the other way, you know? I

⁵Reference to the same officers he spoke of before; spelling slightly different as per what was heard.

was always looking to save my life, you know. That's the secret. When we had a death march from Mauthausen to Gunskirchen. In nighttime they put us in the quarry. You know what a quarry is?

MJ: Yes.

JS: And then up there were the machine guns, you know. And I always figured out to get behind some big rocks where it starts, well, I guess it can be an order, you know, "Finish them," and *tttttttttt*, they're machine-gunned, you know? You know? Then we don't have to march any more. And I always was behind the thing, well, and the machine gun was there, and then over there. Oh [unclear].

MJ: You're behind a rock.

JS: Always. I was in labor camp was in Ukraine, other side in Carpathian Mountains. And we are building bridges. And the bridge was-- TNT was loaded up by the Russian. They came in then they blew up the bridge, you know, dynamite the bridge, the Russian. But the Russian had a, they got hit in the dynamite, and that bridge blow up. This was my lucky day. We run down to, this was a river, I forget the, yes, I don't know which river it was. But I forget it, the name. And then the bodies came down in the river. I pull them out and I looked and he had good shoes. And I had a pair of shoes. And then I had two pair of pants.

MJ: From the bodies.

JS: From the bodies.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: Which, why I'm lucky with these pants. They saved my life later in Gunskirchen. And then after then the Captain give an order, "Schweiger, start to make an entrance for the bridge," you know? And Captain, the Russians, see, and, "Shut up!" And he get a [unclear]. "Yes, sir!" You know? And shoot him.

MJ: What did he want you to do?

JS: To make a path to start to build a new bridge. We have to put rocks...

MJ: I see.

JS: You know, to, to make a road there. And no listen, listen. And there was a lot of holes there where this whole mortars fired, make an explosion, make a hole. "No, listen. You watch me. I have a good ear. And I can see when they coming." Zheeeeeeee! How far is this, you know, a bomb.

MJ: You heard the motor vehicle?

JS: Not the motor vehicle, the, the bombs coming.

MJ: Oh, the bombs.

JS: The mortar, that is a...

MJ: The airplane?

JS: No, no, no, no, no. This is a, a gun. [unclear] and put on the thing and pshhht, shoot out.

MJ: Rocket.

JS: A rocket, yes, like an explosion. "Now listen, guys. When I run, everyone get a hole. Have less chance to get the same hole in. If and don't line up 20, 30. But if you'll die, maybe two or three die, is better." And then all of a sudden then, ping, the first one come in [unclear] this is way out. The second one in the water. And the third one, yyyehppp! And we run. And then we didn't know how, you know. And you go to the hole and hold his head down, you know, and wait in this hole. And we come up. I look around, about 25, 30 people in the same hole! Now, the *meshugenah!* *Meshinageh!* What you doing here? "Joe, where you go, there is safe," you know? [laughs]

MJ: They followed you.

JS: Yes! "Well, where you go there is safe!"

MJ: They wanted you to build this bridge while you were being bombed with these rockets?

JS: Yes, yes. Then afterwards we didn't build the bridge. No, no, they were delighted.

MJ: Oh, oh.

JS: Then we did something else, unloading ammunition, things like this. You see, you can find Jews who was bastards too. You know, every outfit, the clerk was Jewish, a Jewish clerk, in the office. Was a sergeant, but under the sergeant was Jews. One very filthy rich Budapest Jew, Alpen was his name. He was around six foot, from a very well-to-do Jewish family from Budapest. And he was the head clerk there. And the Captain, he was really an, you know, a bastard and things like this. And he did everything what Alpen tell him. And Alpen did everything for money. If somebody wanted a job, a better job, he pay him money to get it. I came down from the mountains, from the first line, with my 50 men. And then, "Joe! There's an order here! The other side, back in Hungary, they need a gunsmith, two gunsmith and some, some other guys." And in evening Alpen walked back from his office. He had his own room. Everybody else, they, they sleep in, in little, with the pigs and the cows and like this. And Alpen, "What do you want, all the time." You know, "Alpen, shut up and stop. Don't turn around. I have a gun in my hand. Tomorrow morning in the order, I am going back. You know I am a gunsmith." "Yes." And I'll put my finger in his, in his back. I didn't have a gun.

MJ: Did anyone, did any Jew have a gun?

JS: No!

MJ: I didn't think so.

JS: You were dead! No! You have to, you have to [unclear] brain. "You [unclear] son of a bitch!" Next morning, Joseph Schweiger and three other guys bring [unclear] to the, to the service outfit to, back to the, through the Carpathian Mountains. Yes? You know what happened with this Alpen?

MJ: Did you become a gunsmith then?

JS: Heh?

MJ: Did you get that job that you wanted?

JS: Sure! I was a gunsmith.

MJ: Now you were the gunsmith.

JS: Sure! And I was a good one too, after a week.

MJ: I bet you were wonderful! I bet!

JS: Well anyway, you know what happened with this, this very big Jew, Alpen? I came back home, and I met somebody who know Alpen, and his fiancée. “Know Alpen, this bastard. No, no, that’s a lie. They investigating him he killed--” “No, it’s not true.” “Now sure it’s true!” I don’t know about, I mean I heard about it. I have no fact. If I have fact, then I go to the court and I testify. But I don’t know, have it. You know what he did? He hanged himself!

MJ: After the war?

JS: After the war. When they investigate him, and they see something unkosher, and he hanged himself. He was a bastard. And he was Jewish. Religious! A very rich Jew. You see, in Hungary, the Jews, here too, you know, if I am a, I am a tool and dye maker, I can’t marry certain Jewish family. Have to be a lawyer or a doctor. I waited, and my wife, 19’, 1937 and ‘38. She was a very intelligent-- here’s, over there. I have one picture of her.

MJ: Oh, I [unclear] to look at that.

JS: And she was very intelligent. She speak fluently German, English...

MJ: [unclear] you were in Hungary? You were married then?

JS: No, no, I wasn’t married.

MJ: ‘37, ‘38?

JS: I can’t, but, we never, she never can marry with me. Have to be an engineer. We were very filthy rich Jewish family. That is here in United States, sometimes.

MJ: And this is you?

JS: Yeah, that’s me.

MJ: You’re right. You’re beautiful.

JS: Oh, I’m gorgeous! [both laugh]

MJ: So was she. She was beautiful.

JS: Oh, she was. But she was just delightful.

MJ: A lovely [unclear].

JS: She died in cancer, and I miss her very much. And is a long time ago, a very, very long time ago, and I still miss her. And, ‘37 and ‘38 I’m, and after...

MJ: But you said you, you were, dated her in ‘37, ‘3-?

JS: Yeah, ‘37, ‘38.

MJ: You knew her...

JS: I belonged to a...

MJ: In Budapest?

JS: Huh?

MJ: You knew her in Budapest?

JS: Yeah. I belonged to a Jewish club in my suburb in town. And I played the piano, and telling jokes, you know. And she belonged to that, her suburb in town, Jewish club. And we come together to change programs, you know. And I went to their house, and was very nice. But her mother was a high society Jewish, with whom she adopted after then, when she died, adopted me as her own son, you know? But anyway...

MJ: Then she liked you.

JS: You see I worked with the *Brihah*⁶ in, after, after the war. And then, in Salzburg. But from Salzburg I went to Munich. And the first day I was sitting in the trolley car, and says, "Joe Schweiger! You are alive!" And this was Clara!

MJ: Her name was Clara?

JS: Yeah. You know, "Hah! But, your, how's Mom? Dad? How's your mother?" "We, we went from Auschwitz together, Mother." But the dad, she, she never find it out. I know what happened with her brother. Was a handsome, six-foot-two, a handsome, loaded with money, in labor camp. They beat him to death in labor camp. He was so handsome. He was strong. They beat him to death. I never tell to her mother, or her. Never, never, during this time. In camp I knew.

MJ: How did you know?

JS: Well, somebody walked with him behind [unclear].

MJ: What happened to Clara during the war?

JS: She was in Auschwitz. Well, they were very well-to-do, even after when we decided to get married after the war, in 1948, '47, '47 or '48 I don't remember. It's not important. And then her mother said, "You know, you know Joey, Clara's used to you know, you know his company." "Sure I know. Well, why don't you tell her, you know?" [both laugh] [unclear] rich Jewish girl. She didn't have a pot to piss in it but she was a Jewish broad.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And they never find there, they didn't, they didn't mind me getting married. They didn't know what kind of work I do. They knew I am, I'm repainting automobiles, trucks. They didn't know I work for the *Brihah*. *Brihah*⁷ this mean underground. Let me show you a book.

MJ: But you're going to tell me that later.

JS: Oh definitely, yeah.

MJ: Right. Because I want...

JS: [unclear].

MJ: Not yet. Let me see. You, we started now, you, in this labor unit.

⁶Brihah - (also Beriha or Bricha), a post-WWII movement that organized illegal emigration from eastern Europe into the Allied-occupied zones and Palestine or Israel. lit. "escape" in Hebrew. (ushmm.org article "Brihah" from the Holocaust Encyclopedia accessed 11-19-2013)

⁷Underground routes of escape for survivors of the Holocaust. [The Holocaust](#), Nora Levin, page 710.

JS: Yeah, labor camp.

MJ: Labor camp. And that was for two years, is that correct?

JS: Two years, yeah? The whole thing was three years, everything together, the *ganze meshugasim* together.

MJ: Can you help me to understand, you were first, you were in, near Budapest.

JS: Well, a labor camp one that, in 1944, anybody, everything was in Budapest or Hungary. Or else everybody went to the concentration camp.

MJ: And in '42 you were not...

JS: In '42 I was in labor camp. I not even knew about concentration camps. I don't know concentration camps. Nobody knew about it.

MJ: And you, and then...

JS: They didn't know, the, the, the ghetto uprising in, in Warsaw Ghetto. No, I never heard about these things. Never!

MJ: No one knew.

JS: No, no, we didn't know about it. This wasn't in the paper. No.

MJ: Things were bad enough. In '42 you were just outside of Budapest. Then...

JS: No, they called me to outside Budapest. And after we went to, north to building with these three killer, building airport.

MJ: Yes. And you've described a little bit about that.

JS: Yeah, well this was tough. Exactly, you know, we sleep, you know in Hungary there was a big farm. We slept in the big barn. Then the pig get the piglets, before they drop the piglets, they put them in the cubicles. And there they get the piglets. And that's was the time, of no pigs there. We slept, we have to sleep there, with rats and everything. For a very long time after the war I sleep always in the cover, my head, where you sleep on that. Rat was running through and then I pulled the blanket and the rat started to sneeze, you know. There we slept. I mean, they didn't give a damn. One guy died, and after two months they were, his name was still in the roster, you know, where they call the names in morning and the evening. And this, this bastard, this, they were laughing [laughs]. He died.

MJ: Every morning?

JS: Every morning they would still call the name of this poor guy. He died.

MJ: Many people died?

JS: Hmm?

MJ: Many people died in the labor camp?

JS: Oh, of around 200 I think around six or eight came back.

MJ: Yes.

JS: After [unclear]. But I, I left them. You know, I was a, a gunsmith.

MJ: Where, where did you go when you were the gunsmith?

JS: Hmm?

MJ: Where did you go as a gunsmith?

JS: Oh, back to Hungary. This was funny. You see, I had an accordion with me. Can you imagine? I *schlepped* the accordion, I, I these two things, two things I missed in three years, almost all of three years. One was food, and other is music. Music. I was singing. I go to Hungary. I, I, I decided I'll never go back again. But I was basically, October, November I go to a spa for three weeks.

MJ: In Hungary?

JS: In Hungary, yes. And I don't talk to nobody. I have some friends there, but no Hungarians were, they come up to me, "You are so, you are so serious always." I was sitting in the water. You know, this is a mount, like, everything. This is mineral water in the Margaret Island. And I'm, "Yes, why?" I don't want to talk to nobody here. Oh, yes. And then they get away. No, I. And, this is, this is Hungary for me. Only a dead Hungarian is a good Hungarian. Only a dead German is a good German. I'm not talk about Mr. Smith and the young generation, and the young Germans and young [unclear]. A lot of them know what happened. And they will not do it. But the, the I don't know, 70, 80 percent, they are, I don't trust them and I don't trust the Italians, the Poles, the Ukraines. They are animals with the Hungarians. They are not humans. I can't understand how a human being can do what they did. To pick up a baby from a, from a baby crib and smash it to the wall what is the Jewish baby, when the religion is Jewish!? I mean they're, oh, it's sickening. Now this is, ah.

MJ: In all those terrible years, were there any Hungarians that helped? Did you...

JS: That's funny. I was thinking about this. No. I had, when I was in the-

Tape two, side one:

JS: [unclear] Well, one interesting episode I had, when I, we were in, not far from Budapest we're working. And we went to a town, always, and then I see a dentist there. And I had a tremendous toothache. I mean that was so bad, I didn't slept for days and nights, in constant pain. And, you see, if you walk out from this camp where you are, and you didn't have no doctor, none, you can't go into a dentist too. They, you don't have those things. And I walk out, which mean if that state trooper catch me there, they can shot me in the sight, you know? I took off my yellow band, and I had so much pain I didn't give a damn any more. And I knocking the door in this dentist. He opened the door, he looked at me, and grabbed me and pulled me in. "What's the matter?" I'm, "Listen, my, I have a tooth--" "Come on! Come on in! Come on in!" He looked at my tooth and said, "Listen, I can't give you no Novocain, but, but this is infected. This is--" And, he called in his wife. "Please, hold this poor man head." I was 30-some years old, 32, 33. And they knocked my teeth out, oh! And they looked out the door. "Well I, I have only two, two." "No! Come on, please don't!" This was a dentist who was a human being.

MJ: Hungarian.

JS: Hungarian. Oh yes, was Hungarian. This was a Hungarian town called, I think Gurderer [phonetic]. The, the mayor of this town or was, was a killer, a murderer. And this happened. But, otherwise we marched in Hungary, I marched in this death march. I never find one Austrian bastard who throw an apple, or a piece of bread. They just looked at that and loved that. They loved that. They looked at, when they, when somebody fall off and the SS blow his head off, you know, that's what the thing. That's now call death march.

MJ: Yes.

JS: If you fall off, they blow your head off and they, he covered you, if you recall it, you know, with his rifle, he cover. And they [unclear] it doesn't matter. Maybe later they will get their check. [unclear] or some money in it, you know, they can grab. None. I didn't find one Austrian or Hungarian who helped me, give me a piece of bread. No, not even one. I was walking in the street, this was in Belz⁸. This was the first so-called concentration camp type of thing. And on there, the soldier, an Austrian, was an SS but this was a funny guy. He asked me to, to get some wood, fire wood, and took it to his apartment while I, while I [unclear] light the fire for him. And then I go back where I sleep, into some barn. And I walk in the street, and this is in Hungary. And kids, eight, ten, six years, they chased me. They wanted to beat me, and I had to run. And the parents was laughing. I can, I can kill everyone then. I was strong. And I was mad. I was

⁸It is possible that Joseph is remembering two different episodes here or it is possible that Belz is not the place in Ukraine that we think it is [see footnote 4]. He refers earlier to Belz as a place to which he marched to from south Hungary.

desperate. But I can't. I have, if I turned around, then the parents beat me to death. This was the Hungarians. They were proud of, of, of how the kids, how brave they were when they, they can chase and beat a Jew. This is Hungary, and this is Austria, and this is Poland. And this is America too, I hate to tell you, in certain parts in America. Even in Philadelphia. Look at the, this, this running for president and called me a goddamned Jew, Hymie. And he have a chance to be president of the United States? I'm getting the hell out of here if he's being the president of the United States.

MJ: Jackson.

JS: Come on! Jackson, yeah. Come on! This is terrible. But that's life. And I like it here. If this country called me in tomorrow morning to fight a war, I'm going.

MJ: You are an American.

JS: I am an American.

MJ: I know.

JS: I was in, in Hungary sitting in, in the, in the, one of the bath. And next to me a lady who speak Hungarian. "Where you come from?" "Philadelphia." "Oh, I'm from," I don't know, "Cleveland." I said, "Where [unclear]? Oh, next week I'm going home." And he, and she, she was studying me. "This is your home!" "What?" "Don't you stick in your ass!" This was a lady. And I tell her, "You stick it in your ass, your goddamned country. That's not my country!" This lady almost fainted and walked away, swam away. I lost my temper. This mine, they called Hungary my country. I find it out in 1942 it never was my country.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And I don't know. I like this country very much, and I pray safe where I am free. Freedom, I don't know. You people, you full blooded Indians, I call you, you don't know what's freedom is. I wrote a letter to Nixon, and I complained when he bombed Cambodia. And I was afraid to the FBI come in or something. And he write back a letter, answer me, and explain to me why he had to do it. And when I got stabbed by this Hungary, they didn't believe me that's true.

MJ: I don't, I don't understand. What...

JS: Well Nixon was the president.

MJ: Who didn't believe you?

JS: The Hungarian. No, no, you can't say this thing about the president.

MJ: Oh, oh, I see. No.

JS: And here, so that is America. Can't you understand? That's why I love it here. I have 100 percent freedom, freedom! Freedom of speech. And I can live my whole life and not even have a, have a ticket for, for, for, for running the red light. I can live my whole life. In the meantime, it's not a stupid country. Meantime, the government know every step what I'm doing. I have my Social Security number, every penny which I have, every-. But I like it that way. I'm an honest man. I don't have to be afraid.

MJ: No.

JS: I don't want to do dishonest thing, purposely. If I do something, that's, I didn't know about it I'm doing it. Which I, that's, that's me. That's my upbringing.

MJ: Mr. Schweiger...

JS: Yeah, Mr. Schweiger. What's your name? Mrs.? What's your name? Mrs.?

MJ: Ah! You know my name's not Mrs. Meta.

JS: You are Mrs. what?

MJ: Meta, Jacoby. But not, my name isn't Mrs.

JS: No, but I am Mr. Schweiger, you hear?

MJ: You are Joe, okay. All right, Joe.

JS: Yeah. [laughs]

MJ: I'm sorry. I am sorry.

JS: Yes, Mrs. Jac-, Jacobson, Jacoby or something. I don't know. It's your old name or new name?

MJ: It's a, it's relatively new.

JS: Yeah, okay.

MJ: I, I had other names before.

JS: Yeah, I'm sure.

MJ: But you just stick with Meta. That's okay.

JS: Yeah.

MJ: You were, you went then, you were in, I'm sorry, I've forgotten...

JS: Hmm?

MJ: When you were a gunsmith, where were you?

JS: A gunsmith? This was in northern Hungary. We always stopped in schools, empty schools, and set up the shop and repaired. They bring the gun from the first line, collected the gun, and repaired it. The first time I arrived there, with my accordion...

MJ: Oh, I wanted to hear about that. How did you save an accordion? That was never taken from you?

JS: Oh they, no, oh no, in labor, in concen-, in the death march I get rid of the accordion. I have two choice: or me...

MJ: You couldn't carry it. I know.

JS: Or the accordion.

MJ: But before that you had it.

JS: Before that, no, before I had it, and music. And anyway, we, we arrived there, and put us up to the second floor in, in the barn, top of a barn, which was hot. This was fall, very hot. And my three buddies, you, "Joe, this is a bad thing!" "No, never mind! Never mind!"

MJ: They what, what did they say?

JS: My three buddies...

MJ: Yes?

JS: The other three Jewish guys said, "We'll [unclear] we'll, we, we if we sleep, it's hot here!" "Never mind." We went down for dinner, and there was a little lieutenant line up the guys. "Four Jew. Nobody talk to them! Jew, you don't talk to Jews!" And then, "Jóska, what're you doing?" "Never mind! Screw the bastard. You watch it." And on, after dinner, example, it was Romanian soldiers was there, old guys, around 50, 60 years old. And they had, they were blacksmith, for that same gunsmith outfit. They were blacksmiths, repairing stuff like guns, stuff like this. And they were in the cornfield. And I walk up, "Psst! Psst! Come here!" "Sh! Sh! You can't speak, speak to Jews." "Screw him!" I said, "Cigarette." "I don't [unclear]." I figure they want [unclear]. "No, no, I want to give you cigarette." They were Romanian. They weren't Hungarian. Romanian. The Romanians was different. You don't hear too much hatred, antisemitism in the Romanian gentiles. They were very interesting people. It was an entirely different atmosphere. And, anyway, after dinner we went up there. And I'm sitting up, so they start to play my accordion, you know? Hungarian music, *czardas* and things. Well I, I like, I'll play any kind of music, German, Hungarian, French, American. I, I know *My Bonnie is over the ocean*...

MJ: [laughs]

JS: I didn't know what I'm saying, but I know the words!

MJ: You know the tune.

JS: But anyway. And then all of a sudden one looks, "Hey! There's some 20 guys standing there!" He said, "Hey! Come down!" You know, "Psst! You can't talk to us! You know the order. You can't talk to a Jew. You just leave us alone!"

MJ: You said that?

JS: Yes. All of a sudden, "The lieutenant want you, want you down here." "Yes sir!" And I went down without my accordion. And he was standing there, sitting in the chair, and all the guys. And I salute them. "Lieutenant Joseph Schweiger, labor camp reporting." Yeah. "Where is your squeeze box?" "My squeeze box? Up in this hot [unclear] there." "Bring it down." "Bring it down?" "Yes." And I'm, "Hey guys, Steve, you come down." And I'm, "You stay up there and hand down the accordion." All three have to come down, you know?

MJ: [laughs]

JS: They were all three. "No, no, they don't screw me. Oh no!" I, I, I, I was mad, and desperate. And I started to play. Example, he had a cigarette and I have a lighter. I find it on, on some soldier. And I wanted to give him a light. He didn't take that from a Jew, the light.

MJ: Really.

JS: No. So, but after three weeks he was eating from my hand with music. And this was already November. The head of the outfit was a Captain. His name was Dr. Benker. And I'm looking for this guy. I wanted to find him. I was back in Hungary a few

times and I never find him. Anyway, he had his birthday around, it was around late November. And then they throw him a birthday party, a lot of drink in a big school room, you know? And [he says] "And I have one request. Bring this accordionist with you." He heard about this one guy, Jewish guy. And then I walk in, my yellow band, naturally, you know, you have your, your yellow band. And the drink was in other corner, all the officers standing there, and I was, there was a pot belly oven. I was, put on my accordion and warm my hand. And all of a sudden the guy walk up, "Good afternoon. Please at ease. I'm Dr. Benker. What's your name?" "I'm Joe Schweiger." "Yes, Schweiger, listen, it's my birthday. Do me a favor. Schweiger. Schweiger. Schweiger. You have a relative in Csongrad." That's a town. If they have red hair, they're, I never know them. My father talk about them, an uncle and son. He said, "They are my best friends." Oh. "Listen, it's my birthday. Do me a favor. Take off your yellow band."

MJ: How lovely. Did he do anything else for you?

JS: I am taking my [unclear].

MJ: What?

JS: Till he was there, no Jews was transferred away. And, and around end of November or December they transferred him. He was a, a very smart man, a genius. They transferred him to the headquarters. And another officer took over. And the next morning the state police come in and we march to Belz.

MJ: How long was he, he there?

JS: I don't know, a couple of months was there, I was there.

MJ: Oh.

JS: You know? If they don't transfer him, I never go to concentration camps and he saved me, he did. Saved not me, but all the Jews. His father was a Protestant minister. Wasn't Catholic. Protestant minister. Yeah, and then this kind of thing happens.

MJ: And then you marched to Belz.

JS: Belz, and from Belz to Mauthausen.

MJ: No, but at Belz, tell me about that please.

JS: Belz was the first experience about lice. You know what lice is?

MJ: Yes. Lice, yes.

JS: We, we play it in, in, in Gunskirchen⁹, we play it odd and even, odd and even.

MJ: Excuse me?

JS: Odd and even. You know this odd and even?

MJ: Odd and even.

JS: You know you, you pick lice and odd or even. One, two, or three or five...

MJ: Oh.

JS: Or one or. First time, I never had lice before. But this time, everybody

⁹Gunskirchen - Assembly camp for the Jewish prisoners from Mathausen near Upper Austria. Established March, 1945. *Encyclopeida of the Holocaust*, Book 2, p. 628.

came there. Everybo-, all over the, the Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland. Everything you find they all was there and from there all shipped to Mauthausen. This was a concentration camp, the first one¹⁰. And it was tough. And I find friends there who were dying. And I, I still have their face, you know-- one, it was a tall guy, sitting there, with a blanket on him. And he was dying. [unclear]. I did, oh, ohhhh. I was with him with Mutchkashi, with this killer. He said now, "Oh, I'm dying." "No, you are not dying." And I had some food, and I give him food. And I give him cigarette, which no, you don't give in this, this. You don't give. You steal everything which you can. But I did not, I give. Why the, eh, it's me. I can't have. Stupid, very stupid.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: My life comes first, you know? No, no. I, I helped him to [unclear]. Then I don't do it anymore. No sir. [laughs]

MJ: How long were you there?

JS: Belz? I don't remember. A month or six weeks or eight weeks. And from there was Mauthausen.

MJ: How did you get, how did you get to Mauthausen?

JS: Mauthausen, well they had march end of-- they put us in the cattle, cattle cars. And from Mauthausen, this was a march, to Gunskirchen. Oh.

MJ: How long were you at Mauthausen?

JS: Mauthausen? I don't know how long. I didn't know, remember. I don't know. A month, or a week, or three weeks, or while we, this was, this was a, you know, you know-- I don't remember my parents' face, my sister. I have a mental block. Honestly, I don't, I don't, I don't remember. I have some pictures somewhere. You see, I had a friend, Doji [phonetic] was a Gentile. And my sister know Doji. And before they take them away, my sister give Doji some pictures and the camera.

MJ: Oh.

JS: "If Jóska¹¹ come home, he had to have a camera." I always had a camera. This was a hobby. And I came home, and I find Doji. "Oh, Jóska. I have something for you."

MJ: So you have pictures?

JS: Yeah, some pictures. I don't know [unclear]. I'm, I'm the worst housewife in, in Pennsylvania, you know. I am not neat. I, I'm lucky to be, you are lucky today. The, my friend, Mrs. Stoke was here, who take care of my house the past 30 years, you know?

MJ: Yes.

¹⁰Dachau was one of the first Nazi concentration camps located in the town of Dachau, 10 miles northwest of Munich, established March 20, 1933. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Book 1, p. 339. Mauthausen concentration camp created shortly after the Anschluss of Austria. The first prisoners were brought to the camp August 8, 1938. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Book 3, p. 944.

¹¹Hungarian diminutive for Joseph, phonetically sounds like Yashka.

JS: When my wife was here...

MJ: It's fine. It is fine.

JS: Oh, good, oh, I like it.

MJ: It's wonderful.

JS: Oh sure. It's, oh, beautiful.

MJ: It's interesting. It's wonderful.

JS: Oh I think, sure, I think that it's beautiful. But nobody smoke in this house. That's the only thing. Yeah, we shouldn't put this on tape. Listen, if they find out you smoked, God's gonna shoot fire at you.

MJ: Right.

JS: You can't smoke in airplane anymore. No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

MJ: I know, I know.

JS: And if you know what you want to do...

MJ: Were you in...

JS: Your husband smoke too?

MJ: A pack.

JS: Oh come on, get rid of him, too, Jesus Christ. Next. Oh my goodness.

MJ: Did you know that Germany was, what kind of pressure Germany was exerting on the Hungarian government?

JS: Germany didn't pressure Hungary.

MJ: They did not?

JS: No, they don't have to. In 1936, '34, they have a, a Nazi leader called Szalasi. So the Hungarian Hitler. Hungary never was, was run, run down or occupied by. In 1930, I remember I had friend in, in one town, a very dear friend, was a *Volksdeutsche*, town, you know? The, the 90 percent was *Volksdeutsche*, you know, this German *Schwab* called them, who speak, if you are a salesman want to sell something in these certain towns, you have to speak German or they don't speak to you. And they lived in Hungary for hundreds of years.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And in summertime I went there to visit a friend, and there was 100 and 100 Hitler *Jugend* was there, with the Hitler *Jugend* uniform. Yeah. Damn son of a bitches.

MJ: The name, I can't pronounce it, that you, you said, was, that was the Arrow Red Cross leader?

JS: What?

MJ: The, you used a name, the Hungarian that was running this, running the anti-Jewish...

JS: Oh [unclear]?

MJ: I don't want to say pogrom, no. Well, was he the Arrow Red Cross leader?

JS: Who?

MJ: Arrow Red Cross. There was the...

JS: Oh Red Cross? Red Cross.

MJ: Yes.

JS: I was in, in this town in Ukraines, and the mud was a foot high, you know. You walked in the mud. Was no...

MJ: Yes.

JS: And I walked in this so-called sidewalk. And across the street was the Red Cross who was prostitutes, I mean Red Cross ladies with German and Hungarian officers standing there, and peeling orange, peeling orange! You know what's orange is? Orange! And then I, and, and they throw that orange peel down in the mud. And I was hiding behind a tree, and waiting then if they go back I can pick up the orange peel.

MJ: Oh.

JS: And the orange, I mean, you can't, you can't you can't imagine what this means. You know, and one of them spotted me, and started to laugh. And this Red Cross prostitute, oh, were laughing. "Look at this goddamned Jew! You know what he is waiting for? He want to pick up the orange peel!" And they smashed it with their boots, smashed it in the mud. And, and they were laughing. I can hear this bastard woman's Hungarian, Hungarian. And then I walked away and I asked myself, "Why?" But I talk a while with GIs, who were Second World War. And they had the same opinion about Red Cross that I had in, in, in, in this labor camp. Never. Oh no. You see...

MJ: Have you ever heard of the Arrow Red Cross?

JS: Arrow?

MJ: Uh huh.

JS: No, what is that?

MJ: It's, I'm not sure.

JS: Arrow.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: E-R-O?

MJ: A-R-R-O-W.

JS: Arrow, no, never. What the hell is this? Swiss or something?

MJ: It doesn't matter.

JS: Red Cross is the headquarter in Switzerland.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And they can kiss my ass, all of them.

MJ: Right.

JS: All of them. No.

MJ: In 1944, when Eichmann came in...

JS: Yeah, I don't know when Eichmann, I don't know, I never know Eichmann.

MJ: No, I know, but...

JS: [unclear] what is...

MJ: Do you know what happened to your family when he came in?

JS: No. No. I wasn't there. No, I didn't know. 1943 I see them last time, and I say good-bye to them, and that's it. And I, I never know. Well when I went home in 1945, I was liberated in Gunskirchen and I went to the hospital. I walk into the hospital, the Red Cross flag, you know, military hospital. And I was in pretty bad shape. I was skin and bone. Skin and nothing. And when I was good enough, with a friend-- who live now, Dr. Santo, live in Australia, a very dear friend, I call him every week, and still-- and we walk home. And then I find people who went in the same transport, but I don't know, a different cattle car. And they tell me, "Jóska, don't wait for your family. They, they, they didn't make it." And then that's why I know. And still hoping, still hoping find somebody. You know it's a funny thing. My sister, I mean, who was two years younger. The other is eight years younger. But, let us see, the Red Cross. Oh God! No sir. Boy Scout? When I heard the Boy Scouts here, was one Jewish Boy Scout in Budapest, the Jewish *gymnasium*. You know *gymnasium* is the high school.

MJ: Yes, yes.

JS: Had a own Jewish Boy Scout where I lived, I lived in Budapest this time, when I was young. You see? And when I heard Boy Scout in America, I have nothing to do with Boy Scout. No, no, no, no. It's somehow, you know, it's, it stay with you.

MJ: Sure.

JS: Red Cross stay with you. Boy Scouts stay with you.

MJ: Of course. Did you know anything about Auschwitz?

JS: No. After the war I find out Auschwitz. No.

MJ: You said that there was crematorium in, in the camp...

JS: Somewhere in Mauthausen, yeah.

MJ: Yeah. Did you...

JS: I, but I...

MJ: You knew about...

JS: I wasn't-- I, I, they tell me about it. You see, when we marched, you know, there was no room when we marched in. I was, we were staying outside. It's a hill, well that's was in barbed wire, you know? And it was raining. It was slippery. We stay there, and it was big tent also. Some people who was lucky was in the tent. Like I, I didn't make it in the tent until later, you know. We just sleep outside in the mud and things like this. And that's it. Till all of a sudden, "Five and five! Ten and ten!" Then we started to march.

MJ: How long was that march?

JS: I don't know. A week? A week? I, I don't know how long. Who knows? Who cares? But, ohhhhh this march, oh was [unclear]. A town named Salureto [phonetic]...

MJ: Where is that?

JS: It's in Austria, between Mauthausen and Gunskirchen. Was an S.S. town battalion. And we marched and we have to turn right. And they blocked the street only on five foot, five, eight-foot width. We had to go through. When I reached there, the bodies was around five, eight foot high. You have to climb up in the bodies and climb down in the bodies. This was, a lot of them dead, some of them still living. And the other side, the S.S. staying there with, with the sticks.

MJ: Clubs.

JS: Armed.

MJ: Clubs.

JS: Clubs, yes, long one. And they beat us, you know. And when I see this, I see when the guy lift his hand, I, and hit, then I run toward him and to another one, you know. But till he lift his hand up, I was through. But a couple I missed. And I find out last year when I went to a, a doctor sports medicine, I had broken the [unclear], this bone here was broken.

MJ: Your right hip?

JS: Yes. And this was bothering me most. And I, I had a, had a very famous doctor in 1951. I was paralyzed in my back, and he didn't find it out, the broken, broken bone. And he, I was in traction here, in Mount Sinai Hospital, 16 week this time. You don't even, you were a little kid this time. And, and I had a, they, they broke my bone, the bastards.

MJ: And you ma-...

JS: You see they will kill people, and after it was over, then they searched the bodies. Listen, Hungary, labor camp. We were in town named Koshvar [phonetic, possibly Kolozsvár/Cluj]. And from there, we worked there, and from there we, oh, you, oh. That's what town they collected the Jews, in Koshvar. This was Romania but Hitler give it back to Hungary. And I was working in a, in a wholesale butcher thing for the army. And I steal, steal sausage and ham and put it in under there, and sneak it out to the Jewish families, to people. You know there was a ghetto, you know.

MJ: Yes.

JS: I went in to the ghetto it. And, what I wanted to say there? Oh yes, and, and from there we transferred us to Ukraine. We went to the Ukraine in train. In the train station, train, you know, a long corridor in the train station they lined us up, 200 Jew, lined us up. And people walking there. You know, civilian kids and woman, men. And we had to drop our pants and the underwear, looking in our ass where the Jews hiding their diamond and gold, and stamps in their back. That's what they did. That's what I just remember. That's funny. Koshvar [phonetic, possibly Kolozsvár/Cluj] was the town name. Then we know the Jews was in ghetto. But this was the time when, 1944 was this I think, '44 the ghetto started. Yeah. Yeah, this was it, whew. But the, the Germans, when we had the dead march, in day time, you know, we are marching through and through, you know? And they, they are standing there and laughing. "Ha ha ha ha! *Schau die*

Juden! Verfluchte Juden! Schau die Verfluchte Juden!”¹²

MJ: What does that mean?

JS: Goddamned Jew. *Verfluchte Juden. Juden*, yeah. No, and I didn’t find one, no, not, not one who threw. I find a pie-, I was lucky, I find a piece of bone, which some dog dropped. And I picked it up and I cleaned them on my pants and I chew it. It was good. You see, I chew a lot of grass. I was chewing grass.

MJ: There was no food at all on this march?

JS: No. Once they were, once we, we get some soup, something. Once. I don’t know how, some [unclear]. And I was lucky enough to, with the group to get some soup. Once. Some kind of a black water. But it didn’t do nothing anyway. No. And Gunskirchen when you’re sitting in the floor. Was no where’s, you’re sitting in the floor, you know? And then everybody think, and I have three Hungarian, two brother and a brother-in-law. And they had a *tefillin*. You know what’s the *tefillin* is?

MJ: Sure.

JS: And they lay *tefillin* every day. And they blame it, the whole Holocaust, I don’t speak Yiddish, *ein Ungarischer Yid versteht nicht*. [Yiddish: A Hungarian Jew does not understand]. Yiddish. The whole Holocaust is-

¹²German: Look the Jews. Cursed Jews. Look the cursed Jews.

Tape two, side two:

MJ: Side four. I'm sorry, the, you were interrupted with the, the tape change.

JS: Beg pardon?

MJ: You tell me the rest? You were, you were telling me...

JS: Oh yeah, we were sitting, these three guy lay *tefillin*. And it was so bothering me, "Look, I'm gonna *meshugeh* these two." Today is Shabbas, you know. And Saturday you don't lay *tefillin*, only Sunday to Friday prayers. And they [unclear] when they find that it's only Tuesday, you know? And, and I was, I was no good. And somehow the [unclear]...

MJ: Where was this? I don't under-...

JS: It's Gunskirchen.

MJ: Okay.

JS: The concentration camp. We're sitting on the floor. And he had everything...

MJ: And he had *tefillin* with him?

JS: He had the...

MJ: He kept the, he was able to keep the *tefillin*?

JS: Yeah.

MJ: Oh.

JS: I don't know how.

MJ: Okay.

JS: I, I maybe they find it when somebody throw it away or something like that. And you know, you're sitting next to each other, you know. And my friend's sitting over there, poor guy. Well anyway, they, somehow they steal some, some beans. And they have to go off to cook it. But if you cook it, all three, if one tasted the water, only two have to taste it. You've really got to understand this. But son was stealing from his father, or uncle stealing from his, the, everybody was stealed.

MJ: To live.

JS: To live. The, the worst thing in life is hunger. Next to me was sitting the biggest thief. And then they have to go out to cook the beans. "Joe, please, sit on our stuff, you know, when we go off." "*Meshuge bist du*." [Ger.: You are crazy]. I am the one who caused the whole Holocaust, the *tsures*, the beatings. "Yes, but you don't steal." You understand? The Jewish *khokhem* [Yiddish: wisdom, cleverness].

MJ: You were saying to him, "Why, how can you trust me?"

JS: *Meshuge*! How can...

MJ: And he said, "I can trust you. You won't steal."

JS: Yeah, "But you don't steal."

MJ: Ah.

JS: "You're honest." You know, the Jewish *khokhem*, next to me were a

friend, Deju [phonetic], sitting there. My God. When I was with him, oh all over from the first year on, and then we lost him. And then in, in Mauthausen I find, we found each other. And he was sitting here and was in bad shape. And all of a sudden, you know, 10, 11, "You killed my mother!" You know, he lost his mind.

MJ: Oh.

JS: "Deju, Deju, please sit." "Okay, well, I'm, I'm sorry but-- come on, sit." Morning I get up, he was naked. He was died and everybody steal.

MJ: They took his clothes.

JS: Yeah. I had two pants I knew where I [unclear].

MJ: [calling to someone:] Kenny? Kenny? [tape off, then on]

JS: And you're sitting there, you don't know. All of a sudden whoop, or...

MJ: Yes.

JS: Then I took off my pants. And the other pants was dry under me. And I put on the other pants. And when the other pants was dry, I have to change it again. I was lucky I had two pants. Can you imagine?

MJ: Oh.

JS: And all of a sudden the S.S. disappear. You see, I had a piece of wood. And on one foot long, a piece of round wood under my, my legs. And if I hear somebody hand then I just lift it up on my head. You know, after when you hit, you lose all your, your energy. I mean you were finished. You were hungry. You're chewing grass. You know like, for days, for weeks. And all of a sudden the S.S. disappeared. And this biggest thief, this jerk, get up. He hear the Americans is there. Pushed the friends, "*Ich bin Rabbi Moskowitz.*"

MJ: He's a rabbi? Moskowitz? Is that what you said?

JS: He was the rabbi. The American came, and for a rabbi they will have privileges.

MJ: Ah. He became a rabbi quick.

JS: Yeah, he was a rabbi.

MJ: Oh, he really was, oh.

JS: Oh he was a rabbi. But he didn't have nobody in the world. Just, he was the biggest thief. And then I get up, wasn't easy; I was very, very weak, how do I know, 60, 70 pounds, I don't know. I mean, you see this thing there, this picture there which I show you?

MJ: Yes.

JS: I was almost in heaven.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And, "Now listen, I needed you yesterday. I don't need you today. Yesterday I needed a rabbi." And then I picked up my piece of wood and I smashed him in the face, and then collapsed, you know.

MJ: Where did you get the energy to do it?

JS: Oh, I was mad. Oh, I was mad. This guy, three years I'm waiting for a rabbi who tell me, "Jóska, everything will be all right. Everything. You will see your family." Something encouragement. No. They were jerks. And I hate to tell you, I don't know, I'm sure there were a lot of nice rabbis, but for me, religious leader, rabbi or priest or pope or, or this Muftu¹³ preachers, no sir, especially when they're running for president too! *Oy vay. Tsures.*

MJ: [laughs] You can't get over that, can you, Joe?

JS: No, no. I, that's an insult.

MJ: How long...

JS: [unclear].

MJ: When the, the S.S. went away...

JS: Yeah.

MJ: The Americans came right away?

JS: Yes.

MJ: It all happened at one time.

JS: I, we walked out, with my friend. I had a couple of friends. And then this was early in the morning. You know, everybody went to the, for the kitchen, for food, to grabbing everything. And I says, "Don't go. Don't go." And you know how many I find in the mud die? Where they run, he, he fall. And the rest of them...

MJ: Oh my.

JS: After when we're liberated was hundred and hundred die. I was hungry. I didn't go. I always, I always watched. I want to stay alive. This probably was very important for me, not to die. I, I, I want to prove this bastard will not kill me. And then we walk out, and in, early in the morning and I see a road block. Oh no, the S.S. is back. If we run, then they open fire. We have to go. And all of a sudden, we see 6-foot-11, 12-foot-10, little gorgeous guys with clean uniform with gun. And they were Americans. And one guy, he was born in America, speak Hungarian.

MJ: Oh.

JS: I don't know, is, is luck of the Irish, you know, that. And he give me a can of cigarette. And he give me match. And one puff and I was dying.

MJ: That was too much for you.

JS: The poor guy was scared to death. I, I wasn't eating for, for weeks and then, yeah, but I needed a cigarette. You know what I smoke? Tree bark. Scrape the tree bark, and with newspaper. I didn't have no eyelashes, you know. When you light the cigarette the eyelashes burn.

MJ: What about food? Didn't the soldiers bring in food?

JS: Oh yeah, oh, Americans?

MJ: Yeah.

¹³Probably referring to Mufti - Islamic preacher.

JS: Oh God! This, this ration...

MJ: K ration?

JS: K ration. Of cigarette and, and oh, every, oh, was delicious. And I compared the, that's an interesting story. I went back to Hungary, in my hometown. And I metted a friend who survived with his brother. They had a bakery shop. They are now in, in live in Australia. And somebody give me a wrist watch. I came home, I have some picture, but I don't know, I had a shirt, and some kind of military pants. That's what I own. And somebody give me a wrist watch. A bit, if you shake it, this, this was going, you know, ticking. But this was mine. And walking in the street. You don't speak Russian?

MJ: No.

JS: I learned a couple of words. And the Russian MP, military police, marching, walking, they said, "Eh! *Ayt yishudah!*" [Rus.: Look where you [unclear].] "Come here you bastard." A Russian, they, they are very, it's worse than the American GI. "Yes, what do you want?" "*Du wachusi.*" [Rus.: Give me your watch.]

MJ: Oh.

JS: And they took away my watch. And I went home. And "*Nu Pista*¹⁴," "Come, Steve, I'm getting the hell out of here." "Oh no, Joe, [unclear] we'll get another one." "Oh no, I, I when the Americans liberated me they gave me cigarettes and, and, and this food and little, little pack of cigarettes and everything and the K ration. No sir." And then I left. That's how I started the *Brihah*, the Jewish underground.

MJ: Wait, after, when you were liberated, did the Americans take you to a hospital?

JS: No, I marched in to the hospital.

MJ: You went to the hospital.

JS: [unclear]

MJ: Where was the hospital, right near where...

JS: Hörsching, called Hörsching.

MJ: Is that near where you were?

JS: Oh yeah, near, near Gunskirchen, oh yes.

MJ: And, and they treated you there?

JS: Yeah, yeah, they give me food, and some medicine or something. I don't know what the hell they did there.

MJ: Until you, until you could, how did you get back home then?

JS: I climb up in the train who went that way. And I winded up in the town where my, my wife lived before the war. From there we take the trolley car and...

MJ: That's when you met her again?

JS: No, no, no, no, no, no, after the war. No, no. This was 1945.

¹⁴Pista – is a Hungarian diminutive of the name Steve phonetically sounds like [Pishta].

MJ: Oh, that's right.

JS: I went home and I met her.

MJ: That's right. Did, did you ever try to escape?

JS: Yes. And I'm glad I didn't. I was working in the, in the front, the first line. And one time was a big Russian push. And I hid there with the Russian come in, then they take me prisoner, and I'm free. But they pushed them back. And, and after the war I found out I'm so lucky. With the Russian they were then, this was no different if it's an S.S. or a Jew, he is a Hungarian, and they treat him, I'm sure I'm dead if I...

MJ: Yeah.

JS: Very few came back. No, this Russian business was worse than anything else.

MJ: Yeah, I know, after the war.

JS: Yes.

MJ: There were, there were some people in, in Budapest.

JS: Yes? [walking away]

MJ: I'll wait for you.

JS: Hmm?

MJ: I'll wait for you.

JS: Yeah, no, no, no.

MJ: I just want to know if you knew anything about them. Did you know anything about Kasztner?¹⁵

JS: No.

MJ: Joel Brand?¹⁶

JS: Who?

MJ: Joel Brand?

JS: No.

MJ: Otto Komoli?¹⁷

JS: Komoli? No, I don't think so. I don't know. And I'm pretty bad with

¹⁵Kasztner, Rezso (Rudolph or Israel), 1906 - 1957; Labor Zionist activist. 1943 Vice Chairman of Relief and Rescue committee of Budapest under Deputy Chairman Otto Komoli. With Joel Brand's help able to smuggle refugees from Poland into Hungary via Slovakia. Kasztner believed only possible way to save Jews was through negotiating with Germans - "Blood for Goods." "Kasztner train" left for Switzerland with Jews but sent to Bergen-Belsen instead, in return for trucks and other materials. After much negotiation, people were released and arrived in Switzerland, including Kasztner's family. After the war, testified on behalf of some Nazis on trial. Considered by some to be a traitor. Others concurred that negotiations in Hungary were the only way to save Jewish lives. Sued and tried in Israel but assassinated before the conclusion of the trial. Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Book 2, p. 787.

¹⁶Joel Brand - headed Tiyyul (trip) section border crossing operation. Went to Turkey to negotiate with Allies to exchange 1,000,000 Jews for 10,000 trucks. The effort failed. Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Book 1, p.238.

¹⁷Otto Komoli - active Zionist. Deputy Chairman of Hungarian Zionist Federation. Worked with neutral diplomats to help save Polish Jews into Hungary, 1943. "Excursion" was code name of the effort. Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Book 2, p. 815.

names anyway.

MJ: Well...

JS: I don't, I don't remember your name again, you see? No, I'm serious. And, it's amazing. I have to repeat it.

MJ: Meta, Meta.

JS: Meta. Zubin Mehta.

MJ: [unclear].

JS: Zubin Mehta.

MJ: That's right. It's a tough name.

JS: Yeah, yeah.

MJ: Raoul Wallenberg?

JS: Hmm?

MJ: Raoul Wallenberg?

JS: I heard about Wallenberg. I heard about him. But I...

MJ: Do you know anyone that had contact with him?

JS: No.

MJ: Did you find any members of your family?

JS: Is one, it's funny, I had one relative alive, my, a cousin. My mother brother daughter. And her husband, they had a son and two granddaughter. They live in Budapest. And they are big Communist.

MJ: Oh.

JS: Very big Communist.

MJ: Oh.

JS: He, the son finish the University in Moscow and he is next to the, the big Communist leader. And around three years ago I was there. And you know I bring thing. And I had a pants which I didn't need them. And they live in the, the son live in the second floor. And my friend, a friend from before the war, live in the third floor. And the second floor, I ring the bell, and I left the pants there, you know? If you need them, or somebody else. Next day, I go up again to the friend's. And my cousin is there. Her name is Eva, [unclear]. "Evinca, now, how can you insult us like this?" "Evinca, what, what are you talk about? Joking?" "No." And in the floor had the pants. I said, "You left these pants? Are you serious?" "Yes." "Kiss my ass! You idiot!" And I left them. And the last time I talked to them. This is *mishpokhe*, Communists! Big Communists.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: Jews.

MJ: There are not many Jews in Budapest now, are there?

JS: No, no. They're all gone, [unclear].

MJ: Some story. I would love to hear, I know because you told me before, but we'd love to hear it on tape too. You are part of the *Irgun*? After the war.

JS: No, no, no, it is the *Brihah*. Yeah. This.

MJ: Oh, that's the book you promised you'd loan me.

JS: No.

MJ: Oh no?

JS: No, I give it. You want to see a gorgeous guy?

MJ: Well, I told you you're gorgeous already.

JS: That's a me here. I was in Israel. And this man who wrote this book, he's a genius. His name was Aba Weinstein. He changed it to Aba Goffen. Wyan Goffen is the same thing. He live in *Yerushalayim*. And he was in Canada. And I have good friends, Dr. Horin, who was teaching in Gratz College.

MJ: Dr. who?

JS: Horin, H-O-R-I-N.

MJ: Yes.

JS: You heard about him?

MJ: No.

JS: No? And then he come to see Aba. And he, I know the, the husband, the wife from Munich, was working in Munich, and they were very good friends for Aba also, who was, who was the leader of the *Brihah* in Salzburg. And then, yeah and Aba is in Canada. [unclear]. They give, they give me his name, Aba Goffen, not Horin, not the...

MJ: Oh wait a minute. You're in Canada now?

JS: No, no, no, no. He was in Canada.

MJ: Oh, oh.

JS: He was a Consul in Canada.

MJ: Okay.

JS: And after he went back to Israel. He wrote a couple of books. And I visited Israel when I took this picture. And I called him up and I went over. And then, he say, "Jóska! Jóska, it's funny. You were so quiet. You never said a word when you worked with the *Brihah*." I was very quiet. I was mad. I was sad.

MJ: Oh, sure.

JS: Yeah. And I married my wife. And [unclear].

MJ: Wait, now in '45...

JS: '45.

MJ: You went back to Budapest.

JS: I went back to Budapest and when they...

MJ: They took your watch and...

JS: The watch, and I...

MJ: And you decided you'd had enough of it.

JS: [unclear] I went to Vienna, the Rotshick [probably Rothschild] Hospital. And from there I went to Salzburg.

MJ: Well, you were in the hospital in Vienna?

JS: No, no, this was the, the where all the Jews were. This was a transport the

Brihah took me there. But I didn't know about it. *Brihah* took me to Vienna. And Vienna they can take me to Salzburg, and Salzburg to France, and France to Palestine.

MJ: Ah ha!

JS: But this was the thing. In Salzburg, I didn't go nowhere. I, I, I left lived in a, in there, like this Overbrook Park, where they threw out all the Nazis and put Jews in who were liberated from Dachau, Auschwitz, Gunskirchen, anywhere, you know? And I had a room with a other Hungarian boy. And then I started to work. And I had a friend who was, I know from, during the war, over, in a different labor camp, Deju, and says, "Joe, so why don't you come down to the--" And then I started to work for the *Brihah*. In the meantime I worked for the U.S. Army, the UNRRA, United Nations, you know, with the English officer was the head of the, and to learn to be an auto mechanic. And all...

MJ: To learn what?

JS: To be an automobile mechanic.

MJ: Automobile.

JS: I didn't want to be an auto mechanic. But I figure I want to go to America. I don't speak the language. Auto mechanic is just, you don't have to speak. You're, you know, well anyway. Can you imagine? And I played the piano there every Friday night. And there was a Polish management. The president of the [unclear], of the camp, was called Shuem [phonetic] Young. The vice president, the secretary. One American officer was there who, who run that thing, handle the money with the Americans. But he didn't do nothing. It was all run by Jews. And he begged them, "Please, listen, why don't you try to go to school, the ORT?" It's the greatest organization, the ORT. You know ORT?

MJ: Yes, of course.

JS: You know, if you want to be a doctor, or a lawyer, or a mechanic, anything, you want to go back to school, college, anything, it's free. Must be a *meshugeh*! And I was there some three, four weeks. In the morning you get up, go down and get the breakfast and the lunch and nothing to do. I said, I went to this American officer, and speaked German. He [unclear]. "But I want to go ORT." He looked down, "I don't understand it. A Jew wanted to go to ORT. Oh God."

MJ: Yeah, right.

JS: But I was a Hungarian Jew, you know? And he took me, called up Mr. Wissen [phonetic], was an English gentleman, a, a military uniform.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: And he took me to the motor, no, [unclear], "You wait me in the office mess. And I will take you to the worker's mess, you know? You will eat there breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And then take you to the motor pool." And then, this was winter, you know? And then I had a [unclear], looks like a *schlepper*. And I walk into the officer mess. And standing in a corner. And was a big Bösendorfer there, a concert piano. And some officer playing the piano, you know, pretty badly. And another one is [unclear]. And he wanted to embarrass me. He said, "Eh. *Spiel*, come. *Spiel*, come! Come, *spiel*."

MJ: Why? Did he know you played the piano?

JS: No. No. He want to embarrass me, you know. And I'm standing there and, "Ooo, look at my fingers, ooo." And he knows he going. Oh, and [unclear] he says, "Come, *spiel, spiel*." He says, "goddamned Jew [unclear]." [unclear] I'm in Hungarian I'm gonna tell to him, "You [unclear] bastard, you!" And I sit down there. "What do you want to hear?" Well the guy was English. My Bonnie is over the ocean. He almost fainted. And the Hungarians, and Germans, so...

MJ: They all gathered around?

JS: No. And Mr. Wissen, I see him walking in and looking for me. "Where is Joe? Joe. Joe." And he was a, he say, "Oh."

MJ: [unclear] piano.

JS: "Well, you will not eat there. You will eat here, the officer mess." And then I'm sitting down, first time in my life on American breakfast. And one of the waitress was a Hungarian girl who lived in the same camp where I was. "Jóska, what you want to eat?" "No, no, I don't know." "We got orange juice, tomato juice, grapefruit juice. You want scrambled eggs? Ham and eggs? Over?"

MJ: You didn't know what that was.

JS: I don't know, I never ate, a piece of bread with a little butter on it and coffee. "Well, give me the same thing what this soldier eating," that officer. And this I said. And then I had a pretty bad [unclear] hernia. It was very, very bad this time. But if I cut my finger very bad, very slow heal, and it's a...

MJ: It's slow to heal?

JS: Yes.

MJ: Yes.

JS: My white blood cells are...

MJ: Certainly.

JS: Well anyway, after a few months I cut my finger and bingo. [unclear] And I went to a DP hospital. I walk in there, and then "*Ich hab ein Bruch*." I had a rupture, and I need operation. Well he says to me, "Come back tomorrow." And I'm, "Noooooooo! I'm come back tomorrow, I'll never come back if I leave." And they operated on me. And I had nobody. The whatchyamacall, my roommate come in, and helped me out. I had to go to the bathroom. You know, this time you don't go to the bathroom. Today you had to go to...

MJ: Yes.

JS: You had to go.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: But, then. And then I was bend down. And then he [unclear] get killed. "Don't die on me." And the German nurse, "*Was machen Sie*." [Ger.: What are you doing?] "Get the hell out of here" in Hungarian. In German, "*Heraus* [Ger.: get out] from here. *Sakrament Kruzifix*" [Ger.: sacrament; crucifix]." And I, I cursed the German

nurse.

MJ: Oh.

JS: And I went and I feel. Saturday, lunch time, the second floor where I lived, lived a Polish family. The mother, daughter, and the daughter husband, they survived somehow. And they were very big black marketers, very, very big. I mean they were very rich. And the old mother was Orthodox, kosher. And I see the older woman standing there with a little package. Came to me, "*Hab Ich gehört*" [Ger.: I heard] you were in the hospital. I'll bring you some Jewish penicillin," you know, chicken soup.

MJ: Chicken soup.

JS: And never forget this woman.

MJ: That was nice. That was nice.

JS: I'll never forget this. And, you know, he walked.

MJ: How far?

JS: Oh, half an hour walk.

MJ: Oh.

JS: You know why? In Shabbas he can't take the trolley car.

MJ: Oh.

JS: Orthodox Jew. You know. But, I came home from work. Can you imagine.

MJ: [sneezes] Excuse me.

JS: Salute.

MJ: Thank you.

JS: I came home from work and my roommate tell me, "You, Joe, you are in trouble." He was working in the, in the stock room where the American bring the, bring the suit and everything, toothpaste, toothbrush, comb, everything.

MJ: Yeah, yeah, the Post Exchange.

JS: Make-up, tuxedo, everything. No, no. You know, they collect it and you give your leftover or many times you use something you know, the Jews in, in Europe. "Jóska, you are in trouble. Shula [unclear] want to talk to you. I don't know why." And I walk in, it was evening. It was around 20, 30 people standing there. "*Shalom, Guten Abend.*" "*Guten Abend,*" you know, always joking. "*Guten Aben, Moshi* [phonetic]." And I imitate the Polish Yiddish, "*Moshi.*" Not *Was ist Moshi.*" And I hated this thing. And they hated me too, you know? "*Du bist nicht ein Yid.* [Ger.: You are not Jewish]," they tell me. You know, "*Nicht, nicht.*" This is Yiddish. "*Nicht,* not, no, no. [unclear]." They figure out I am working. I don't speak Yiddish. [unclear] have to be a Hungarian Nazi who sneak in to between the Jews...

MJ: Okay.

JS: Then we want finding out he was a Nazi and killed the Jews! "*Nicht, nicht.*" They said, "Can you say a *b'rachah.*" You know what the *b'rachah* is?

MJ: The prayer.

JS: Prayer, you know, *b'rachah* when you eat bread or washing. They say, "Well, how about the, when you're drinking wine?" And the "*Meshuge bist du*," "Are you crazy? That's the best *b'rachah*. *Borei p'ri hagofen*." I learned this in, when I was a little boy.

MJ: Yeah, you had to ...

JS: And, "Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah. *Mazel tov!*" "No, no, no every goy can learn this. It's easy to learn if you want to survive between Jew." "*Känst du daven?*" [Ger.: Can you read the prayer book?] "I, I a little bit. I forget a lot of it." I said, "Give me a *siddur*," I tell him. "Give me a prayer book." And give me one and then on the, when they opened it this was the *Sh'moneh Esreh*. You don't know, you don't know what a *Sh'moneh Esreh* is.

MJ: No, I don't.

JS: Well, this, this is the *Sh'money Esreh*. "[unclear]." Then they know I am Jewish. They said, "Oh! Oh Jóska." "Hold it! Hold it! You fucking *Polaks*! You god-bastard Jew. You want to see I'm a Jew?" And I dropped my pants, "Here!" [unclear]. "I'm a Jew certainly." Huh! The women screamed and ran. Kiss my ass! Kiss my *tuchas*, all of you. Pulled my pants and walked off.

MJ: After all you had been through, you had to prove to the Jews that you were a Jew.

JS: No, that's the Polish Jews. [unclear] I didn't have any...

MJ: [unclear]

JS: You didn't find, you will never be find in America a Polish Jew. These all came from, from Russia.

MJ: Yeah, yes.

JS: You know?

MJ: I know.

JS: And Friday night coming...

MJ: A Galicia. I love that one.

JS: A Galicia.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: And Friday night is coming in the, "Jóska, *spiel epes*, [Ger.: play something] come down to play the piano Friday night." And I'm, "*Zechedeh*, [phonetic] sweetheart, kiss my ass! I ain't playing yeah!"

MJ: You wouldn't play there.

JS: They asked me, "Jóska, how much you make where you're working?" You know, I made around 400 shilling, and one pack of Austrian cigarette, and some half a kilo hard candy. *Meshuge bist du* [Ger.: you're crazy]. It costs a, I buy a carton of cigarettes from the GI for 400 mark and sell it for 1200 mark!

MJ: You were in business!

JS: In just two minutes I make more than them, yes, but I learn a *fach*

[phonetic].

MJ: Oh, you weren't doing this, he was.

JS: No, no, he was.

MJ: Okay.

JS: No, yes, but I learning the *fach*, [phonetic] learning a trade. When I go to America...

MJ: You'll have something.

JS: I'm seeing the Jewish Family Service when I came here.

MJ: No, you're getting, now what happened, you getting a little bit ahead now.

JS: I thought you want to know that.

MJ: I know, but what, what happened now after, you were, you were trained as an auto mechanic, mechanic then.

JS: I learned that in Austria.

MJ: Yeah. And then, then what did you do?

JS: Then...

MJ: Where did you go from there?

JS: Well I worked for the Jewish underground.

MJ: I know. I'm, I want you to get into it! How did that happen? How did you get into it?

JS: Well, my friend worked for them and they needed a mechanic and so they needed a driver. And example, I get married. And my wife and my mother-in-law didn't know I work for the Jewish underground. You know, I was, I was in jail, you know, but I never, we never use our own name. We had false identification card. John Finkelstein and thing like this. Anything, but not Joe Schweiger. I want to go to America. In America you can't have two things when you come here: tuberculosis and police record. That's two things I knew I, *Boruch dayan emes*, [Heb: blessed be the righteous judge] your opinions.

MJ: Sure.

JS: And then...

MJ: What was the first thing? I didn't understand you.

JS: Oh, that is Hebrew. *Boruch dayan emes*. [Heb.: blessed be the righteous judge]. If somebody gets, if somebody dies then we say *boruch*. This is Hebrew. Never mind.

MJ: But you can't have a police record. I know that.

JS: No, you can't have a police record, and tuberculosis. And I was getting married. And I disappeared for three days. I have no right to go to work. I have to go to Salzburg. And I went to France, Toulouse, to sneak in Jews through. And we knew they were close to [unclear] and all that. And took them to Marseilles. Where was the [unclear] the ship [unclear] and being loaded it up.

MJ: And even your, your new wife and your mother-in-law did not...

JS: They didn't know about it. But my mother-in-law worked in the kitchen

for survived Jewish children, treat them. And the manager, this idiot Polish Jew, asked her, "How's your son-in-law? The Schweiger [unclear]." "Yeah, he's all right." "He's okay? Good. You know, they, they caught a transport." "What transport you talk about?" "*Du weisst nicht?* [Ger.: you don't know?] Your son-in-law is working for the, for the *Brihah*." And then [unclear].

MJ: How did he know?

JS: The Jews know everything!

MJ: That's true.

JS: The Hungarians don't know nothing. The Jews know, the Polish Jews know everything, you know? And, and then I came home and called up Clara. Clara was the chief telephone operator of the, the AJDC, American Joint Distribution Committee.

MJ: The Joint.

JS: Joint, yeah, Joint, yes, AJ. But she speak fluently Hungarian, German, and English, fluently. And then [unclear] her mother, "Clara, you know what Jósi's [pronounced Yoshi] gonna do? He is maybe in jail. He's at the--" And I came home. I bring home bananas and oranges from France, you know.

MJ: From France.

JS: Well, oh, [unclear]. "Sit down. Where you been?" "Oh, know about it?" [both laugh] That was [unclear].

MJ: How long did you do that work?

JS: Till Israel was independent in 1948. That's when everything was kosher.

MJ: From '43 to '48?

JS: From, no, '45.

MJ: '4-, I'm sorry, '45.

JS: '45.

MJ: How stupid of me.

JS: To '48, yeah.

MJ: '45 to '48, three years. That's what I was thinking.

JS: Yeah, for three years. Everything was kosher. And ...

MJ: You worked on the European side.

JS: Yes, yes, yes.

MJ: Getting the people into the boats.

JS: Hmm?

MJ: Getting people into the boats.

JS: Getting the people from all over Europe to Palestine, beginning Palestine.

MJ: Was that all, did all the boats leave from Marseilles?

JS: No, no, no, no, no, from Italy, all over.

MJ: From all over.

JS: All the way...

MJ: Were you all over Europe with this?

JS: Oh, I was in France. I was in Italy, yes.

MJ: And what was your job?

JS: I was driving a truck and repairing the truck.

Tape three, side one:

JS: [unclear] he went to college. We shouldn't eat. This reminds me something. And, [unclear] I [unclear] think about to eat.

MJ: It's good.

JS: His wife was a German gentile who turned Jewish faith and lived in Israel. And here on the children, she was in England, she was a better Jew *wie, wie* [Ger.: than] you and me together.

MJ: A convert.

JS: Yes. And, and we went to, I think Garmisch-Partenkirchen or somewhere. Clara my wife, his wife, and myself, you know, riding there. And then Dr. Hoffman was studying us. He said, "You know Clara, Joe, Israel need people like you are, having trade, intelligent. This what our country wants, you and me." "Well, I'm sorry. I don't want to go to Israel." "What?" "No, too many Jews. Then my first choice is United States. The second," and, and my Clara, "Jósi, please! [unclear]."

MJ: She was embarrassed. You embarrassed her.

JS: No, not embarrassed. But she knows I, I'm outspoken.

MJ: Oh.

JS: The first choice is United States. The second choice is Canada. The third choice is Australia. And is not even until then I'm going to Israel. Israel I can fly there. I don't have to take the ship. I was working with the *Brihah* and then I had this much privilege or something, how you call this thing.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And fortunately I didn't go, we didn't go there.

MJ: Did you say unfortunately?

JS: No, fortunate. After when we was re-liberated, and then when we was legal, then the *Shlichim*, the Israeli workers, came to work in the Consulate, you know. They are all Sabra, Sabra. They can kiss my Sabra, non-Sabra ass. Sabra! I'm, I'm sitting there eating. Two, three sit down next to me. "*Jósi was bist du?*" [Ger.: Joe, what party are you?] I am a *Betar* or a *Shomer Hatzair* or I don't know what the hell is the -. "*Ich bin a Yid!*" Then what's the difference? A woman who, who was, I think was German, went to Israel and came back. And she was there, responsible for a whole house, the kitchen, the bathroom, the rooms, everything you know? She was the house mother or how you call this damn thing. And then when I work in the garage, and then I was dirty, I went up and took a shower. And I came out from the shower. "*Was machen Sie heir?*" [Ger.: What are you doing here?] "You know, I took a shower." "You can't do this! Here, take this one."

MJ: Why?

JS: Well I am not an Israeli.

MJ: Oh.

JS: I am a worker here. I am just working around in the garage. Now listen, when you see that, "One more word out of you," I show my fist, "then I knock the shit out of you, woman or no woman. Get the hell out!" And she went. Next time she see me she was [unclear]. I mean this, they are, I don't know why they do that. What's the difference? I had a mechanic there this time. The Germans worked there also. The Germans and Italians were there, a lot of work there, a lot of cars. If one German want to take a shower I send him up too. So I says, "Yeah, indeed." But no, he said, "Nah."

MJ: When did you come to America, Joe?

JS: 1949, Jewish Family Service. You see, we lived in Munich. And I had a very dear friend who worked for the HIAS who did this. And then example, was, they sent empty affidavit, only number on it. And we supposed to give it to the people. And Tommy worked, I did not tell you his first name, last name, I mean Hungary is first name, and last name, Tommy. And he worked in the office. And for one, these certificate, they sell that for 500 dollar, 800 dollar, 1000 dollar, 200 dollar.

MJ: You were selling them?

JS: Yes! They're Jewish! He is Hungarian Jew, yes!

MJ: All right.

JS: They give away two and 15 they sold. And the Jews in Philadelphia put some, collected some money and sent "x" amount affidavit. And Tommy [unclear]. "Jóska, come, come, hurry up from, from the *Brihah*." I mean this is the, the Consulate. "Come. Here is three, one for mom, one for Clara, one for you."

MJ: He, he dealt them out.

JS: His hand was shaking, you know? And then after two months, you know, "Come on over. You have your number." And I said, "Philadelphia, Hotel Congress." That's my address. Philadelphia, Hotel Congress, in Walnut Street. [unclear]

MJ: I don't know.

JS: The Chinese wall, you know you're too young, you don't know the Chinese wall in Philadelphia.

MJ: No, because I didn't live in Philadelphia then. I'm not too young but I...

JS: Sure you are.

MJ: I was in the Midwest then. I never saw the Chinese wall. I heard about it.

JS: Anyway, and we arrived to...

MJ: You came on a ship.

JS: On the ship, *General Black*, *S. S. General Black*. 10 days. And I'm, when I'm gonna, I have a Jacuzzi bathtub here. When I see that going I get seasick.

MJ: You still get seasick.

JS: Well anyway...

MJ: You landed in New York?

JS: In New York, the Statue of Liberty. Oh my my! And, you know, we went through CID, and check-up and x-ray. And they take 35 men in there for x-ray, you

know, for lung. But if you see something, they'll take a big one. My wife, she had spots.

MJ: On her lungs?

JS: Yeah, but wasn't malignant. This was growing, you know through emotions or something get. But this was a, how you call this, healed.

MJ: Did, she had TB there?

JS: Yeah, there, there she had TB. And you can't, and since you come here, you know [unclear]. And I have a man, a Polish man who was a teacher [unclear], who was the head of this [unclear]. "Jóska, no problem." He hide the big one, and the small one.

MJ: Oh.

JS: And, and she didn't, he didn't take nothing like, "No, please no. You and Clara, you are good friends." We visited Austria, [unclear].

MJ: Oh.

JS: And there was a gentleman, a Polish gentleman. A Gentile, you know, who is the real McCoy.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: Well anyway, we arrive here, and on the whatchyamacall, the health department come on.

MJ: In New York?

JS: In New York.

MJ: Yeah.

JS: Yeah, on the ship, you know and then over-- "Joseph Schweiger, Clara Schweiger." Yes, and on my mind is hoping Clara [unclear]. And then Clara says to me we have to go back. Where? A ticket place there. And she understands. [unclear]. You know, he looked at us...

MJ: You said that to your wife?

JS: And he looked at my wife. And then she don't he don't know. He says, "No, it's all right." I said, "How did you know that?" Can you imagine? The man was so honest.

MJ: Good.

JS: He didn't have the guts to destroy it. He just didn't serve her, they asked for the x-ray of Clara Schweiger, and he sent only two of us, you know? And then the lady waited for us [unclear] and give us five dollar.

MJ: Who was she? Who?

JS: In, in the ship.

MJ: Yeah, but what...

JS: Well you know...

MJ: Organization was that? Who, who met you?

JS: The Jewish Family Service.

MJ: Jewish Family Service.

JS: One lady took us to the station where, how you call this thing, the...
MJ: The train?
JS: Central, Central Station.
MJ: Oh, Grand Central.
JS: Grand Central, you know?
MJ: Yeah.
JS: And then I want to pay for the taxi and she didn't let me. "No."
MJ: And she gave you five dollars?
JS: No, they give an envelope. [unclear].
MJ: Yeah.
JS: And then, all right, here, and the lady [unclear], and took us [unclear].
MJ: And put you on the train?
JS: Put you on the railroad station...
MJ: To Philadelphia.
JS: At Philadelphia get off, and then a lady waited for us. Was evening. And then the taxi to...
MJ: To the hotel.
JS: In the whatchyamacall it? And then I wanted to pay for a taxi, and she let me pay for a taxi. I feel better. Yeah, no, I am [unclear]. I have five dollars. How much five dollar?
MJ: Five dollars! Well you didn't have a lot.
JS: I don't know about that, but I'm, "How much is this?" You know, I ask him, "How much is it?" "I don't know, one dollar, two." And then when the hotel, they say, "What kind of room you prefer?" "The cheapest." Somebody have to pay for it. And after the Jewish Family Service, you know for, we have case worker. And who is sitting there but one of the Jewish guys from Salzburg...
MJ: Oh!
JS: Who was big black marketing! He says, "Jóska! I explain to you! You don't have to go to work here. For months you can save it, 13 kilo." He's only a day in America even. "No, no, I'm working." He said, "Oh for you is easy. You had a trade, [unclear]. You had a trade." I go, "Yes I had a trade."
MJ: Is this the same one that told you not to work?
JS: Is another one here, but at the hotel, yes, you know?
MJ: He was selling cigarettes and you said [unclear].
JS: Yeah, he, he was a very rich man there, you know?
MJ: Did the Jewish Family Service help you get a job? Did they help you locate one?
JS: Here, what? Yeah, they didn't want me to get a job.
MJ: Why?
JS: We have to learn, learn the custom first, and learn English.

MJ: English.

JS: And when I'm learning they will get me. They, they pay everything. I had a furnished room in West Philadelphia, Sixtieth and [unclear], Sixtieth and Bonn in Baltimore. And they paid for everything, you know?

MJ: Wonderful.

JS: And then, but I, heh, you see in America, a paid man, paid with gold.

MJ: Yes.

JS: I walk out the first morning, and the two guys repairing a Dodge. They're pulling out the piston and put another piston. And they don't know what they doing. "Hey, you are refugee." They, they didn't know.

MJ: Yeah, they knew.

JS: Hey, and me, "Me mechanic, mechanic." And I went under the car, put the [unclear]. And, "Oh, I have to go." "Hey, hold it!" And they give me money. "No, no, no, no." "Oh, oh it's America. You will find out..."

MJ: They wanted to pay you.

JS: I didn't want it. They was asking. On the corner was a Atlantic station. Peter Coler. It was Atlantic station and a automobile repair shop. And was a Pontiac agent and a Pontiac agent there off and lining the wall. And then the man there says, "Ey! You're the refugee. Ay! Yeah, how you doing, ay." You know, I don't speak a good English. I sign language with him, you know, "I want to do that. I want to learn what kind tools they're using." You know, I bring metrics tools.

MJ: Oh, yes.

JS: Mechanic tools in here. And in America have no...

MJ: Yeah, it's a different...

JS: [unclear]. And then I -- and he give me, [unclear]. In the evening we had-- take a walk and Peter Coler was sitting there. "That's your wife? He won't listen," he says. "Tell him I'd like to learn what's tools he, [unclear] my money." [unclear], "Tell to your husband, in America you work you get paid for it!"

MJ: Oh.

JS: Listen, and he had a customer, I forget his name. And he bought his car in Girard, Chevrolet, 59 and Lancaster Avenue. He says, "Now, I will talk to the service manager." And he talked a bit there, the service manager. And he hired me. I was automobile mechanic, new car complain mechanic. Can you imagine, new car, 1949 new car. You know, new car complain?

MJ: A complaint?

JS: You have a new car.

MJ: And it doesn't work right.

JS: And you make a list. This throttle, the motor, or the bang, the bang, the bang. And you came, they send to you me. And I don't speak a word English. "Listen, listen, hey Joe, hey, I have a--" And then I'm, "No, no, no. And I want to stop you." No,

no, no. And you go on the list and you [unclear]. “No speak English!”

MJ: Oh that’s so funny. That is funny.

JS: And you know what happened? I never find one customer who paid good money for a new automobile who go to the serviceman and say, “Now, damn it, give me somebody who speak the language!” Never. Never find one customer in Girard Chevrolet who was complaining to Dave. Can you imagine?

MJ: How, and then, then did your wife also work? Did she work?

JS: Also worked, yeah. Sure, she worked, and the, and then she worked for Lit Brothers. And Lit Brothers sent her to the executive, executive school. And she was a buyer of a junior miss dress department, till she had to resign. And you’re [unclear].

MJ: Joe, did I, did we miss anything? Is there anything more you’d like to tell before I turn this tape off?

JS: No. I don’t know.

MJ: It’s just, I have one question.

JS: Yeah.

MJ: I think I know the answer. I wanted to, what do you think helped you survive? What was...

JS: What do I think helped me survive? I’m a son-of-a-bitch!

MJ: [laughs] That would not be my answer! No, be, be, be serious, Joe.

JS: Yeah, no, he will not kill me. No. Nobody will kill me. Not today, not this time, no sir. Mmm nnn. If somebody hurt me, I kill him. I beat the hell out of him, or I can get beat the hell out of, you know? No, no, no, no, no sir. No if or but. I can not be pushed around. I never, I, I have an aunt in Hungary. And you know, in Hungary the custom is *Kuss die hand*. You kiss the hand, especially for an aunt or a grandmother.

MJ: Yes.

JS: And my aunt walked in, and, “Joey!” Like this. And our family, nobody kissed hands. I kiss my mom. I kiss my dad. But we didn’t, I never kiss my parents’ hand. We didn’t have, we, we they didn’t teach us to kiss hand. Oh, we kissed, you know, mom, dad and so on, like. And like, you know, I never kissed nobody hand or nobody back ground or forehand. No, no sir. I’m a straight shooter.

MJ: You are indeed. Thank you. I’m gonna turn this-