

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ALAN SPIEGEL

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Harvey Weiner
Date: March 12, 1989

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AS - Alan Spiegel [interviewee]

HW - Harvey Weiner [interviewer]

Date: March 12, 1989

Tape one, side one:

HW: ...with Mr. Alan Spiegel on March the 12th, in his apartment and he is starting to explain about what he thinks in regards to remembering some of these events.

AS: I think it is very good to know that people-- first to the Jewish, then to know that people were helping.

HW: Yes, mmm hmm.

AS: Because the, I don't think so, well this is my opinion on it only, that they helped too much, because the people forget and the worst thing, the Jewish people forget. Maybe they make like a holiday, like a Passover or like the other one from these occasions that we have a holiday, but they're just forgetting. I am [unclear].

HW: Mmm hmm.

AS: And, it would be good mostly for the young people to know.

HW: Yes, of course.

AS: That is the most important thing, because the main trouble is they are not working for Jewish causes, that's the whole thing. You know, I experienced in Europe when this happened during the Hitler years, nobody thought would happen this way. And when it happened, the people was not organized to help. Only the Zionist Movement, the members of the Zionist movement. They did all deciding, they did all the traveling and everything. The other people didn't think it can happen; it was impossible. But the Zionists was organized. I was a Zionist. I am a Zionist, too. And they had [unclear]. And [unclear] in this helping process because I know very well the whole thing. I studied the whole thing, the Jewish situation in Europe before the war and during the war and during this, that time I was [unclear].

HW: Where were you born, Mr. Spiegel, where?

AS: I was born in Yugoslavia.

HW: When now?

AS: When, [unclear]?

HW: When.

AS: When, in 1903, I am 86 year old. And I am proud of it, of my grandfather, was the first Zionist...

HW: Oh.

AS: ...in, in Hungary because he became very friendly with Theodore Herzl, and Theodore Herzl was a terrific speaker and a terrific man and he influenced my

grandfather to visit Palestine. My grandfather was a very well-to-do man and he traveled and then the traveling was not too easy.

HW: Yes, I'm sure.

AS: In Turkey and [unclear] and he saw there [unclear] the situation, how poor are the Jews, how they had nothing, there were Arabs who were poor too, and then he donated very much money for this purpose, even he left his whole belongings, everything for the Jews in Israel, in Palestine, not for his family. His family didn't need it, father was a well-to-do man, too. And from him I learned the Jewish history and the Jewish situation in Europe, because the Jewish situation before the war was not easy.

HW: [unclear]...

AS: Everywhere-- Pardon me?

HW: I was going to say, before 1941 and all?

AS: I [unclear] try talk about 1930.

HW: Oh, I see.

AS: 1915, 1920, before the wars, because in all European countries with few exemptions was antisemitic. With few exceptions, very few, the northern states, Belgium, Poland, Denmark, they were not so antisemitic, but Germany, France, the experience during the war, France, Spain, Russia, Poland, Austria, are all antisemitic. Italians sometimes, but very [unclear] and in this ground they grew up the antisemitism. It was not so terrible, not so bad, but when Hitler came, then he made it terrible because always, [unclear] to the troubles from there, I talk from conference, not from family trouble, when trouble always the Jews are the cause for everything wrong, always. Remember France, the Dreyfus?

HW: Yes, yes.

AS: Remember in Russia the beginning of the pogroms in Kishinev.

HW: Yes, my parents were from Eastern Europe, so.

AS: That, that influence, a young boy, I don't know, remember of his name, I forgot the name, it is very easy, and he said he saw how they killed the Christian girls to put their blood in the *matzah*. And in Russia, [unclear] in Poland. In Austria they never liked the Jews. In Hungary was very antisemitic, everybody even I read now in Switzerland, after the war, during the war, in German Switzerland, because Switzerland are put together from two, from German, Italian, and French. In German Switzerland was an antisemitism very, very bad. Then it started with Hitler you know, but the main cause was, nobody wants to know about the Jewish troubles, for Hitler and all the killers they give [unclear] and nobody wants to take the Jews in Europe. He tried to talk to the, to England, to France they had big territories in Africa, in Asia, to take some Jews, 100,000 Jews. They couldn't take it and when Hitler saw nobody wants to take the Jews, of course [unclear] and this way it started. Not only Hitler is the bad fellow, there is Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. I don't know who was in France, the minister and every--, nobody want to take the Jews. When it is trouble nobody wanted to take the Jews, so this gave

Hitler the strength of [unclear] because nobody wants the Jews, nobody cares about the Jews. Let's get rid of them. Then in 1938 or '39 he started in Poland, there the Jews were many, many Jews were there, to have killed the Jews. They, from S.S. and from all their groups, they made some killer groups, [unclear] in villages they took the Jews, they have to make a grave and they shoot them. But this was very slow, they couldn't kill enough.

HW: Mmm hmm.

AS: They couldn't get rid of it, don't forget in Poland was I think 3,000,000 Jews. Because in Germany were not too many, 200,000, 250,000. It's too many Jews for these big Germans. And then it started already, started, started, started, then they made the different killing camps and first they killed they close them in a automobile, you know they closed the door. And they let the gas from the motor in there. Must to help me, because I don't speak very well.

HW: No, I understand, yes you are speaking very well.

AS: They put in the gas.

HW: [unclear]

AS: ...and when the car went, they killed the people there. Later, to make this more perfect, they give order for the automobile factory, they made special [unclear] for them, with special strong doors on the back, because everybody was pushed towards the back and that way, that was 10, 15, or 20 SS men had go outside the automobile and when the doors opened by the pushing, the pressing, then they killed them. But this was not enough. Then they studied how can they put more and more cadavers, dead people in the graves. You know, systematically and finally an engineer finds out that the gas is the best solution. And they made this gas and this way they killed thousands and thousands.

HW: What was your life like, Mr. Spiegel before the German invasion of Russia, in 1941. How were...

AS: I was not, because the German invasion. I was, I had a very good, going business, in Transylvania, Cluj, Kolozsvar¹. I was partner with my father-in-law. We had a clothing factory and we had clothing stores. We manufactured the clothing and we had in different building, big stores and we sold it. Very good going business.

HW: So you felt comfortable and secure in your life in Hungary.

AS: I feel always comfortable [unclear]. In Hungary, yes. Not always because I don't want to tell you my life story you are not interested, but this is my life story is the real story of the whole thing, because when I finished my schooling it was 19-, about 19-, 1920.

HW: Which school was this?

AS: In Budapest.

HW: In Budapest.

¹Kolozsvar – the Hungarian name for the city of Cluj.

AS: Because my parents and, they lived in Budapest, my father was an important export merchant and I was sent to the university I couldn't get in easy, because this was the *numerus clausus*², only five percent of the Jews could attend the university.

HW: Like a quota system.

AS: Yes. But my godfather was a Christian man, who loved me very much and he had arranged it, he had very good connections and they took me at the university to the medical studies. I wanted to be a doctor, wanted to be a surgeon, because my grandfather's father originally was a surgeon.

HW: Oh.

AS: He came from Austria and was a military surgeon. But I had lots of trouble.

HW: Is this in the university?

AS: In the university, they, they beat up the Jews, you can't imagine, when five percent Jews you are among.

HW: Yes.

AS: But there was so many they beat up the Jews, fortunately, I got a, got a very good place. I was very interested in anatomy and Professor Langushek [phonetic] took me as his student in his univ--, uh, in his, how can I forget myself?, took me as a demonstrator there, because I wrote. He never had a book, and I made notes and I made a book, anatomy book and he was very, very thankful for it and he asked from me if I want to work with him I can. Myself and my friends who were next me are not Jewish, are Christian. We went to, in the, the university and helped the other students to study the cadaver, I helped them, that's why I was never, I was never wrong, because I taught that. But before the last examination of that four and a half years, I was the vice president of the Jewish student association. I took always part of the Jewish movement, that's what I am telling now, the young people do not know, today they don't take part of it, they don't do anything for the Jewish, just they eat gefilte fish and that's all,

HW: Right.

AS: That's all their Jewishness, or corned beef sandwich.

HW: Right.

AS: And before the examination there, a couple students came up to me, they said, since one year they cannot make the examination, because when they have to go in the examination room the Christian students, they didn't let them go in. And then they can go in until eight o'clock the door is closed, after a half eight I cannot make anything. I should help him. It was about eight students, seven or eight. And, I became a little

²*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. In Poland Jews were limited to 10%. (The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia, Cecil Roth, Editor in Chief, Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York: 1959)

angry and took my revolver, because I had a right to have a revolver. And told them, "Come tomorrow, seven thirty and--." Is this interesting?

HW: Yes, yes.

AS: Seven thirty and we went to the entrance and there was standing the [unclear] Hungarians, with sticks, with boxers. And they said, "Don't step, the Jews shouldn't step in the, to the door, in the door or in the room, because they will be beaten to death." And I took out my revolver, I put it up, they knew me very well, they knew I am, a decisive man, "Anybody who puts his hand on a Jew, will be shot." And I told the Jews, "Run in." And they run in and then they have the examination. But after two weeks, I was called to Rector Magnificul [phonetic], he was the head of the university, because the university there was entirely different. No policeman can go in, no soldier can go in with weapon. It was a separate...

HW: Separate.

AS: Separate country. Only Rector's permission gave for everybody to do something then. They called me, they called me in and asked me, "Do you have a revolver with you?" And I told the [unclear] "Yes," because [unclear] I am interested than before. "Thank you." They left me. "Go." And after, in about six weeks, or four weeks, they made four, from four professors, so called judgment group who judged me and I told them, there was, he was the head Rector and what happened, what is their opinion, what should they do with me because I did this thing? Because he proposed, the Rector, that I should be throw out from the university. You can't imagine, three months later I would be a doctor.

HW: Yes.

AS: I had my doctorate already in. I made it very well. And I would be the youngest doctor in Hungary, because I went in the school one year earlier and in 22 years old I would be a doctor, medical doctor. So the four professors, two--, one was my Professor Langushek and the other professor liked me very much, said, said, "No, he should stay there." The other two professors said, said not to throw me out, to keep me. The other two was very angry at me and said, "Throw him out." And the Rector himself said throw me out. And three against two, they threw me out from all the university [unclear].

HW: Wow.

AS: I was thrown out. And I became very ill, because my father died a year ago, and I became so sick I didn't want to study anymore. I went to Romania to my uncle who was a director in a big textile factory. I wanted, I didn't want to be in Budapest anymore. And after a month there, I told him, "I would like to get a job in the factory and work there." He said, "Are you crazy?" he said, "Go study in Bucharest, I give you the money you can go study, no problem." And, I could go in Italy or Germany and everywhere. I didn't want to be a doctor. And I studied in the-- I went in the factory and became there a working man for a year and that's all what happened. After I went,

after a year, I got a much better job, because they liked me and later I had very good job. And I went, during the job, went to Kolozsvar. I married there.

HW: Now this is in Romania?

AS: Romania, yeah. I married there. I left my job. And I became partner of my father-in-law.

HW: What year was that, that you married?

AS: When I married? In 1932.

HW: In 1932. To Elizabeth?

AS: To Elizabeth, yes. I am married for 56 years.

HW: I see, very nice.

AS: And I became, you know, always in Europe, who was rich was *khlepen* [phonetic] is everywhere [unclear] and the big shots, but what I am not paid for in, you know, who has not has salaries I always went to the rich people, through my situation I got a big job by the Jewish community, I became the, because I had a college education, I became the, I don't know how you tell it. I took care of the Jewish schools.

HW: Yes.

AS: We had a lot of Jewish *gymnasiums* and Jewish elementary schools.

HW: Now this is in Romania, in Bucharest?

AS: No in Bucharest, in Kolozsvar, in Cluj, Transylvania. But back home I became a very hard working man, member of the Jewish organization.

HW: I'm sorry, I just remembered that, yes, you mentioned that town. I was thinking back to before, yes.

AS: And I was part of the Jewish leaders in the community, well it was a big Jewish community, about 20,000 people was there. And a member of the Zionist party, later I became the vice president of *Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael*³. I went in different cities to speak, collect money, for Israeli purpose, and I worked very hard. In the sport club, I was a leader in the sport club, and Jewish Zionist sport club, and became an ardent Zionist. And when this happened, this trouble, I was working together with a man who is very big and very famous, but in the wrong way. Dr. Kasztner Rezső, do you hear about him?

HW: I think, I think yeah we have some notes about him.

AS: They said that he wrong, but he wasn't. And, he asked for -- he was a journalist and he left for Budapest.

HW: Rezsne Kasztner.

AS: Rezső Kasztner. Dr. Kasztner, yes, oh very famous. They were killed in Israel.

HW: Oh. So you were friendly with him?

AS: Friendly with him and we worked with him, because he was the organizer of the Zionist group. And when this Hitler here it started...

³*Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael* - Hebrew term for the Jewish National Fund.

HW: At about what year was this?

AS: About 1940.

HW: Mmm hmm.

AS: Hitler, it was thought that the [unclear] the Zionists, how you call it? They made a Zionist-- I don't find the right word, but they get together and they tried to see the Jews who were deported. It was three men, I think the name was *Gavar* [phonetic], the name I've forgotten. *Gavar* was its society what their name was. And Kasztner, Joel Brand, and the third one, who's name I forgot.

HW: Was it Otto Komoly?

AS: Pardon?

HW: Otto Komoly? No?

AS: No. Joel Brand was the head of it, he speaks very well many languages. And his wife was from Polish Jewish descent and when the Germans took the Polish Jews to the concentration camp, he⁴ was a very hardworking and very brave woman. He went there and he paid for the SS officer and the people and he liberated them, his relatives.

HW: This was Joel Brand?

AS: Joel Brand's wife.

HW: Mmm hmm.

AS: And Joel Brand was the head of this [unclear] I don't know how you call it. And Joel Brand's daughter to talk to the Germans because two kinds of German officer was. One who can, who you could pay. And one you can't. He always find out who could be paid and who could be, how you call it, and try to liberate some people on transports. Dr. Kasztner, he was very good with the Hungarian government and the Hungarian police and he arranged a thing with the police.

HW: He arranged what?

AS: With the police, in Budapest.

HW: Ahah. Yes.

AS: They didn't looked it.

HW: Oh, I see.

AS: For months.

HW: So, they looked the other way, he kind of hid.

AS: And the third one...

[End of tape one, side one.]

⁴He – it appears that Mr. Spiegel means “she” referring to Brand's wife.

Tape one, side two:

HW: I am interviewing Mr. Alan Spiegel and you mentioned a third man's name.

AS: The third man's name, I don't, I don't know. He was a juggler. He spoke many languages, he was the connection to the different consulates, to the French, to the Belgian, you know. Everyone, man had their resource. And Kasztner wrote to me once I should come up to Budapest, I came up to because I had to buy some merchandise there and they gave me the job in Kolozsvár, in Cluj, because there was a Romanian, Romanian frontier, to put the saved people through Romania and Romania to Garad [phonetic], and from Garad by ship to Palestine.

HW: And about when was this? Mr. Spiegel, about what year?

AS: 40s. I would say 40s. '40, '41, '42. '42 I went in a slave labor myself, the Hungarian military slave labor, I was not home for a certain time and we had to stop the thing. But after I came back, I did it again.

HW: How long was that, that you were in the slave labor?

AS: I was in the slave labor with different interruptions about one and a half, two years, but I came home, I got again my officer I paid, I came home for a month. Then I went to Budapest. I bring again, brought again people with me, I went through the frontier and I paid the Hungarian officers and the Romanian officers and I went through.

HW: Where was the money coming from, Mr. Spiegel to...?

AS: From us. We had plenty money.

HW: People were raising the money?

AS: People that had plenty money. This was a very rich city, a very rich people down there, and I gave very much, not I, my father, you know, he was very, very rich and he gave a lot of money.

HW: What was it that your father did?

AS: My father-in-law was in the clothing business.

HW: And your father as well, was he in clothing, too?

AS: My father, no, my father in Budapest. He died, he was a import-export merchant.

HW: So he had died before this.

AS: He died before I went to Romania. He died one year before. And then we worked briefly, but when the Germans in 1944 invaded, they came into Hungary, to Romania and it started [unclear]. They took my father-in-law and my mother-in-law and I don't know how you call it, 40 Jewish people they took in a jail and they said when anything happens to the Germans they will kill them.

HW: Like hostages.

AS: Hostages, that's the right word. And after, they took away our stores, took away our factories, they took everything, but I saved the money and we take all the money what we could and put in the Jewish community and we had plenty money to work with it and after came

there the concentration camp in Hungary, we were concentrated in Cluj and the whole part of this [unclear] are the concentration camp, the first concentration camp and we were there for a couple months.

HW: Which one was this?

AS: This was 1944.

HW: And do you remember the name?

AS: Kolozsvár, Cluj, Cluj, in a big factory. And then went from there they send the people away, but they told us, they don't send them to Germany or to be exterminated, I know there was extermination camp, but I know they send somewhere in the country and I work there and they believed that. But it was not true.

HW: How did you know at that time about the extermination camps?

AS: Through Brand, Dr. Kasztner and myself.

HW: I see.

AS: How we saved the people, save the people from the extermination camps...

HW: So you knew what was going on when they were sending them [unclear].

AS: Not hundred percent, not hundred percent, because this was all very secretly and then we got taken to Budapest. From Budapest to Germany and to different concentration camps. But, in between Brand was talking to the Germans. The Germans were beaten in Russia. They didn't have proper equipment, they didn't have enough motor cars and the motor cars are no good in the Russian winter and the German general, one general talked to Brand, Brand had a connection to him and he said, "If you bring me thousand cars, I give you hundred thousand Jews." Brand couldn't do it alone, he said he has to talk to the Jewish leaders, they were in Constantinople partly and partly in Palestine, and he traveled to Constantinople. They called me in it, the English people, more in Palestine and [unclear]. They never came out from the camp, only after the war.

HW: I am sorry, I didn't follow the last part. You were going to Constantinople?

AS: He talked to the Jewish people to get the cars.

HW: Yeah.

AS: We knew, we knew it cannot be done easily. But he took, the thing was to make the time longer to stay there.

HW: Yes.

AS: No to terminate, not to deliver the people to Germany so they were killed.

HW: Yes.

AS: To wait, to take time.

HW: Yes, to stretch it out.

AS: To stretch it, right. So he was taken there.

HW: He was captured in Pales...?

AS: Captured by the Germ, by the English.

HW: In Constantinople.

AS: In Constantinople, no in Constanople [sic], when then in Constanople, in another country, an Arab country. It was the English people, the English people. That's why I am telling you, not only the Germans are...

HW: Yes, right.

AS: And he couldn't talk anymore because they knew he, he is trying to do something. Then Kasztner took over the Germans and he was talking to the Germans and when we couldn't get the cars, then one of the German generals said, "Please, give you me some money," from value I don't know how many millions dollar, "and we will free some Jews in exchange." He collected money in two big bags.

HW: Is this Kasztner?

AS: Kasztner yes, took to the Germans. And then they said about 1200 Jews be sent to Austria and from Austria to Switzerland. In Kolozsvar was a group of about 300, 350 Zionists, university professors, and rich people really donated the money. And we were the last group that left Hungary. We were sent to Budapest. And in Budapest, we were in a place in a Jewish school and all the Hungarians whom we want to save came there to it; it was very crowded, we built places for them, but not long time. And we were under the SS and later this 1200 grew up to 1500. And we were up there, four or five weeks staying there. We were put in, on a train, 40 people in a-- was not so bad like Polish Jews, [unclear] and we were sent to Austria. In the camp, there in Budapest, by the doors were SS people and they were always talking with my daughter who was looking very like a Aryan child, blond hair, light eyes, and one of the guards tells her, "Come here." I was already afraid to send her but couldn't do anything else. I let her go and she told me the man, the German, "I have a daughter like you at home. Nice to see you." The next day he brought chocolate for her. He was very nice to me, he let my sister bring in some food for us because we didn't have enough food. Josef was his name. And we are going on the train and once on the train in Moggorod.

HW: And your wife was with you at this time period?

AS: Sure, with my whole family, because they saved me because I was a Jewish leader.

HW: I see.

AS: They saved me, but I didn't put up all the families. My father-in-law, my mother-in-law came with me too.

HW: And so how many people were you in the family there?

AS: Five.

HW: Five. It was your father-in-law, your mother-in-law, yourself, your wife and your daughter.

AS: That was all my family. And I was standing there and some repair was done and I was the commandant there, the Jewish commandant. I took care of my people. And I was, I was, I had all these connections with the Germans because I was never afraid from the Germans. I always, when anything was wrong with the Germans, I went there and, because I was in officer school in Hungary I know how to behave for an officer. I behave this way, *haptag* [phonetic] and

everything and they liked it. And they liked me, the Germans. Always, I had to arrange the Jewish community, I had to go to the Germans. It was very dangerous because they were hot-headed people the SS, young people they can shoot you right there when you didn't [unclear]. But I was not afraid. I was stepped down from the train. I see Josef is coming.

HW: This is the same German that you knew?

AS: Knew from...

HW: The same German guard, yeah.

AS: "[unclear] Josef what are you doing here?" "So I am, I had a, I know now, I had a higher rank and I am with the people here, and [unclear] I don't know [unclear]. How is Julie?" "Oh she is sick, she has the measles. And she doesn't feel very well, but I am not worried about it, because couple days we will be in Austria and after is Switzerland and she will be alright."

HW: Mmm hmm.

AS: "Austria, Switzerland?" "Yes." He made a face. "What happened, Josef?" "Oh, I can't tell you." A man talks like him, I bust here and I ask him, "You know what is, tell me, what to, what happened? For Julia, you have a daughter, too. For me, my life is not important, shoot me right away, but my daughter." He said, "You are not going to Austria. You are going to Auschwitz." This was equal with the death.

HW: Yes.

AS: For the children, for the women, equal to the death. I was strong, a very strong man, muscular and sport man and I was not afraid for myself but if I was alone. You have to do something, so what can I do? My order. I went back to the Jewish, old Jewish, the Jewish, how you call it? The head of the Jewish group, that's officially [unclear] and the other one. They are all dead now. I told them them, "We don't go to Austria we are going to Auschwitz." "How can be, we arranged this! Kasztner Rezső arranged it, paid so much money and--" "It was happened something." You know, was two officers there, an old one and young one. The older one angry at me, he [unclear] that he gets the money and he arranged it to send of course.

HW: Because he didn't get the money?

AS: He didn't get the money. He was angry with the other one.

HW: He didn't get the money. Yeah.

AS: And you know what, we had to send somebody to Budapest. Find my, our officer and arrange the thing differently. How can we send? I went back again to, to the group [unclear] but I can't [unclear] it is 10,000 *forint*, 10,000 *forint* was like you give 10,000 dollar.

HW: Mmm hmm.

AS: Alright, so do something. I give you, give you somebody to send. But how can we get two, three days?

HW: The time, yeah.

AS: Then I told the man, the group they should send somebody to the locomotive mechanic and try to bribe him, we should stay there. Everybody was afraid of that, when he talks to gendarme they will shoot him. Nobody wants to go. That's the trouble with the Jews, nobody wants to do something about the other ones. Everybody is afraid. What could I do? Again, I

went to the mechanic, he is working there on the machine and I give him a cigarette. [unclear] "Ay you are very well," because there they are all [unclear] he knew I am a Jew. "Very well, you have the best cigarettes." So [unclear], what can I do? How can I start to talk to him, because he won't friendly? He say, "I am working for the railroads since 25 years. I don't have even a house, a room my own. And my family is this and that and that [unclear]." I told him, "Look, I tell you something, you want to buy yourself a house, you want to have a little your own? If you keep these machines here for three days, I give you 25,000 *forint*." It was like here, 25,000 dollar. Then was, "You could buy a house, you could buy a.--" Then he said, "Mister, you are joking with me," then I was not, "you". You understand the difference? "No, I am not joking with you. You know but you don't have to give me the answer. I give you the money. Half of it now, half of it, when we go, and you have it, you have to think it over. And I come back in a half an hour." But I was very upset, because I don't know if he will talk to the gendarmerie, then they will shoot me. I don't know what will happen. But after a half an hour, when I went back, and he says, "Where is the money?"

HW: Mmm hmm.

AS: "Here is 12,500." He counted it. Well, alright. Then they, we heard from the, from the other one something wrong with the, don't know what in the machine, they had to send away to get it, it takes about two three days until we get it. So they send a boy to Budapest. We find fortunate with an SS, [unclear] a Jew [unclear] the money helped.

HW: So, he went with an SS escort or whatever, took him there.

AS: Yes, and came back with a new order, not to Auschwitz, to Bergen-Belsen, exchange camp. This was a little better, not too much. A little better, exchange camp, Bergen-Belsen. This was not an extermination camp. And then I went back to the machinist, I give him the other 12,500 dollar and after three hours we were at the frontier and the German took over in Austria. And he left, he came there and greeted me and that was the story and from there is the usual story, we went to Austria, via Linz, they took off all the girls, cut their heads, disinfected them. Then we reached to Bergen-Belsen and we were there about for two months. Then they made a group.

HW: At about what year was this now?

AS: '44.

HW: This is '44.

AS: I guess in '44. I made a good, I was always every day by the, in the morning, [unclear] with the German officers. Many things happened, and little things, what my daughter was very sick and had no medicine. And if we got the medicine, we got the Germans so upset. "We need that medicine for the German children." Then I arranged with the [unclear] happened then we got an order that 350 people be back on a train this time to Switzerland, to show the German goodwill. And 350 people packed very nicely. We had plenty wagons. We had 35 people in a wagon, plenty space, plenty straw underneath, and we got food, [unclear] by the hundred.

HW: How were the 350 people chosen?

AS: Was chosen by a, by a, a committee. Always the Jewish committee was the bad, you can't imagine how can choose 350 for 1700. Because later we became 1700 when a Polish train came into Budapest, these Polish refugees. And they run over to our train, they came to us and we took them too, with us. And then we went through Germany, [unclear] and everything, we reached Switzerland and then in Switzerland everything was okay, this was the story of us.⁵ And that was by Kasztner they arranged to take 1600, 1700 people, but said he is a traitor and a madman in, in Israel he was killed.

HW: I am sorry why do they say he was?

AS: Because.

HW: He tried to arrange an exchange.

AS: He arranged it, because Brand was not anymore. Brand started, but after he fell in his, Brand, Brand's place.

HW: Brand has been arrested.

AS: Yes.

HW: So he took over. And he worked through the exchange.

AS: Yes, and that's why he was, he had a, went to the, he had many troubles there, he couldn't get a proper job, he was a genius.

HW: This is in Israel.

AS: In Israel, yeah. And they had to go to Israel, myself too, because the state promised me a very good job, but my wife didn't want to go to Israel because my brother-in-law lives here in the United States and in Israel he said, she said, they take away the children in camps, and they can't live with the parents. It was, she said, she had bad information and that was my story, but this is not the story, this is a good story, because I don't, didn't suffer too much. Only I had mental suffering to arrange the thing, but what happened in, in, in Poland, when we heard of it, we didn't want to believe it. We didn't want to believe that, that they, that they pack the people from Polish villages in a box car sixty, seventy pushed together they couldn't sit down. And after two, three days they arrived they came with a [unclear] with a everything, and they throwed them out from the-- they had to run to the motorcarts and they were killed. I could tell you many, many things because I had the information. It would take until tomorrow morning until I tell you everything, not everything, because I don't remember everything because it happened about 45 years ago.

HW: Sure.

AS: But I remember I know very well, I know the situation that I know the main thing was why the Jews didn't stand up and left the concentration camps. Didn't, there were so many in the concentration camp and so few soldiers around, they could kill them with bare hands. Why they didn't go out? We tried in Kolozsvár first because we had people that came back first partly was in military slave service, they came back. I tried to make a little army. I could get weapons through with money, but I could collect about five, 600 men. What can do five, 600 men with

⁵On page 25, Mr. Spiegel explains that he was in Switzerland from September 1944 until April 1947.

around taken the German and Hungarian soldiers, number one? Number two, we break out for five, 600 left over 100, doesn't matter, but the people who live there who are children or parents, old people, they would be tortured or killed. We were afraid for them. And the Jew was never organized this way, you understand what I mean?

HW: Sure.

AS: Was never organized not he, only one base was organized in Warsaw in the ghetto. They was organized, by the Zionist movement too, and other leaders are not organized. They were very few and what can you do when 100 SS soldiers around you and with a, with a different weapons, you know, they could kill you. They couldn't do anything. And the Germans know how to do these things. They had a very good system which the Jews didn't, they was very systematic people, they did everything systematic. They did everything very well, that's why they could kill so many people, 6,000,000 Jews and other seven or 8,000,000 other ones. But how they killed, how they, I can tell you what was this in Poland, how they collect the people, how they put them in, in, in box cars and how they killed them, but you know what so many description is documented. And not so many people were there and many people telling stories, this is not, what I am telling you is not a story.

HW: Sure, no, sure.

AS: This was happened to us.

HW: Any other members of your father's or your mother's family who were involved in any way.

AS: They were killed.

HW: They were.

AS: Killed in Budapest.

HW: They were.

AS: My sisters, my sister I had a sister in Budapest and her husband was a prominent Hungarian lawyer and he was deputy on the, like, how you call it, he was a Senator's...

[End of tape one, side two.]

Tape two, side one:

HW: We are interviewing Mr. Alan Spiegel on March 12, 1989.

AS: My sister lived in Budapest. I told you my brother-in-law was a very prominent lawyer and part of the Hungarian government. And he was taken away beaten and my sister was put in a group about nine to 10,000 people. They sent them from Budapest to Vienna walking there.

HW: Walking there.

AS: In, in, it was then very bad weather, rain, fog and walking there about from these 10,000 people arrived in Budapest I don't know how many hundred that was killed and everything. But my sister is a very pleasant girl and she recognized a soldier who was next to the group, watching the group [unclear] "I have to go very quick..."

HW: Have to go...

AS: "...Very quick to do something," you know.

HW: Yeah.

AS: "I go in this house and I run out, please, could you [unclear]." She run in and [unclear] that's why she is still there and she died about seven or eight years ago. And she saved many of my things, my books from the university, [unclear]. If you want to see I can show you. And okay that was the story shortly, but in between this so many little things happened, you know, so many, such as, you know, wonder happened with me, you know, I don't, I cannot explain, you know, maybe it is not interesting.

HW: It is, yes.

AS: You know, when I was employed by this textile factory I arranged businesses in different big cities and I stayed there for two, for a year, for a one and a half year and I made a deposit there and from there we delivered the merchandise to the merchants. And when I was in-- it's unbelievable what I am telling you. When I was there, my mother died [unclear]. I had a very good friend there I told him, "Look, I cannot go every day to say *Kaddish*⁶, but I want to say *Kaddish* for my mom." You can pay for an old man a certain amount who goes every day in the synagogue and he says *Kaddish* for my mother. Talk to a rabbi and got, get me some from an old man, because I was not too religious then. He said, "Alright." After a couple weeks he told me, "Okay, come to my rabbi, he's a very good rabbi." When I went in the city a big house like a motel, 100 doors and windows [unclear] Vizhnitzer, the Vizhnitzer Rabbi's headquarters, you know the Vizhnitzer Rabbi, very famous, Hager, Israel.⁷ "Now what do you want here?" He will give you a [unclear]. "Alright." We went in, a room, 40, 50 people, answered a man at the door. He knew already that the Rebbe [unclear] and gave very

⁶*Kaddish* – the Jewish prayer for the dead, recited for eleven months by the children of the deceased. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.)

⁷Hager, Israel - Rebbe Yisroel Hager of Vizhnitz was the third Vizhnitzer Rebbe.

much money to the Vizhnitzer and after a half an hour, I got called in with my friend. My friend introduces me to the rebbe. Was there, a man, gray hair and gray moustache and everything gray and very fat, a very big, fat man. He introduced me and shake my hand, you know how the Jews shake the hand? You don't know.

HW: No.

AS: This way.

HW: Oh.

AS: Shake my hand and ask me, "Jewish?" Unfortunately, I don't speak Jewish. "And so you speak Hebrew, [unclear]?" I say, "No." "So how do you speak, how can I speak to you?" "In German." He says, "Alright, I will speak to you in German." He was talking to me [unclear] I don't know how long, because the time went by and after a certain time, [unclear]...

HW: [unclear]

AS: A certain time, [unclear]. "Have you gone every day to the synagogue? Have you prayed for my mother? Have you put the *tefillin*⁸ on?" I do everything. And he called in a man, bring a *tefillin* for them, I want to show him how to put the *tefillin* on, because I couldn't very well. Could because I learned when I was bar mitzvah. So he brought in a big *tefillin* was a orthodox Judaism, [unclear] such an important man. He says, "We get more on, put on a big one." I brought a small one and put it on, and he implant me so much that I'm every day in the synagogue and I pray for my parents. After two, just one and a half months, my friend told me that the Vizhnitzer want to see you.

HW: What year was this?

AS: This was in 1936.

HW: Mmm hmm.

AS: "He want to see you." "For what? I am doing my job." "Well he asked for you and he want to see you." Okay, he want to see me. He is the rebbe was important to us, you know, [unclear] when I told I was with the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, it was, "Oh my God, you shake the hand with the Vizhnitzer rebbe?" Went there, went in, he put his hands around me, kissed me, said, "My boy, I trusted you and you are trustful, I like you. Come next time for my dinner and, on Friday night you will be my guest." It's about a big room, I don't know 80 or 100 were sitting, I was given seat about two, three places down from the Vizhnitzer. Everybody looks at me because I had, I didn't have a *yarmulka* [head covering worn by Jews] I had a *yiger* [head], I had like a Hungarian boy who is a *sheygetse* [non-Jewish boy] and when the food came, the Vizhnitzer asks me for my plate and with his hands near me, this was such an honor, you know he passed me

⁸*Tefillin* – "Usually translated as 'phylacteries.' Box-like appurtenances that accompany prayer, worn by Jewish adult males at the weekday morning services. The boxes have leather thongs attached and contain scriptural excerpts." (Jewish Virtual Library)

dinner. And many times on holiday, *Pesach* [Passover] [unclear] invited [unclear]. When I left Mogyorod [phonetic] I finished my work for the factory, I went to him and I told him, "I am going away and I want to say goodbye." He gave me his blessing and he says, "My boy, anytime you are in trouble in the li-, your life, call me, let me help you." Alright, he kissed me, I went away. In 1942, or '41 I married. Seventeen years later or sixteen years later, I was the man for this company who sent through, I told you that, Romanian frontier the people. How did I collected the boys, young boys, they became fatherless and motherless, they sent me down. I took them in the frontier and I send them to [unclear] and from there to Palestine. I sent 20 boys, again 30 boys. Later until 50 collected, then when they both went up to the frontier and I sent them over with the Romanian was paid. In between the Germans came in. The old Hungarians soldiers went away, SS was on the frontier. What can I do? It happened. So I had a connection, and again 20 boys and again, this boy, this boy, 20 boys, and again and again and again. And it was 100, 130 of them, or how many. Couldn't what to do with them, we put them in the schools. We didn't have the facilities, to sleep on it, to toilet, to washrooms and was dirty. I said, "You should do something for me, Dr. Fisher," he was the president of the Hungarian Jewish Society, Dr. Fisher and he was a very good lawyer. He said, "What can I do?" "Somebody has to go up to the Germans, talk with them, bribe them." "Should I go to the frontier? When I, when I tell these SS that I want to bribe them he shoots me right away. These blond boys were so hot headed," I told him. And "Look, I have my daughter here, I have my wife here, I have my father-in-law, mother-in-law I have to take care of them, I can't leave them. I don't care for my life, I never cared for my life." Alright, nothing and I went in the school and they knew me very well the children, I was Uncle Noah. Nobody has the name, you know, nobody has Alan Spiegel, or Spiegel, Achush was the name Hungarian, just Uncle Noah, because nobody should know who is Uncle Noah you know for the police and everything. "Uncle Noah, Uncle Noah, do something for us. You did always in the past and do something we cannot be here." "I know. And I will be here and it will be okay with the Germans." Naturally, I couldn't do anything. After I went home, I couldn't sleep, couldn't sleep, how can I leave so many children, but there is my child, my daughter. There is my wife, there is my--. I don't know what to do. Went back the next day again in the school. They were crying and dirty and unkempt you know because we couldn't take care of so many children. Went in Dr. Fisher, I told him, "Joshka," because I called it was *tatu* [phonetic], are you there? *Tatu* means you, because in Hungarian is when you, when you are very friendly, there is another calling, and not so friendly oh something else. And we were very friendly and [unclear]. "What do you want, I give you everything. What do you want?" "I don't know yet." And then I talk to

my, I had a taxi cab, I had a cook, a woman, and he--, she married a taxi cab owner and was very, [unclear] the taxi cab I didn't have the money, was very much money. And I always when I went somewhere out, I took this, paid him five, six cents so much. And I told him, "Let's go up to Felek." People play game with him many times. Cannot go in German side. "Look, how much is a fare for Felek?" "At least they pay me 140." "You know what I give you 1,000 for it." Because, because we, we couldn't save the money, we knew that...

HW: Yeah, sure.

AS: We throwed it. He was very anxious to get the money, he picked me up, he put me in, we went in and when I arrived in, in Felek, I know where is the guard post where the officer is. I stepped off from the taxi, I cried, started to cry. I was never afraid. But I was afraid they will kill me and what will be with my family? I cried, I cried to my father, I cried to my grandfather to help me, to do something for me, you know. And I look up, the door that was out was standing the Vizhnitzer Rebbe...

HW: Oh my goodness.

AS: Smiling.

HW: Oh my goodness.

AS: Waving, come in. He was there. He lived there, it was a long time ago. And came back by himself, because when the Germans saw you are not strong enough they throw you out right away. Knocked on the door, the soldier came to me, "What do you want?" "A very important thing, I have to talk to the officer." He went in. Fortunately, not a young German officer, the SS was pulled out because they needed the soldiers, and the SD, *Sicherheitsdienst*⁹ was put in. An older man, about a 40 or 50 year old man, but sitting at the desk, looking some pictures, I saw two boys and a woman. Here was sometimes much better than the SS. Was [unclear], you know, I told him "Excuse, my name is Mr. [unclear] I wish to get a permission to ask something from you, if you let me talk." Because you have to talk this way. Well, you know, he is a good man, you know, a family man. "Alright, speak up." I told him, "In Kolozsvár," I lied, "we have a school for young boys, and from the whole part of this which is now occupied by the Germans and the Romanians are children there and we want to send home them."

HW: Mmm hmm.

AS: "To their families. But we can't because this is [unclear] with the Hungarians, I had already been given of the permission in past time." Not true what I said, because not from there, because it's Polish kids. He looked at me and he said, "So, I have to talk to the, to the city, to the colonel who takes care of everything." I told when he takes care of the colonel, we'd be nothing from it. I

⁹*Sicherheitsdienst* – the SD, Security Service, was the intelligence service of the SS. (Holocaust Chronicle)

lost my case. Then I took out, it always was something with me, a diamond ring, one and a half carat and I took and I talk, "Give me a other permission. I see you look this picture." "Well, that's my wife and my two sons." "Please, I have a present for you right, because you were so nice and you were listening to me. And you seeming to my, my, my pleasures, here this is for you right now, look the ring." Then was a one and half carat diamond worth 20 times like today, in war times, this was a life for five years, or I don't know how many. So, "I cannot take it." "Please take it, this is my wish. Put it on." He looked it. He put in his drawer and he said after, "Alright. I thought it over, tomorrow send up some part of the kids." And we send up the kids in three parts and [unclear].

HW: [unclear]

AS: But I was so sick after, so exhausted that the Vizhnitzer came, it is a wonder happened. But I can't tell you this was an imagination or this was a I don't know what, because I saw him so well, he was looking at me and he was smiling at me, never forget it, never. Such a thing happen.

HW: Yes, that is. Yeah, that is.

AS: This is such a thing.

HW: That is such an incredible story, yeah.

AS: Incredible story. I talked to Dr. Rosen, you know Dr. Rosen?

HW: No, I don't, no.

AS: He is working by in the Gratz too, and he told that we have to write it down and many things, you know, little things happened when, when, when like a wonder, you know, this happ-- when I can talk to the machinist and he took the money and when I, when I have acquainted for, with this SS man, why? Through my daughter, my daughter saves the lives for 1700 people.

HW: Yes. Mmm hmm, yes.

AS: It is such a little things, things makes a lot.

HW: Was religion important at all, you know, in terms of people being traditional or following the religion very much?

AS: I tell you honestly, for not too many. Far from religious man too there, but some rabbis there and Akiba Rozhner, the rabbi, orthodox rabbi from-- and oh, we had a very famous rabbi, the Satmar, of, what is his name, Yoilish, he was a leader in New York, a very famous Hungarian rabbi, not Hungarian, Polish Hungarian rabbi, Teitelbaum Yoilish¹⁰, very famous-- he was always, when we were out in Bergen-Belsen, he has always a scarf here, and the whole German

¹⁰Teitelbaum Yoilish - Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, The Satmarer Rebbe (1887–1979); born in Krooly, a small town in Hungary. As the War approached, the Satmarer Rav was smuggled out of harm's way, first into Switzerland, where he remained throughout the War, and afterwards in 1946, into Israel. (The Jewish Virtual Library)

asked for him, he is sick, he is sick, he has trouble with the throat, he didn't want to cut his...

HW: Beard.

AS: You know, but always...

HW: He was one of the 1700?

AS: What? Oh yes. Teitelbaum Yoilish, very famous rabbi there. When you tell the name, they know it very well, and Rosner, Akiba, all rabbis -- not all rabbis the orthodox people, all rabbis they left. There is in New York too, as a professor there, he was our rabbi, he left us. And the religion was not so important, but all these I told the youngsters are all told always, if you are a Jew, you have to be proud of it.

HW: Yes.

AS: Because you are, we are the, the-- I don't know how many thousands old people, how many thousands ours history goes back and we were selected people and we are different. We have a, a mission here. Look, I was telling them, how many professors are a Jew, how many famous musicians, how many famous directors and this and that and that are among the Jews? By percent were more Nobel...

HW: Yes, prize winners.

AS: Prize winners are among the Jews than there are among the other people. Why is this? Isn't this only just funny? We are different people. But, to keep us living, everybody has to do something. Do something. They don't have to be anything, they don't have to be every day in a synagogue, they don't have to do everything the *tallises* [prayer shawls] with 'em, very good when they *daven* [pray], but we have to do something.

HW: To partake.

AS: Have to take part in it, have to take part in Jewish institutions, they have to give to money for Jewish institutions, they have to keep Jewish institutions, what keeps the Jewish, Jewish people up and the Jewish religion and everything. Everything has to be done for the Jews, not only what I said before, eat gefilte fish...

HW: Yes, sure.

AS: ...and a corned beef sandwich. This is not Jewish. To do something. I am not a religious man myself, I go in the synagogue on the big holidays and I have the different *Yizkors*¹¹, but I know I am a Jew and I give to Jewish purposes. I give for this *yeshiva* [A Jewish rabbinic academy of higher learning], that *yeshiva*, not too much, because I can't give too much, but I give for

¹¹*Yizkor* - A memorial service, called *Yizkor* (meaning "remember"), is recited as part of the Jewish prayer service four times during the year. (Jewish Virtual Library, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

everyone, for Jewish purposes and I feel good because I did something. And that's, that's what I should do.

HW: I agree with you.

AS: The youngsters, they should do something in the Gratz college. For example, because you are near to it, everybody look at, we are-- I am in the Hungarian Hebrew Association. We give every year some 100 dollars I don't know how much [unclear] when we have. We don't have, we don't give so much, but we give, because it is necessary, it's a very important part of the Jewish community. That's what they have to do, that's what I always teach them, I always tell them and, and this is the most-- because this story, this Holocaust will go out. We people who were in the [unclear] very few people will take care of the whole story, not too many. And after a certain years, after a 100 years, everything will be smoothed, totally forgotten, totally forgotten. Maybe what I said, they will have a holiday for the Holocaust and they will have a dinner like we have for the Pesach when they came out from Egypt the people, but this is not enough, because what we suffered in this Holocaust, is not for humans, these people in concentration camps, this suffering, this torturing, with lice, no food, no clothing, in wintertime they had to go out naked in the road, you know. We cannot imagine how much they suffered, cannot, nobody can imagine. That's why they're telling it was not true, they made all the stories. But this is true, 100% because I lived it. I knew about it, I knew maybe more than the other people knew there, and I took part of it. But the people forget everything and what is a little not so convenient, they don't believe. I told them, you don't have to go any day like I told before any day in a synagogue, you don't have to do everything. What, what you have to do is-- much better if you do more, but something has to do for the Jewish people. Something has to do for yourself that this what happened now shouldn't happen again and only one thing can be done, when the young people has in his, their minds that they are Jews and they have to work for Jews. They don't have to be ashamed of it, like in Hungary. What is in Hungary? In Hungary they don't like the Jews very well, but they had equality, everybody has the same rights, you know. Same job, because the jobs are given by the state. Nobody tells he is Jew and when he is telling, proud he is Jew, he stays on this place where he is and doesn't move forward, you understand?

HW: Yes, yes.

AS: That's why people, for their interest, they don't tell they are Jews. You understand what I mean?

HW: Yes, yes, sure.

AS: They don't. And dying...

[End of tape two, side one.]

Tape two, side two:

HW: ...Alan Spiegel on March 12, 1989.

AS: People is afraid Jews, to tell that we are Jews. Why? We have to be proud of it. So many big people were among us.

HW: Sure.

AS: So many big people who put the world and the science forward. And we never learn, this is our trouble, this is our trouble, that's why I am afraid when in years, 100 years, I don't know how many years, everything will be forgotten, start again the trouble because nobody likes the Jews. Very few people, non-Jewish people like the Jews. Everybody has a Jewish friend. You know.

HW: [laughs]

AS: I have a Jewish friend, I like the Jews, but in general. The same thing in France, same thing in the Spain. We were in Spain about, 12 - 13 years ago, we were in Madrid for a long time. I was looking for a synagogue and I couldn't find one. Finally, in a, in a big building inside in the [unclear] was the synagogue. They don't like the Jews there, too. But in Jewish streets are there, you go to the cities are Jewish names in some cities are Jewish monuments and everything. But nothing happened. And in Israel the situation now very bad because you know we don't have friends among the big ones. England was never a friend.

HW: Yes.

AS: England is even more harm for us than help. And France I don't know. Italy alone and some Balkan, some Serbian or Yugoslav, or part of Europe they have, Romania, they was plenty of pogroms. In Russia, so few Jews left. So many were killed. And still they don't [unclear].

HW: I'd like to ask if I could, Mr. Spiegel some questions...

AS: Ask me some questions.

HW: ...about your family. I just want to get down some of the names of people and where, when people were born and things like that if I can.

AS: Sure.

HW: Okay. [unclear]

AS: Because this story is not interesting. This is my story.

HW: Yes, no it was very interesting, Mr. Spiegel. It was very inspiring. Do you spell your name Allen.

AS: No. E-L-E-N.

HW: A-L-A-N.

AS: One "L," Alan. This is a name, my original name is Achush.

HW: Oh.

AS: If you go in the museum there, you have a museum there at Gratz, one window is my things, my military, my [unclear]...

HW: Oh really, oh, that's interesting.
AS: Yes, yes. I give it all to Phil Rosen, I give it there, because....
HW: What's, what's the date that you were born?
AS: 19-- 11 August 1903.
HW: Okay and education, you mentioned that you have your doctor...
AS: I have four and half years, more than four and half years in the Budapest University of Medicine and in *gymnasium* and before elementary.
HW: Okay and your occupation in Europe was with a clothing factory.
AS: In Europe was first of all the medical school.
HW: Yes.
AS: Later I was employed by a clothing factory, later I was employed by a textile factory.
HW: Okay. And you were a partner in that...
AS: A partner in a clothing factory. And [unclear]. Fortunately, I was then a well-to-do man but [unclear].
HW: And where exactly were you born?
AS: I was born in Orahovicza, Yugoslavia. Orahovicza. Like a spelling, O-ra-ho-vi-tza.
HW: Let's see, you told me some of these things, but just to go back over them again. From 1933-1939, where were you living?
AS: In Kolozsvar.
HW: Okay.
AS: Cluj.
HW: Like Cluj, would be...
AS: Romania.
HW: Like K-L-U-G-E, sort of like that?
AS: C-L-U-G [Cluj]. Cluj, C-L-U-G.
HW: Okay, okay. And, alright from 1939-1945 we pretty much went over this, so I don't have to. Okay, what was your father's name?
AS: My father's name was Mor, Mor, Maurizio.
HW: Like Maurice?
AS: Maurice, Maurice, yes.
HW: Okay and Spiegel of course, was the last name.
AS: Spiegel, yes.
HW: Okay. And do you happen to know the date of his birth?
AS: He died in [unclear], about '72, 1872 about.¹²
HW: Okay, and where was he born.
AS: He was born in Transylvania, Oraliyemara [phonetic].

¹²He means born, not died.

HW: And where did he die?
AS: In Budapest.
HW: And about what year was that?
AS: He died in about 19--, about '22 or '23.
HW: Okay.
AS: I can't guess the [unclear].
HW: Well that's okay. And your mother, what was her maiden name?
AS: Her maiden name is Reich, R-E-I-C-H.
HW: And her first name?
AS: Margit. Margarita.
HW: Okay, and where was she born?
AS: She was born in, in northern Hungary, Secsheny S-E-C-S-H-E-N-Y.¹³
HW: In Hungary.
AS: In Hungary.
HW: Okay, and do you know about when she was born? About what year?
AS: About '74 or '75.
HW: Okay, alright, and you mentioned you had a sister. What was your sister's name?
AS: My sister's name was Ilonka, Iliana.
HW: And do you know the date of her birth?
AS: I don't remember.
HW: Do you know about what year she was born?
AS: Wait a minute, she was 75 when she died, well, she was born about 1898.
HW: And she died about...
AS: And she died in Budapest about in '40, no, no, no, no, it was 78, '80.
HW: 1980, okay. And where was she born?
AS: She was born, I think in Budapest.
HW: Okay.
AS: I think so, I don't know, you know these kind of things you don't know.
HW: Yes, yes, no, I know, it is hard. Did you have any other brothers?
AS: No, no, no. But my grandfather, it is another story about a very famous man.
HW: And your wife is Elizabeth.
AS: Elizabet Boschan.
HW: Yes, what was her...?
AS: B-O-S-C-H-A-N.
HW: And what is her date of birth?
AS: [unclear] 1912.

¹³Correct spelling is Szecseny.

HW: 1912 and...

AS: July the 2nd.

HW: And where was she born?

AS: She was born in Cluj, Romania.

HW: And when were you married?

AS: Who?

HW: You and your wife.

AS: Me, 1932.

HW: And where was that?

AS: In Cluj, Kolozsvar. September the 4th.

HW: You remember your anniversary, right?

AS: Yeah, this date, you know, we got [unclear].

HW: And you mentioned your daughter.

AS: My daughter.

HW: What's her name, your daughter?

AS: My daughter is Julie.

HW: Julie.

AS: She is married to Dr. Gordon.

HW: What is her date of birth?

AS: 1937.

HW: Do you happen to remember the date?

AS: [unclear]

HW: April the 28th. Okay. And where was she born?

AS: She was born in Cluj.

HW: Okay. How much education has she had?

AS: She's, college, she has college education, she's a teacher. And I have a son-in-law.

HW: And does your son-in-law, is he a child of a survivor of the Holocaust?

AS: No, but my daughter was with me in the...

HW: Yes, you mentioned, was with you, yes.

AS: And my wife, obviously.

HW: And it's one child that you have.

AS: Yes, unfortunately, we couldn't have more.

HW: Yes. And after the war, you were in Switzerland?

AS: I was, after the-- during the war was in Switzerland for two and a half years.

HW: Okay, like what were the, do you remember the years or the dates that you were in Switzerland.

AS: In 1944, September, I don't know the date, 1947 April.

HW: And when did you come to America?

AS: 1947, April.

HW: Did you have any injuries or illness during the war?

AS: [unclear]

HW: Okay.

AS: I'm a very lucky guy.

HW: Anything else for people that might be important. Your story is fascinating. I must say your story is fascinating and very [unclear].

AS: I don't really know, I could talk to you when I talk from my family. I can talk to you until the morning about my grandfather, my grandfather was a very famous man. My grandfather's father was Austrian, in the Austrian army, head surgeon in the army, and German, Austrian. And my father-in-law, my grandfather was 18 years old when he went in the Hungarian Revolutionary War to free Hungary from the Germans, from Austria. And he became a very famous soldier, very good, many decorations and later he became an officer and when he got wounded about two or three times, the third time he was ordered to the Corps to the General Corps to help. And then the Hungarian revolution was conquered by the Russian help because Austria couldn't conquer Hungary. They ask Russia to send an army, all was conquered. Then, he was fleeing with the head of Hungary, Kossuth Lajos, he was the head of Hungary, they gave in the Corps him as an adjutant to Kossuth, 2nd adjutant. First was the colonel and he was a lieutenant [sic]...

HW: Lieutenant.

AS: Lieutenant, he was a lieutenant and he was with Kossuth about 16 or 17 years. He was to Turkey, he went to Italy, near Turin he was, he lived-- the Italian king, he gave some villas for Kossuth, and he lived with Kossuth there. And he was in the United States with Kossuth too, my grandfather.

HW: Yeah, that's interesting.

AS: And married an Italian girl. A very big family. And the girl was thrown out from the family and they came back to Hungary and bec-- then the Germans, the Austrians and the Hungarians made an agreement and because my father was the leader of Hungary's adjutant, they gave him anything what he wants. And he wanted to have the connection between Transylvania and Budapest by coach. The right of [unclear] and his father was a surgeon, he had money, gave him money, but from horses and coaches and everything and he became very, very rich. And when they built the train, then his carriages carried the material for the train.

HW: Oh, ahah.

AS: Made plenty money again.

HW: Yes, mmm hmm.

AS: Then his wife died, he lost his pep to work more and he traveled in the world and this way he get to know Herzl, Theodor and he traveled to Palestine, was twice

in Palestine. And he left everything what he had, very much money to Palestine. [unclear].

HW: That's nice, that's very nice. I wonder, Mr. Spiegel, if I can ask you please to sign a release form releasing the tapes to the Gratz College Library Archive so that they can do...

AS: Yes, okay, good. That, that was the purpose.

HW: I am just going to ask you to sign this.

AS: But this is another story, my grandfather.

HW: It sounds like it's very interesting.

AS: Oh, the most interesting story. I told his Hungarian nobleman because he had another name, he didn't want to keep his name, for his father.

HW: If you'll just sign over here, just on this line.

AS: Here?

HW: Yes, on that line. Thank you.

AS: You're welcome. And he had a beautiful Italian wife, but she died. Seven children and she died.

HW: Would you like to have a copy?

AS: Oh, I, I would appreciate it.

HW: Sure. Okay, because that's certainly.

AS: I have a copy, a tape from my life, but this is Hungarian, because I don't speak well English.

HW: Oh, you speak very well.

AS: Oh.

HW: You spoke very well.

AS: This is a shame, this is a shame, because I speak so well Hungarian, I speak German. I speak Romanian, and some in French.

HW: Yeah.

AS: And I don't speak the Germ-- the English language well, always not liked by me, because the pronunciation, you know.

HW: A hmm.

AS: I never liked. I never wanted to, when I was a young boy, my father wanted to let me know the English language because it was very important because he was traveling all over Europe, you know, exporting, importing things. And I never wanted to learn.

HW: Well, you express yourself very well. You express yourself very well. I mean it's...

AS: No, no, no.

HW: Well, you do, you make yourself understood very well.

AS: No, I feel ashamed for myself, because I speak Hungarian so well.

HW: Yeah, yeah.

AS: Not so well, but I am very good speaker in Hungarian.

HW: Oh, ahah.

AS: You know, when I, when I was -- the *Keren Kayemet* had a meeting in Satu-Mare Redyu-Mare, I went there to speak to the people to give money.

HW: Oh, I see.

AS: And I always knew how to speak.

HW: Well, you express yourself very well, Mr. Spiegel. Yeah, you really do. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Spiegel.

AS: You are welcome. That is a, if you want details from the Germans, for the, for the Holocaust and everything, I know very many details because I was in it, I was in it, I was in the top of the people who took care of it, you know who had a connection. About a couple of years ago I even knew the German officer's name who took care of these things. Who was sympathetic, who was antipathy. Who could do something good for the Jews, who did very bad for the Jews. But now, I am forgetful when 86 years old and...

HW: Well you have an excellent memory for 86 years old, Mr. Spiegel.

AS: Yes. I had a good memory.

HW: Well, you still have a good memory. You remember a lot.

AS: Still if you want to talk to me let me know, or you want to know like in Herzl's I've gotten things, I know very well. If you want to hear Hungarian poems. I know very well. Even coming back now to me. I forget what happened yesterday, but I remember what happened 80 years ago.

HW: Well, you know, I'll let them know at Gratz that if they're interested in additional details that you would be willing to speak to them about additional details.

AS: Sure, anything, anything, because you know, I know that this was a very bad case with this Kasztner. This Kasztner was condemned because he arranged these things, not he started because Brand, Joel Brand started, but he fell in. He arranged these things with the Germans and they said he is a traitor, and that's why he was killed. Somebody killed, a hotheaded man. It was very [unclear], very shame, because he has a genius, he has a talent, he would do for Israel very much more what he did.

HW: Had you heard or had known anyone who had any contact with Raoul Wallenberg?

AS: Sure, sure. With my sister.

HW: Oh really. Oh, ahah.

AS: Sure, sure and he, Wallenberg saved his, her life because she run in a Wallenberg house.

HW: Oh, it was his, it was his...

AS: I told you he was...

HW: ...yes, you told me a Swedish house, yes, I didn't realize.

AS: Swedish house. It was in Wallenberg's house.

HW: Oh my goodness.

AS: He went in Wallenberg's house, and Wallenberg, Wallenberg had a, had a strength to give them passports and everything. He falsified passports, he had a printer and my sister could draw very nicely, and he¹⁴ draw the names and everything. He write the names, for everybody's names that and he have to do these things, because he, in his house was the printing.

HW: So, he actually saved her life.

AS: He actually saved her life and saved many, many thousands Budapest. From these two things he saved, first, he had a like, Jewish [unclear] you know what is *chutzpa*?

HW: *Chutzpa*, right.

AS: *Chutzpa*, he was a *chutzpa* he went out to the, to the train station and take off the Jews. This is Swedish, this is Swedish and the SS couldn't make anything, number one. Number two, he gave passport for them. He send them away. Then, he made a time that the deportation to stop. And he have the luck and the poor man had to die in Russian prison.

HW: Yes, yes that's what we understand. You know there is one other name I'd like to ask you about, actually. Let me find it.

AS: We have this movement you know. [unclear]

HW: One other name is, I mentioned it before. Otto Komoly, Komoly, K-O-M-O-L-Y, I don't know if I am pronouncing it right.

AS: Komoly, Komoly, Komoly.

HW: Did you hear of him or know anything about him or whatever?

AS: Maybe when you tell me...

HW: To tell you the truth Mr. Spiegel I don't really know. They just have a few names here, two of them you've already mentioned, Mr. Kasztner and Mr. Brand...

AS: ...very, very...

HW: ... and Raoul Wallenberg...

AS: ...very hard working man and he went left and right to save the people. And Kasztner too and the other one too, and myself too, and as a connection to Transylvania.

HW: Okay, well I'll let them know...

AS: ...because I have here, you know that I was in there, I can show you, you speak German?

HW: No, Yiddish.

AS: I have a, you know when I was in Switzerland, because I was in the leading part of this movement, you know, they send me always every month, a letter about what is the situation in Hungary.

¹⁴It appears that in several places rather than "he" Mr. Spiegel means "she" (referring to his sister) - she drew the names.

HW: And you have the letters?

AS: I have one here. I can show you.

HW: Well, you know what I am going to do, Mr. Spiegel, I am going to let them know at Gratz that you have additional details and that you would be willing to speak with them about some additional details.

AS: Look, look, unfortunately, unfortunately, I know too much about these things, but I never came forward and I tell you why. I saw many people came forward and lied, what they suffer, what they did. Everybody, like everybody who came to the United States was a bank director, was a millionaire at home.

HW: [laughs]

AS: You know, everybody and if somebody asks me, what you were at home. At home? I was a cutter in a factory. Why should I tell him I was this, I was that, I did too, this that and the other? I never told, I never came forward, because I was among liars. Is so few people among these who forwarded and came with different things are very much liars. They make stories.

HW: Yeah, yeah, well, I am going to tell them, Mr. Spiegel, that again you have some additional information see because, they're collecting a history in a way that I'm not really familiar with. I'm just a volunteer and I'm starting to do some of the interviews. But they, back at Gratz have a pattern and a whole history that they are collecting, so they know what they'd like to maybe get some additional information about, and if it's alright with you...

AS: I can look it up and I can tell you right away.

HW: Yes, well, I am going to tell them and maybe they will call you if they think that there is some additional information that they want...

AS: ...this is, this is a very, very important because this is, this letter what I said I threw away because everybody had a name, my name was "Director". And everybody had a name.

HW: I am just going to write this down that that's the letter that you have.

AS: And they send me a letter, which was after the Germans left, what happened. That these were the terrible situation.

HW: Okay, and like what year is the letter from? About what year?

AS: 1945 or '46, I don't know.

HW: I am going to tell them, and again maybe they will call you...

AS: Because my mind is not so fresh anymore to put everything the date and...

HW: Okay, well I'll tell them Mr. Spiegel. And again they know what is it they are interested in, maybe they will call you...

AS: They are interested in anything, anything about the concentration camp, because we had the information from people who were there, not storytellers, because story, everybody can tell a story. Because everybody who reads these papers, from the newspaper, these books, the book came out you know, everybody can tell, everybody put

himself in the middle of the thing, that's why I didn't want to come forward, I didn't want to do anything. You know?

HW: Okay, well, we appreciate your coming forward now, you know, in fact when I call them, if they have some specific things that they would like to find out about, if it's alright with you, maybe I'll come back and speak with you because...

AS: ...alright, very very, sure, sure....

HW: ...you know I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you.

AS: German things I don't have anything because when we...

[End of tape two, side two. End of interview.]