

The Holocaust: Three Perspectives

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Anti-semitism has recurred over and over during a period lasting more than two thousand years. This hatred of Jews violently climaxed during the Second World War when six million Jews met their brutal death at the hands of the German Nazis. Adolph Hitler's henchmen took extreme delight in the attempted eradication of European Jewry, to the point where winning the war became secondary to the policy of mass extermination of all things and people Jewish. This atrocity is more recognizably remembered as "The Holocaust."

Webster's Dictionary defines *holocaust* as being "complete destruction, or a burnt sacrifice, the whole which is consumed by fire." The followers of Judaism who had the catastrophic misfortune of being placed in relocation camps, or concentration camps, usually found themselves doomed to die by fire, in the crematorium's ovens in Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Nordhausen, *ad infinitum*. While there is no justification for anti-semitism, or the attempted annihilation of every Jew in Europe, so violent a passion merits some sort of explanation. Such heartless and mindless acts cannot be passed off merely as inexplicable madness on the part of an entire nation, caught up in the societal attitudes of the day and the perils of a bloody war.

Deep seated resentment and ignorance must be partly to blame along with a host of other reasons: A charismatic but crazed dictator, personal fear, prior prejudice and racism, a poor economy, and tacit approval by the general public to allow such an occurrence to go unchallenged and unchecked. Traditionally, the original justification for anti-semitic acts and accusations were largely religious based. The Jews killed Christ, such a crime must be punished severely. This argument carried more clout during the 1500's when Martin Luther wrote fiery anti-semitic statements abhorring Judaism and the Jew. Relating this argument to the biblical claim that the Jews are God's chosen people, translated into a statement of superiority in the eyes of many insecure Christians. Modern Germany intensified this insecure feeling by bringing to the attention of the German people the supposed threat the Jewish population held. It was felt by those in power that the Jews only degraded the more "pure" Aryan race.

Since Hitler needed a scapegoat, a whipping boy, the Jews seemed to be a logical answer to his "problems." Why not blame the rising inflation, poor economic conditions, poverty, and unemployment on the Jews? They were a distinct group that were numerous and unique enough to be easily identifiable (important traits when seeking out an enemy). Nazism offered the German people a common bond— their non-Jewish heritage. What with the stressful, hard times coupled with a rampant insecure feeling of worth, the "Jewish Problem" appealed surprisingly well to the German people. The end result: The attempted eradication of "the Jew." *The Final Solution* propaganda was presented as the ultimate and only answer to solving Germany's woes. The end result was the Holocaust.

This primary study is an attempt to find out the reason, the cause, and hopefully shed some light on this terrible atrocity that was allowed to happen, through personal interviews. The ensuing interviews have been compiled to get a more vivid picture of the events that led up to and

included the mass slaughter of the Jewish people in the death camps, as remembered by an actual survivor; the liberation of the death camps from the eyes of an observer; and the effect the Holocaust has had on a victim's child. All three interviews are exclusive in that they are the actual accounts of real people who either experienced it or who have a very deep, personal interest in the Holocaust. The interviews are included in their entirety with only minimal editing. Hence the transcripts reflect the opinions, experiences and ideas of the people interviewed in a conversational, colloquial style.

Through interviews such as these, it is hoped that the world will not forget the gross violation of human rights the German Nazis incurred upon the Jewish people. In times of depression, humans have mysterious and often times frightening ways of dealing with the situation. Atrocities that are ethnically and racially motivated are still being committed today from Rwanda in Africa, to Bosnia in Europe. Humankind obviously does not learn from its mistakes and is doomed to repeat them. God help humanity that such acts of merciless, inhumane, mass suffering stop plaguing the inhabitants of the world. God help us that the world never again lays witness to another Holocaust...

Abbreviations:

IN = interviewer

SU = survivor

OB = observer

CH = child of a survivor

I. VIEWS OF A SURVIVOR

IN : I am about to interview a woman, Dr. Anne Berkowitz, who is a survivor of a concentration camp. Yes, could you tell me where you were born?

SU : I was born in Czechoslovakia.

IN : Were you also raised in Czechoslovakia?

SU : Well, things are a little bit more complicated over there. I was born and raised partly in Czechoslovakia and that part became occupied by Hungary, so then it became Hungary. I consider myself Hungarian though, not Czech because my mother is Hungarian.

IN : Could you tell me a bit about your family -- brothers, sisters, parents?

SU : I was the only child and my father was an engineer. He was working for a Swiss firm in Czechoslovakia and in Hungary.

IN : How old were you when Hitler took power in Germany?

SU : Germany, in 1933... I was three years old. I was very young.

IN : When did Hitler invade Czechoslovakia?

SU : Well, Hitler invaded... actually I think it was not until 1938; either '38 or '39. It was Munich in '37 [sic], and then actually he invaded Czechoslovakia in '38 and at that time Czechoslovakia was partitioned, and it became Hungary.

IN : When did you first realize that there was something really wrong?

SU : I never remember not realizing it. My earliest recollections were of my parents and grandparents continuously engaged in political discussions. And every time Hitler scheduled a speech, we actually lived in dread of it. I never remember not being aware of the danger.

- IN : So, were you aware of what Hitler had in mind for the Jewish people of Germany and Czechoslovakia, early on...?
- SU : Well, we were not aware of “The Final Solution;” we were not aware that we would ultimately be killed, but we were aware that discrimination was going on as far as deportation was concerned to some “unknown land.” To the very end we were not really aware of the actual extermination, but, we were aware we were being deprived of our liberty, of our property, of our homes and being expelled, but we were not aware of the extermination.
- IN : Was your family ever bullied by Nazis and the SS before you were supposedly “relocated?”
- SU : Well, not bullied by the Nazi’s or the SS because there was no need for it, the Hungarians did the bullying themselves.
- IN : I see. How or in what ways...?
- SU : I mean on a personal level we were not bullied, but, in practice we were. My father was fired from his job because he was Jewish, my grandfather lost his business because he was Jewish. We had soldiers quartered in our home because we were Jewish. We had our radios confiscated because we were Jewish. I was expelled from school because I was Jewish. I mean, our life was made miserable, but not physically at that time. People would insult us or curse at us or things like that.
- IN : While you were walking down the street?
- SU : Oh no, they did not. I mean, individually they did not, but collectively. We happened to live on a street that was on the way to the military training ground, and they would parade and the military would go back and forth from there. They would march on the streets and usually on Saturday morning they would march and they would sing virulently anti-semitic songs on the streets and so on. From that point of view, we were insulted as far as most of the population was concerned. The people that we knew, did not bully us or insult us except that they completely withdrew. People who we were good friends with, my father’s particularly— he went to the university and he had some very good friends who were not Jewish, and we were. We considered ourselves very much integrated into the Hungarian and non-Jewish society. And we had many dear friends who were non-Jews and what happened was that these people gradually withdrew and we just stopped seeing them socially, or they stopped seeing us socially.
- IN : Because of all the pressures that the Hungarian Government was imposing?
- SU : Yes, yes because well, it was just not fashionable to be seen with Jews.
- IN : I see. Were you and your family ever relocated before being sent to the concentration camp?
- SU : For a short while, yes, for four weeks.
- IN : Where were you relocated to...?
- SU : We were relocated to what they called the “collection center.” Oh, maybe it was a couple of hundred miles from where we lived. We actually, my parents and me, lived in a very small community, and I don’t know how many...maybe twenty or thirty families from this community, and twenty or thirty from another community and so, we were all shipped to a collection center. At the time we were being shipped, the reason that was given to us was that the front was coming closer. Fighting was coming through, but if we had stayed there for three more months, we would have been liberated by the Russians. So, the fact that the Russians were pushing onward was true. But, what was really mind-boggling at the time, because we were

so close to the end of the war, the Nazis still had energy, and the will to do what they did. When it was clear that they were going to lose.

IN : What year was this?

SU : 1944.

IN : Which concentration camp were you interned in?

SU : Auschwitz.

IN : In Auschwitz, was your family all together, or did they separate all of you?

SU : Well, my family consisted of my father and my mother and I. And that was our immediate family. And of course, my grandparents, and my aunts and uncles, but they lived in different towns, so they were not taken...my grandparents and my aunts and uncles, were not taken to this relocation center because they lived in a town where it actually had a rather large Jewish community, so they used the town as a relocation center. So, they were also taken to Auschwitz but they were not taken with us, so when we arrived to Auschwitz there was just my mother and father and myself. And we [my mother and I] were immediately separated from my father, and I never saw him again. He was thirty-nine years old at the time.

IN : I'm so very sorry to hear that... Could you give me an account of the events that took place prior and up to your imprisonment? For instance, when was it evident that you were going to be relocated?

SU : Well, it wasn't evident. You see, what happened was this. I remember this very clearly. On March 19, there was a Hungarian Fascist Government, Hungary was fighting along with Germany, right?

IN : Yes.

SU : So we were not an occupied country. Hungary was a satellite, so there was no German occupation, there were no Nazis, there were no German soldiers in Hungary so, you know, actually there were no Germans there. Occasionally we would see German troops on trains being transported to Hungary, but that's the extent that we had contact with the Germans. On March 19, the collaborationists of the Fascist Hungarian Government fell, and it was replaced by a super-collaborationist, Nazi Government. I mean, they were to the right of the government which was in power all these years and were waging war against Russia as an ally of Hitler.

I was living with my grandparents because my parents lived in... my father was an engineer and he was in charge of a big lumber mill... and he would occasionally be relocated whenever there was a new operation. At that time, we were in a very small community, up in an area where they had their lumber mill and the lumber yard. So my father lived on the premises where the lumber yard was. So when I became,... when I went into the fifth grade, it was to get the type of education that my parents thought I should have. During the school year I lived with my grandparents, who lived in this larger community. So I was in, on March 19, . . . I was with my grandparents. And one day I just,... and life was so restricted then— we had an awful lot of problems. Because at that time, my father had lost his job. Our problems were economic. My grandparents who had a very large lumber and coal business, had their license to operate it taken away. I mean, he [my grandfather] had a wholesale

coal and lumber business. And he was restricted to retail, which meant, you know, that most of his income was taken away. My two young cousins, who were in their early twenties, were taken into the labor batallion and they were lost on the Russian Front, so, you know, things were pretty bad, but we lived in our house, relatively securely... I mean we thought we were sort of secure in that the Hungarian Government would never deport the Jews.

So, on March 19, I came home from school, and my grandfather said that things are really getting bad... that there's a new government and one of the edicts that the new government issued was that no Jews were allowed to get on a train or in a bus or leave their communities. And my grandfather thought this was a very bad sign that something imminent was, something very bad was to happen. And he called my parents and said to them, "I think that your child should be with you, these times don't look to me to be like very good times." And he put me in a taxi and he bribed the taxi driver to drive me home... which was half-a-day's journey and was very expensive. I was very upset because I didn't show up in school, and I was worried I would miss tests and what was going to happen? I went, you know, by this time over a year [to that school]. I was home for about ten days with my parents with nothing to do and not being able to go to school, and nothing happened...nothing happened. I was really very upset that I was going to lose a year of school because I was going to flunk all my subjects. And in two weeks, things started to happen... my grandfather was right. So the whole thing happened just... well, absolutely very fast.

IN : Could you explain in detail the system in the concentration camp, for example, the type of work you were assigned?

SU : Nothing. In the concentration camp, we got there and we were told we're going to be killed and they told us that the first day we were there... Well, first of all, we got there and I don't know why, but my father ran to me -- and I was thirteen -- and my father ran to me and said: "Don't tell your age. If anybody asks you your age, don't tell them how old you are." And this was... well, it just turned out that nobody asked my age. But if that same advice would have been given to other people, many more people would have survived.

IN : Why?

SU : Because of what we weren't told, you see... The first thing they did when you got there was to say, "Men in one line, women and children in the other line." So immediately the men and women were separated. Then, they just looked at us... so I was with the women and children. And then they said anybody who is less than sixteen or more than forty, in one line, and the other women and children in the other line. So people asked, why in different lines? So they said the women and the children will go to camps where they will go to school and they'll get better nutrition. And the young women... they will go to factories to work. So if you have a child, you'd better send them to the children's camp. And so the mother's and some aunts and uncles, also some grandmothers... you know, went with the children to the children's camp. Actually, what happened was that anybody who went, and there were many people, like for instance, a mother who was, let's say, thirty-five... and a fifteen year old daughter. You know they considered themselves children, so they would go into the line with the children, and then, as you went through, the Germans looked at you. They never asked me my age and they just allowed me to go with the women... with the adult women,

not the children. But lots of times, if someone looked young to them, they just pulled them out from the line anyway, most of the time and sent them into the children's line. And you see, sometimes whole families... adult women, you know, somebody in the family had the child and people, particularly during times of stress and bad times, wanted to stick together... so whole families...

IN : What was done? Were they really taken to a children's camp?

SU : No. They immediately, within the hour, were gassed and killed.

IN : I see. It was just a ruse they were given to make them cooperate more fully.

SU : Yes. All of these people... were fooled. Also, if you didn't look fine, or if you looked too young, or if you looked too old, which was anybody that looked less than 16 or 18 or more than 35, they just sent them to the... gas chambers. So, actually people marched to their death and they marched to a place which was like -- I don't know, I've never been to a locker room but, this is what I understand they are like -- just a big room with hundreds of showerheads and we marched, and the women and children marched -- the only difference was when we marched, the showers had some water in them and when the children marched and the older people, the showers had poison gas. They were side by side -- you didn't know... I mean, people didn't cry, or didn't scream because they didn't know where they were going.

IN : They were identical buildings then.

SU : Uh-huh. Yeah.

IN : I see. That was to relieve the Nazis of dealing with a lot of the probable panic that would have transpired, had people known.

SU : Yeah. I never was inside the gas chamber, so... if I would have been, I wouldn't be here to tell the story, but people told me that inside the gas chambers, they realized what was happening. They were panicking, but... it was too late.

IN : How did the Germans identify the Jewish people? Did they take down names in files or anything?

SU : No. Nothing, nothing, nothing. There were a thousand here, and two thousand, and three thousand. It was just like cattle, no names, no ages, nothing; nobody and of course, you know, we were in the camp with the Jewish group so they assumed we were Jewish. Nobody asked us whether we were Jewish or anything; there were no names taken, no data or who we were or what. We were just people, just numbers, and also, you know, sometimes they continuously counted you because sometimes they needed a hundred people here, two hundred people there so they would just pull out the hundred people sometimes they didn't have enough, almost every day they would come in and you would have to line up... this was life in the camp. You wouldn't do anything, you were just locked up all day. There was no work, no nothing, you were just there and at least once a day, they would come in and they would line you up and by this time you must realize how you looked. The first thing they did to us was to take away all our own clothes including shoes and they gave us one rag, one randomly assigned dress. I mean you could have been a size 8 and gotten a size 40 dress, no shoes and no underwear, and no sweater or no coat, nothing, that was it.

IN : This was in the winter?

SU : Well this was in May, this was in the summer but, this was all year round. That was it.

They shaved our heads, so everybody looked like a lunatic. As a matter of fact, when we first arrived we saw groups of people in funny looking clothes, with shaved heads and my mother and I, we looked at each other, and we just burst out laughing and I thought to myself, "My God! This is a lunatic asylum." And we were there and you just couldn't imagine that those people were like us... and furthermore, these lunatics were yelling at us, screaming at us because in the evening there was an hour where you just could sort of mill around in the camp. You know, just walk around and talk and that was just the time we happened to be coming into the camp. At that time we saw these people behind the barbed-wire, yelling, and screaming. You see, we are coming in, in our own clothes, and furthermore, we were expecting a real arduous journey and starvation. So we would have things with us like chocolate and cookies and things that were very nutritious. My mother baked cookies with lots of sugar and lots of butter so we knew one or two cookies could keep us alive. You know, in case they don't give us food for about two weeks. So, when we got off the train, we had suitcases, but they took away our suitcases; the only thing we were allowed to carry was like a little handbag. Our handbags, they were full of cookies. We were carrying food and we were not carrying anything else; our valuables were taken away. So they were yelling at us because they knew we were carrying food: "Throw your food, throw your food!" but we didn't throw our food because we thought we would need it. Well, in fact, they needed it desperately. The Nazis took it away anyway. They took it all away. They took away our clothes, they took away our food, they took away everything.

IN : What kind of food did you have in the concentration camps?

SU : Well, once a day, you got soup, but I have to tell you what the soup was like... and sometimes a thin slice of black bread! Now, the soup was given to you in the barracks, there were like bunkbeds, and on each bunk there were large bunks. The bunk was, I would say, about six by eight, no, yeah, I would say about, oh maybe, six by six feet. These were just boards — — real rough, sawn boards. So you know, it was full of splinters, and we didn't have any stockings or anything; we were just sitting on these boards, no blanket, nothing and they would put twelve to fifteen people in there. So you were just, I mean, you couldn't turn around when you laid down to sleep. When one person turned around, changed sides, another person... can you imagine having fifteen people in a bed? That's how it was. And if you were in the back, you couldn't even, if you had to go to the bathroom, you couldn't even get up because you had to climb over ten or twelve sleeping people; the food was given to you up there, and it was in one dish, like a pot of soup. It was given to you which was, I don't know what it was, I mean, we thought it was grass sometimes. We saw a little cabbage in it and for the first three or four days, we just couldn't eat the food. I mean, it just tasted awful and it was awful. Then we got very hungry, and of course, it was very bad because you didn't have a spoon, you didn't have a dish. You had, can you imagine, a whole pot of soup? And that pot was being passed around, from person to person. So a person who drank fast and drank a lot of soup got some soup and the person who was last or was timid didn't get any.

Now then, they gave you a piece of bread sometimes. So, you ate a piece of dry bread, and the first thing that happened in the first four weeks was about half the people that got this

far, just lost weight. If you got diarrhea, that was the kiss of death. Once you got diarrhea, that was the end of you because then you lost weight, then you looked bad, and when you looked bad, they selected you out and that was that.

IN : What kind of bathrooms did you have? Were they in the barracks?

SU : No, no. They had one room which was the bathroom, it was a whole barrack. It must have been made of cement, like seats out of slabs with holes in it and about two to three hundred people were in there at once. And that's it and there was no shower facilities or tubs. They had a trough with running water, and you just washed your face; you had no towel, you had no soap. I mean, they took everything from you.

IN : Is this the water you drank also?

SU : Yes. This was the water we drank also.

IN : I have a question regarding the guards. Could you detect any compassion at all in the guards' faces? Or in any of the other camp personnel for that matter?

SU : No. You mean the camp personnel?

IN : Well, principally the guards. Whenever you passed the guards and when you would look into their faces, could you see compassion?

SU : No, no. There was none, furthermore, a very strange thing happened. That the personnel... the guard personnel who were not SS, pretty soon adopted the SS attitude and there were lots of Jewish guards and there were a lot of people who were in charge of groups and not only did they—the Germans treat us with contempt—we were so completely dehumanized by those people who were in charge. They were also treating us with contempt. I mean they never had people from the same ethnic group as guards, for instance, we were guarded by Polish and Slovak Jews and Slovak Jews were guarded by German Jews and the German Jews were guarded by Russian Jews, so they really played on both, you know...

IN : Having the friction between the two?

SU : Having the friction and also when we got there all our guards were Slovaks and the Jewish-Slovaks had been there for two or three years. They were the people who really survived already for two or three years. And so when we got there—and even to this day I use this phrase in my family that nobody else understands—we refer to it as the “chicken paprikask syndrome.” The chicken paprikask syndrome is that when we came in there the first night, this Slovak-Jewish girl who was in charge of 1,000 Hungarian girls said, “Well, it's your turn now. While you were sitting at home eating chicken paprikask”—you know chicken paprikask is a Hungarian National dish—“We were already dying and suffering. Now it's your turn, OK?” So, so we were not treated with any compassion, as a matter of fact, it was our own guards who were telling us everyday that there is only one way out of here, and it is through the chimney. “There is only one way you are going to get out of here and it is through the chimney.” Unfortunately for millions, there was only one way, and 98% of those there went that way. As far as we were concerned, there was just absolutely no hope, I mean, we knew that that was going to happen to us. It was just a matter of time.

IN : This leads me to my next question. Do you think that they were just following orders? Or do you think they received personal gratification by watching fellow human-beings suffer?

SU : Well, I cannot speak for...

IN : I realize this is a hard question.

- SU : I don't really know why those people did it.
- IN : Many said that they were just following orders; orders from the top and then...
- SU : Well, mainly I suppose they were men that just followed orders, but there were enough of them who went beyond the orders. I mean there were beatings, and there were kickings, and there was punishment, and there was,... informing, unnecessarily. You mean, why the collaborators were there? I think it was to save their own skin, though it was not necessarily true, because many of them eventually perished too. I think that was their primary motivation. As far as our own guards were concerned, they did it in order to have better conditions, more food and to save their own lives. Now why the Germans did it, my feeling is that anybody who was involved this intimately in a concentration camp, they did it because they wanted to do it. For what psycho..., whether it was because of the hatred of the Jews or rather they were sick psychologically and got some gratification out of seeing suffering, I do not know because I'm sure that the Germans who did not want to be on concentration camp detail could have done other jobs.
- IN : Forgive me, I know how painful it is for you to relive these horrible experiences, but if you could describe in detail the concentration camp, the grounds surrounding it and the extermination procedures?
- SU : Well, as I said, I was not in the extermination procedure or I would not be here. The only thing that I can tell you is what I experienced, where I have been. It was a camp, which had 32 barracks. For each thirty barracks, there was the latrine that we referred to previously, and one barrack was for the camp workers, I mean they were workers who kept the latrines clean, who mowed the lawns you know, because the grass had to be cut and the grass had to be cleaned; those who worked in the kitchen were inmates also.

They would make us sit up at around four o'clock in the morning and they drove you outside and it was cold and it was damp, even in the summer. This was in Poland, the weather is not particularly mild and you stood in line, and you lined up in rows of five and they counted you for hours and hours. And you had to stand out there in the whole camp, all the camp, not only in this, but this we will call 'C'; C meaning C lot camp, A, B, C, D... they had various camps. You waited in line there first, your own barrack leader counted you and then the 'C' camp leader counted you, and then somebody else came and counted you and somebody else, there were about four people who came and finally the SS came— and incidently most of the SS we dealt with were women, they were women SS, and not men SS. The men only served as, as guards, you know, when we were transported from one area to another. The only SS men that we saw were the doctors, like this doctor Mengele [a notorious Nazi doctor who performed heinous experiments on prisoners], and the SS who picked out people for work. The SS people were picked out for that, but most of the running of the camp was done by women. So, they were, believe you me, just as cruel as the men. I think that humans are humans regardless of sex. So anyway, this lasted till about 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning and then you were allowed to go to the bathroom until 10:00 in the morning; after that you went back into the barracks and you were there until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. They counted you again for a three or four hour stance standing there, and afterwards you had about an hour for sort of milling around and then you went back and they gave you the soup,

and...

IN : This was day after day?

SU : Day after day. About the only people that would come in were SS. They would come in with a truck and once in a while, they would stop at one barrack and another and empty the barrack and the people disappeared and you never knew what happened to them, some of them would go to a factory to work after much selection, and then of course, there were "selections." At least once or twice a day your block was opened up and the SS came. You see the barracks were rectangular barracks with an end, with two entrances, one in the back and one in the front end. The SS would stand in the back, so nobody could go to the back and a couple of SS with rubber hoses came to the back and drove the other people out. As the people came out, there were people at the door telling you to go to the truck or go into a different line. Then again when people went into the truck, you never knew what happened to them. Some of them were killed, some of them went to factories. And so this is where I stayed for 6 months.

IN : How has this experience changed your life?

SU : Well, it has changed my life completely. As a result of it, my family was completely destroyed except for my mother and I. My grandparents and my aunts and uncles, everybody was killed. My mother was a relatively young woman when this happened to her. We never went back. I came to the United States, and I really feel, I have very mixed feelings. Sometimes, I feel that whatever happened to that person in Europe was not me. I feel some of the time that I had a new birth.

IN : After coming to the U. S.?

SU : After coming here. And the further back it recedes into my memory, the more unbelievable it gets. I cannot, when I look at it, I just cannot see how it happened, and how I could have gone through it.

IN : Do you feel bitter?

SU : Bitter towards whom?

IN : Well, let's say the German people.

SU : In general no, I don't feel bitter toward the German people because if I would feel bitter about the German people then I would be doing the same thing as they did to us. They hated Jews and you can see what total irrational hatred does. And so I don't hate Germans because I was innocent and therefore I'm not going to hate an innocent person. So I don't hate...

IN : Two wrongs do not make a right.

SU : That's right, I don't hate innocent people. Yes, I do hate... I do hate very much the people who did it to us, and I think that all of those people should be very severely punished. But I don't hate this generation of Germans and I don't hate the Germans as a public.

IN : I guess I meant the Germans during WWII, that allowed Hitler to take power, who turned their backs, and ignored what was going on. A lot of people say, "Well, the Germans didn't actually know what was going on."

SU : I think the German people knew it. They didn't want to know it, it was very unfair, it was really very unpleasant to know that these things are going on and you as a human-being aren't doing anything to stop it. Well, you know it is very, very difficult to say who was guilty, but I certainly feel that people like Barbie and Mengele [German war criminals] and

all of those people should come to justice. But I certainly don't hate the innocent people of Germany.

IN : Do you, or were you still in prison when the liberators came?

SU : No. Well, yes and no, because we were liberated by the Swedish Red Cross, we happened to be near Denmark and the Germans made the trade for us. And this happened about nine days before the war ended on May 1, 1945. So we were very fortunate we weren't liberated by the liberators. I mean people died even after the liberation because there was disease in the camp. People were in such bad physical condition, that just eating regular food meant many of them couldn't handle it and died. And number two, the camps were pretty soon emptied and people went back to their original homes, during a very disorganized time under very bad conditions and we were very lucky that this did not happen to us. We were taken over by the Swedish Red Cross and we were actually treated in hospitals and sanitoriums for a long time... for 6 months to a year, until we were physically, completely recovered.

IN : How did you feel when this took place? When the Swedish Red cross came in?

SU : Oh, I just... I mean, just, it was... it was, you know, just... unbelievable, I mean when... as a matter of fact, they weren't telling us where we were going, they just packed us into a car. And they were taking us someplace and we were sure that they were [going to kill us]. People were saying their last prayers, because usually when they packed people into cars and they were taken someplace like a clearing, they shot them. Things were so bad by that time, we had no food and water for days and we were very sick and we could hardly walk. And the Germans, we were in a small camp at that time and the Germans came in and they said, "We want all the Jews,"... "we want everybody to get up" some people couldn't walk and at this time the Germans lifted them into the trains which was very unusual because usually when you couldn't walk they just killed you right then and there, and this time they lifted them, so we were sure that they were going to take us someplace, to a clearing, and do away with us. This was at night time and so the religious people -- we weren't religious -- but the religious people were praying and saying their last prayers. And when the doors opened to the train, there were Red Cross nurses standing there. And even now I cry when I think about it..., and so..., ...

IN : Yes, it is a very moving recollection. I have tears in my eyes.

SU : And they were very good to us. And also this gave us an opportunity to go back but we never went back.

IN : Did you come on to America?

SU : We came to America.

IN : Was it difficult for you to get a visa or...?

SU : Oh, no. It just so happened, it was just, you know, many coincidences.

IN : That led up to it?

SU : Well, the weirdest coincidence was that we had no papers, we had none..., everything which we had was destroyed but my mother remembered that she had an aunt in Los Angeles and she didn't, of course, remember her address and she wrote a letter just addressing her name, and "Los Angeles." Los Angeles is a big city and you wouldn't believe it, but a man in the main post office knew her [my aunt] and noticed this letter from Europe, addressed to

somebody he knew, so he took the letter, and gave it to her. And it was my mother's aunt.

IN : Wonderful, wonderful.

SU : And so, there was absolutely no problem, we got our visas and affidavits and we came very soon thereafter.

IN : Anti-semitism had occurred over a period of nearly two thousand years, as far as many Jews were concerned it was a divine law set out in the Old Testament. Are the Jewish people destined to be persecuted? Is it prophecy in your eyes? Was it inevitable that the Holocaust was to happen? Or do you think it could have been avoided?

SU : It wasn't inevitable. No, it wasn't inevitable. It could have been avoided if Hitler had any opposition earlier. I think it could have been avoided if the other European countries would have been willing to help. I know that, and that includes the United States. I don't know where, I guess it's controversial, that they just didn't believe that it happened. I know that my father had a visa to go to England in 1937, or so,... 1938. They wanted a certain amount of money for the three of us to insure we wouldn't be a burden on the state. We didn't have enough money for that, we had just enough for one person, so my father chose not to go by himself. There were many people who wanted to go too, but countries wouldn't take them, there was no place to go. In a way, the German Jews were better off because it happened to them earlier. And at the time, they could leave, but there were European countries for other reasons, who were not involved in the war so they went to adjacent European countries but they wouldn't let them stay, so eventually they went to China, or they went to South America, and some of them came to the United States, but by the time it came to Hungary there was no place to go. And nobody, I don't know, I really, we had only one prayer in the camps, I mean we were doomed anyway, we felt we were doomed and what we really felt was "why don't the allies bomb the camps, why don't they come and bomb them!" You know, they were killing 30,000 people a day; they had such efficient machinery. Some of the German people were starving, they didn't have enough food. Some of the German soldier's feet were freezing off in Russia. They didn't have enough cars to transport them, they had to march for hundreds of miles on foot, because they didn't have transportation. It was being used to take the Jews to the crematoriums. Up to the very last day they had transportation for the killing business. Now, if they would have [The Allies] bombed the railroad centers, if they would have bombed the crematoriums... I mean they would have done damage, they still would have gone on killing but at least it would have slowed them down.

IN : In the end it probably would have saved more lives.

SU : Saved more lives, I mean 99% of the people in the camps were eventually killed, I mean, died anyway, and everybody would have been willing to die, if it would have meant saving people. Just to disrupt it, the smooth operation, it was a smooth, smooth operation. So I don't know, I think that the Jews have survived as a group because the Christians never wanted to accept them. As you know, it's a part of a country, in the Christian countries of Europe, so, it was in a way a defense mechanism. I don't know about the other Jews, but Hungarian Jews you see, they were very much Hungarian. I mean they were, they were just like the American Jews [are today], they are Americans first and then Jews. I know that my parents considered themselves Hungarian, and they were very proud of being Hungarian. They were Hungarians of the Jewish religion. They were very much integrated into Hungarian society,

just like Jews are here in America. And there are many, many Hungarian Jews who converted or whose parents or grandparents converted, to protestant or Catholic religions, but I mean, there was such a hatred, it didn't matter. I mean there were people who never knew that they were Jewish. There were people who were all Christians, who were practicing Catholics or Protestants, and they were all of a sudden labeled as Jews and were persecuted as Jews. This was a total, such a total, irrational hatred.

IN : When one thinks of the Aryan race, and that was what Hitler was striving for, you think of the tall, blond, blue-eyed type of person. I notice that you have blue eyes, so that shows that the stereotype is wrong.

SU : The stereotype is wrong and there are lots of Germans that aren't tall and blond-Aryan, including himself. He was certainly a peep-squeak of a man.

IN : There is talk that Hitler might have been one-quarter Jew.

SU : There is no anti-semitic like a Jew who is an anti-semitic, but I don't know, I think that the churches have changed. I think much of the European anti-semitism was fostered by the church. And I think that, hopefully, certainly the American churches are different. I think that if the churches would have spoken out, you know, I feel the machine wouldn't have been able to function, if the population as a whole wouldn't have supported it.

IN : Can such an atrocity happen again?

SU : Yes.

IN : Could you explain why you think this?

SU : Because when I was fourteen years old and I was in the camp, I, my world, the world, the reason I survived is because my world was black and white, I mean, the Germans to me were totally evil and everybody who was fighting for the truth and justice against the Germans were good. And I thought if that the war was going to end, and if anybody was going to survive it's going to be a wonderful world. And I wanted to be a part of that world. And as I have grown older, as I said, my feelings have mellowed much toward the Germans, and I became much more cynical of people in general because I'm afraid that given the right circumstances, people can be just unbelievably inhumane to other people. I always thought that the Germans did it and nobody else could have done it, but I see what is happening over in India and Pakistan, and what's happening on in other places, one black tribe is massacring another black tribe. I still think that we are still better than most of them— Americans that is. At least we have some national conscience, but I'm worried about the circumstances, if the economic and political circumstances are correct, any country could have the capability of doing such a thing. You see it's not black and white to me anymore, and that's why, that's why I'm more depressed about this, than I was in the camp. Because then, things were very simple.

IN : Is there any message or idea that you would like to especially convey in this interview?

SU : Just what we said before, just be careful that the thing doesn't happen again. You know, to any group of people.

IN : How important do you think it is for these accounts of the Holocaust to be brought out in the open?

SU : I think it's very important because, I think that history is already being re-written.

IN : In what way?

- SU : There are already groups making noises that it has never happened, again, I mean there's a group of many illustrious professors in California and I forget what they called themselves.
- IN : They are contesting it, by saying that this had never happened?
- SU : There is a group of some sort of historical society and they claim that the Holocaust has never happened, that the whole Holocaust is Zionist propaganda, and as a matter of fact they offered a \$ 50,000 reward to anybody who proves that one person was killed in a concentration camp.
- IN : There is proof.
- SU : OF COURSE THERE'S PROOF!! And so somebody claimed that and they wouldn't pay, they took them to court. But, the thing that is mind-boggling is that these people should be given enough credence to even be allowed to make such an accusation. The Russians are beginning to make noise that the numbers were exaggerated and the Germans didn't kill so many people, I think that unless these things are not brought up, and people aren't reminded then maybe, who knows, in one hundred years, people will think that this didn't really happen.
- IN : Well, I think that through interviews like this and through documentaries that have been on TV, we won't forget. Would you like to make a closing comment.
- SU : Well, I think that you made a very good closing comment and I hope that we won't forget this, is probably the best closing comment.
- IN : Well, thank you so very much for reliving your experience with me today. It has been very moving for me, and I am very appreciative and grateful for your help. Thank you. This concludes the interview.

II. VIEWS OF AN OBSERVER OF THE LIBERATION

- IN : I'm about to interview Mr. Vanhandle at the Lafayette Public Library on the Holocaust during World War II. Mr. Vanhandle, what branch of the service were you in?
- OB : I was in the Army Air Corp.
- IN : Army Air Corp?
- OB : We did reconnaissance work for the First Army.
- IN : What rank did you hold?
- OB : Technical Sergeant which is three up, two down, two rockers.
- IN : When did you, or did you ever realize how evil Adolf Hitler was during World War II? Were the Americans aware of what he was doing?
- OB : Well, we were going... at, well, we became aware of it one time in Belgium. And...
- IN : What year was this?
- OB : This would be 1943. Our outfit, our reconnaissance outfit as I mentioned, we worked with the First Army, and therefore we were the most advanced of the Air Corp units. And... we had a landing strip in a place called Gozley, Belgium, a mining town, and the airstrip was just taken out of the countryside, leveled out by engineers, and that was where we operated out of, that area. And it was that area that had been occupied by the Germans, and evidently at some stage during the occupation a German must have been killed by partisans or what have you, in the Belgium area. And... the story was that the Germans had taken all the men that they could get out of this small town; hauled them out to this area and made them dig a trench and they killed them and just dropped them in and covered them. This was in

Belgium. This area was right along side of our (INAUDIBLE) areas where we stored airplanes and serviced airplanes. And the Belgians had asked permission to come out and open this trench; identify the bodies and take them out for a proper burial, and they had that permission. So we could see what was going on there, then they, there were two men that were down in this trench, and they would call people from town to identify it. And the three people that came out for this one looked like a man, wife and... must have been their daughter and must have been the husband of the daughter of the body they found and I recall the one digger holding up an arm, evidently they could identify it and these fellows are very callous by this time, body after body, he just tossed the arm back in. The girl snapped, and just jumped right on top of him in the trench. But this is where we have seen some of the things that the German army had participated in. Of course, up to that point it was all rumors.

IN : Was there any evidence that they were Jews?

OB : Oh, no. This was just townspeople.

IN : Do you think that the U. S. was aware of the atrocities...

OB : No, I don't think too much, to the extent that...

IN : ... of deathcamps, and things like this?

OB : No, there were rumors but...

IN : Nothing that was substantial enough for them to go in there and see what was going on. You have been in a concentration camp?

OB : I have been to two of them.

IN : Could you explain in detail what you saw, and possibly how you felt, when you saw these concentration camps and realized what had taken place. Was it after the war or...?

OB : It was right about the end... just before Germany or at the time Germany gave up, when they uncovered some of the camps, and the one that was closest to us at the time was called Buchenwald. And... infantry, artillery or whatever really were the first ones in there and we heard about it and some of us went up and went to see what this was with our own eyes. I have some pictures here if you are interested.

IN : Yes, I would like to see them.

OB : That was Buchenwald and the other one was, and of course, I haven't heard of it since, was Nordhausen.

IN : You mentioned to me that you were an observer and not actually a liberator.

OB : I am not a liberator. Nor the American army, but the, I'd say the infantry or whoever went in there at the start, that was, they were the liberators.

IN : What do you mean by observer? Could you explain? Just going in and...

OB : Just going in and seeing what actually the conditions were.

IN : Were there still prisoners in the camp?

OB : There were still prisoners in the camp, there were still dead bodies piled up there, there were still, a body on the slab before the furnaces. The furnaces, you could see human skeletons and bones still in the furnaces.

IN : Could you sense any smell in the air?

OB : No, I could not.

IN : I see. These pictures, could you explain these pictures as we look at them.

OB : This was right at the entrance to Buchenwald.

- IN : It looks as if a man has been hanged.
- OB : Well, that's just a dummy that they have hung up there and we were told that this was a thing that the prisoners, the concentration camp prisoners would see everyday when they would go in and out of the gates and you see the wording on here is what the people after the liberation wrote. "Hitler must die so that Germany lives."
- IN : I see.
- OB : And this just shows some of the things, and again there's just, they're talking about Germans, or something about American friends.
- IN : Then the Americans had written this?
- OB : No, the inmates of the concentration camp. This is just one of the inmates showing how, this was in the torture area.
- IN : The torture area?
- OB : They were hung up sometimes by the arms or legs or what have you and they were beaten with this like big ol' potato masher.
- IN : I see... it's big on the end, it's rather thin and then on the end it is rather clubbed on the end. Do you know of any other methods of torture that went on, within the death camps that are not really publicized? Besides the torturing, such as this.
- OB : Well, it was just the poor food, poor living conditions, the... We were just told that they would be beaten, and that they would try to disembowel them. Let them down and make them run until their bowels would come out, but this I don't know... Here this shows where the prisoners lived. There would be anywhere from six to eight people in each one of these little...
- IN : Did you take these pictures yourself?
- OB : No, these were taken by somebody else in our group. And here are some of the people that were around when we came. They were very undernourished... hardly able to move.
- IN : They had very sunken faces, very undernourished.
- OB : They also, some...
- IN : The tattoos.
- OB : They are showing the tattooed number on their arms.
- IN : Each one of them was given a number?
- OB : Oh, yes, every prisoner had one.
- IN : Now why do you suppose that was done, to keep track of the people?
- OB : For identification. But when we came in the camp, there were also, there were still dead bodies around.
- IN : Now what would be done with these, eventually buried or burned?
- OB : Yes, their clothing would be stripped and they...
- IN : Shave their heads for their hair?
- OB : Well, they have done that, I think especially for women, I understand, if they had long hair. Then they would be incinerated in these ovens. Here are more that are dead. I had one [picture], I don't know what happened to the picture, but some of these dead bodies; the clothing had already been stripped and they were on top of an old fashioned wagon and it just looked like cord wood... just skin and bones.
- IN : Stacked one after the other.

- OB : Here's a picture of one of the furnaces.
- IN : Oh my gosh! These would just hold one body at a time?
- OB : No, I think that they would hold more... they put more in.
- IN : Put two or three in, it is hard to tell the size of that, but it might be bigger than what it looks.
- OB : And this was the bones and ashes from the furnaces... would be piled out here and this was another area where people would be strung up.
- IN : What would they eventually do with these bones, do you have any idea? Just bury them or...
- OB : The reason they burned them, I guess, was more economical to dispose of them that away than to bury them. And here again is that pile...
- IN : This is kind of ironic, having three Jewish prisoners sitting by the pile of bones.
- OB : I imagine they were pretty accustomed to it by that time. And this was in the laboratory where they had specimens or organs.
- IN : So Buchenwald was also for medical research, or supposed medical research?
- OB : I don't know, it very well could be, as of, of course that's the area where they talk of the commandant's wife making lampshades out of human skin.
- IN : At Buchenwald? This is almost impossible for me to believe that a human being could subject another human being to such punishment. Was that the kind of surprise you had when you were walking through this?
- OB : It was shock, it was just complete disgust that anybody could ever treat another human being in that manner.
- IN : Do you think the German people were aware of what?
- OB : I guess the majority of them did not.
- IN : Did not? How could they not know, though, when their cities were being emptied, didn't they wonder where these people were being taken?
- OB : They just didn't question it. The thing with them being resettled. Like in this country where we took the Japanese and interned them for the period of the war.
- IN : For the ones that did know what was going on, why do you think they let this happen?
- OB : There was a protestant minister that said, in fact, that they were exterminating Jews, "but it didn't affect me, so I did nothing about it, and they started with this other group, and did nothing about it and now they are doing it to me, and now it's too late to do anything about it." I imagine a lot of it was "It's none of our business, it's..."
- IN : That was the feeling then. Why do you think the Jewish population was so passive in letting the Germans incarcerate them, instead of having a mass riot or revolt against the Germans, they seemed to more or less, go right into there — I've heard this before — walk right into the ovens. Which is very cruel sounding, but basically many of them did not question why they were being incarcerated.
- OB : I've heard different things on this and I've been very impressed with this T. V. thing, the "Winds of War." I've read the book on that and followed up on that and evidently, they were: They were German citizens and German citizens have the reputation of following orders. So if the army comes in and says we are going to relocate you and they go along, it might also be that the Jewish people have a history of persecution. And they thought that it was just going to be a short period of this and then we are going to be able to come back and enjoy our citizenship. And I imagine they loved their country just as we do.

- IN : And the Nationalism involved.
- OB : The Jews fought back at certain times, especially in Poland. I don't know of any in Germany that did, but I imagine there were.
- IN : Do you think that there could have been anything done to keep this from happening. Or do you think that it was rather inevitable as far as the Americans are concerned?
- OB : I hate to think that it was inevitable, because I even hate to think about what had happened after this many years, trying to recall, but the only reason I do is that I just don't want it to happen again and if you are aware of it, but maybe we would learn to speak up. I don't think that it was inevitable.
- IN : It would be sad to think that it was.
- OB : Todd, if you look back in history too, I imagine it would be about the same thing when America was young and we had slaves. And the settlers, the colonists at that time did not consider the blacks as being human. This might have been about the same feeling that the guards at the prison camps, concentration camps, might have felt about the Jews.
- IN : Did you ever have any opportunity to talk with any of the guards, the German guards, or any of the German people?
- OB : No.
- IN : Did you have any opportunity to sit in at the Nuremburg Trial or know anything that was going on in that?
- OB : I was back in this country by then.
- IN : How has this experience affected you, and your outlook?
- OB : I just hope it makes me a better human being. I will have compassion and thought for the underdog. It doesn't do me any good, does it? Because after football games, or at anything else, I root for the underdogs and most of the time I lose.
- IN : This has then affected your outlook on humanity, on what really is humane?
- OB : Well, I would like to think that I felt that way even before seeing this.
It sharpened it.
- IN : Do you think something like this could ever happen again and why?
- OB : I don't know. I know there are very definite feelings in different areas of the world, one group against others. I know that there have been a lot of imprisonments made in some of these dictatorships. We don't know what is going on, just anymore than we knew what was going on in Germany. In war, it is a closed area. We don't get any news, you might hear more than, and some things that is going on in let's say South America. Now I mentioned earlier the American feelings toward the slaves; Germany against the Jews. I think there are areas in Asia where they feel that way about the Chinese. And maybe for the same reasons that a lot of Jewish were, because they were good businessmen.
- IN : They were a threat? I guess Aryan people, or Aryan Germans, which were supposedly the main force in Nazi Germany, wanted to make sure the Aryan race stood above all else.
- OB : You picture an Aryan as being a tall, blond, blue-eyed and so on. There doesn't seem to be very many blue-eyed blonds in Germany. But...
- IN : Directly after the war, when all the camps were opened up and everyone knew, and everyone's eyes were opened to what had been going on, did the American people, perceive the Jewish population as being a very passive people?

- OB : No, Todd, we were in the service. We were very restricted as far as where we could go, or what we could do. At this period of time we were in Germany and there was a rule of non-fraternization. We were not allowed to speak with the Germans and so, we actually were pretty regimented as far as what we could do or what we could observe. It wasn't long after that, that they started shipping us back. We were over, I was over there for over three years. And after the end of that, Germany capitulated, we started sending men back. We were shipped out of Germany, into France under (INAUDIBLE), we don't have the freedom to go around and ask questions... the, I mentioned that there was a camp called Nordhausen and there evidently, they were working on the V-2 bombs and they had a mixture, it was not just Jewish people, there were Italian soldiers and sailors there, that were imprisoned in there.
- IN : So that must not have been a deathcamp?
- OB : They had ovens, there was evidence they had big slabs there. They had an assembly line for these big V-2 rockets, it was on a railroad with five cars, and in a tunnel. You could go in one way and they would assemble these things and they would come out the other end of the tunnel. And that is where these people were employed or put to work, but when we got there they were starting to find their way back and there were truck loads, they were loading trucks up to the border of Italy or wherever. There was even a wedding.
- IN : In the concentration camp?
- OB : Yes, the inmates there. They seemed quite happy to be free [at last].
- IN : What surprised you the most when you were walking through Buchenwald, and you were taking in account everything around you, what really surprised you or maybe let's say shocked you the most, or appalled you the most...?
- OB : I think that the whole treatment here, when you see these people are skin and bones; you see how they had to live, you see the torture chamber which was not too bad in appearance because they cleaned it up before we came; when you see the ovens, the dead bodies waiting, still waiting to be put into the ovens. It's hard to, you try to say, "Now could I have survived anything like that," anyhow it's just shocking and disgusting.
- IN : Well, do you have a closing comment that you would like to add.
- OB : Just don't let it happen again!
- IN : Well, thank you very much Mr. Vanhandle for taking the time to talk with me today. I really appreciate it. This is the end of the interview.

III. VIEWS OF A CHILD OF A SURVIVOR

- IN : I am interviewing Ron Steiner. Ron, could you tell me where you were born?
- CH : I was born in Chicago, Illinois.
- IN : In Chicago... You might have to speak a little bit louder because I don't know how well this will pick up. Where were your parents born?
- CH : My mother was born in a small town in Yugoslavia and my father was born in Budapest, Hungary.
- IN : Were both of your parents in concentration camps?
- CH : They were in detention camps in Yugoslavia. What happened was that they, they tried to escape Hungary in 1956 during the revolution. They got caught and was put in a camp called Etchka, which was in Yugoslavia. And after that they made their way out and it

wasn't a concentration camp, it wasn't a death camp. It was operated by the Germans, it was just a border patrol basically. They went through Yugoslavia, and eventually made their way to Nice, France, where they were married. And then they made their way to England and crossed the Atlantic on the Queen Elizabeth, they arrived to New York with about three hundred dollars and the suitcase they were carrying and the clothes on their backs. They got to Chicago, Illinois with the help of some distant relatives of my mother and other relatives and friends, who knew my parents were coming and helped them get established in Chicago. They bought a, well they didn't buy it, they got into an apartment on Toman Avenue, which is north, a little bit of downtown. And they eventually moved to a house or rather an apartment on Palina street, that's the apartment I was born in, too. I was born in May of 1964. My grandmother came out for a visit and she was here...

IN : Now where is she from?

CH : She is from Hungary. It is my father's mother. She came out for a visit in 1963 and 1964 and she came out for good in 1966. She became a citizen, July 4, 1976.

IN : Oh, that's a nice day to have a citizenship ceremony. What year was it that your parents were detained?

CH : It must have been '56.

IN : I see, so they weren't really directly involved with the World War II detention camps, or rather concentration camps.

CH : No, my grandparents on my mother's side, and my grandfather on my father's side were directly involved.

IN : Could you explain that?

CH : You see, well, my grandfather on my father's side was Concert Master of the Hungarian Orchestra. And it came time during the war that they put them to work, in a work camp digging ditches. And there he caught pneumonia and tuberculosis and he died a few weeks later, or three months later I'm not sure what the time span is. That's when, my father was eleven years old. It makes it 1943.

IN : The Germans took your grandfather then? Why didn't they take the rest of your family? Did they just want the laborers?

CH : Well, yeah, and also my grandmother was an actress and singer and she was a very visible performer, so was my grandfather, but she worked on the radio and in plays. And they didn't really care about my father. He was a ten or eleven year old boy. He quit school and started selling newspapers, to support himself and help his mother through. He eventually went back to school where he went in and out of [INAUDIBLE] which is a typical training school, it's a monastery for Jews. And that kept him out of the army, he is an architectural engineer, he became a draftsman in Hungary and worked there. Then he tried in '56, is when he tried to leave.

IN : Now what about your grandparents on your mother's side?

CH : My mother was one of two children, she had an older sister and her parents; that was the immediate family there. They were in Yugoslavia and they were put into a concentration camp. And the story has it that, there was a woman that worked for the camp who was bribed and agreed to take out a mother and her son from the camp. And when the woman got there to the camp she found that the boy was mentally retarded and she refused to take

him because she was afraid he would say something. The mother wouldn't leave without the boy and my grandmother overheard this and said "Here take my daughter instead." If you're going to take somebody, and there had to be a decision made between my mother and her older sister. And they took my mother because she was smaller. And easier to hide. [Author's note : This circumstance is similar to that which appeared in the movie *Sophie's Choice*.]

IN : So they were taken out of the camp by an inmate that had special privileges?

CH : I don't know if it was an inmate or not, exactly. I just know that someone could be bribed and had some connections to get her out. She was raised by a lady named Mimi, and as a step-mother...

IN : The same lady she went out with?

CH : I don't think so. The rest of her family, the next day or two, the stories are hazy, they were put into a bus shipped somewhere and the exhaust from the bus was put back in. This was a very common, and also the very early way of killing people. So they just drove them, literally to where they were going to dump them.

IN : And by the time they got there they were already dead.

CH : Already dead.

IN : What year was this, do you have any idea?

CH : I have to subtract my mother's age. She was born...'36 or '35.

IN : So she was a youngster when Hitler was...

CH : So this was somewhere around 1940 or '42. Between 1940 and 1942.

IN : So it was early on when they started doing the actual extermination. Were your grandparents ever aware of the final solution or did they have any idea of this?

CH : They probably never heard the term. They probably...

IN : ...Didn't realize why they were being detained, why they were being relocated.

CH : Oh, they knew why — they were Jewish. They didn't know what the purpose was but I'm sure when they got into that bus, it didn't take them very long to figure out what was happening. So, the reports that people have and got word, we know these stories, for various sources and for various reasons we know that. And many times letters explaining, "Here's where I am, what's happening and then they were sent off and, "Oh here this is where he was on this date and a few months later we got word from a third cousin that he is over here and now we know he is dead, and this cousin saw him, or..."

IN : I see.

CH : So that's how the stories are pieced together. My grandmother that lives in Chicago, she has a ring, a silver ring that has a story behind it. It belonged to one of her brother's children. My grandmother was one of, I think of eleven kids. And she was somewhere near the middle. She, one of her brother's kids, her nephew, was working in Russia near Siberia and he, at some point, and he was going back to Budapest, missed his train, or he was on the train and got off and the train left without him. He was about twenty, twenty-five years old. And here he was stranded in Siberia, he had a heart attack and died on the spot. And the ring was taken off of him and someone else, it eventually floated back to my grandmother.

IN : Through a matter of coincidences or...

CH : A lot of it is coincidences.

- IN : Also, now that we have a lot of the background information, I was wondering, are you now in an organization that is for grandchildren of concentration camp victims?
- CH : Yes, it's Children of Survivors.
- IN : Could you explain this organization?
- CH : It isn't really an organization, like that. It is, well I never thought of it as an organization. All it is, is a, they know the Rabbi and many other people know that I am a child of a survivor. And occasionally they get together and I have, I only know of one meeting and I was unable to attend, so I'm not sure exactly what they do. There is about a half a dozen, I guess on campus. And sometimes they offer support on anniversaries and they get together because many times people don't want to be alone for an anniversary or a death, or something like that.
- IN : Do you have any brothers or sisters? And does your mother ever tell you the stories?
- CH : I have a younger brother who is twelve... thirteen years old. Just turned thirteen. And, well grandma has a lot of stories and occasionally she tells them. My father, I can remember, he made a point -- I've been to Europe three times -- first in 1971, then '75, and in 1977. And we went to different places and he showed me, this is my grandfather's grave and this is why he died. This is another important place, here's what happened here and why.
- IN : So they were able to bury your grandfather's body when he got the pneumonia?
- CH : Yes, he was in Budapest, he died in a hospital. They brought him back. He had tuberculosis and pneumonia. They brought him back once he was sick, he was a very, very small man, and not very strong. So he was a lousy ditch digger. And once he got sick, they just got rid of him. They sent him back to Hungary and, I mean to Budapest which is the capital. He was in the hospital there and my grandmother and my father saw him a couple of times and my dad remembers those times. And we only have one picture of my grandfather taken on the inside of his house. We have others that were taken at portrait studios and places like that, but only one on the inside of the house. And from the time my dad was eleven, until he left, he was raised by my very domineering grandmother.
- IN : How has this experience affected your parents, your mother?
- CH : People who survive something like the Holocaust -- and it's hard for a lot of people to imagine exactly what it is -- either you become very religious because God saved your life or you become very bitter because God let it happen. When my brother was eight years old, no I was wrong, my brother was eleven years old, and I was here at Purdue, this was last year... and he asked my mom why God let the Holocaust happen. And my mom or my dad really wasn't sure how to answer that so they waited till I got home and asked me. And there is a stipulation in the Jewish religion that allows for a freedom of choice. God will guide you and God will give you the Tora, or give us the Tora and you can learn from it and you can interpret it. But you still have the choice of good or evil, or right and wrong. That's why the Holocaust was allowed. My parents who were never very, very religious either in their households or in their married life before I came, they are not very religious. And whether or not it is because of bitterness or just outright fear, our winter holiday, Christians have Christmas and we have Hanukkah, it's a holiday of lights and candles and you are supposed to light candles one each night for eight nights. Adding one, and you are supposed to put it in the window to display it and my father won't let us display it, he's afraid that

someone will see that we are Jewish. While sometimes he is rational enough to realize that this is the United States, the 1970's and 1980's, things aren't as they were. There is and probably always will be anti-semitism and discrimination against Jews forever, and that is something that is real and is rational, and not a paranoid Jew talking. But many of the fears that my father still has...

IN : Have carried over...

CH : Right... and I went to Hebrew schools, and I never went to a parochial dayschool but I went to, into trainings and the weekends... but I, usually that culminates into a Confirmation, which is a Bar-mitzvah, when you are thirteen years old; I went on after that and I had more secular training about the religion. Courses such as the *Jew in the Medieval World*, and things like that so I can get a better perspective on what it is to be Jewish not only, but I mean, what Judaism is. And looking at it historically, we are picked on. For whatever reason,... Why it is that we are picked on, I'm going to use that phrase, it is easier, I'm not sure. Stories, fairy tales, I would call them, that are in the Bible... the story of Exodus and why the Jews were taken out of Egypt and all that, I look upon it as a story that illustrates a point. And I don't look at the story as fact, I look at the point as fact and we are the quote/un-quote "chosen people"; it doesn't say what we are chosen to be whether we are chosen to be the ruler of the universe or whether we are chosen to be the doormat of the universe. It isn't something, it isn't something that I can do anything about. It isn't anything that I or anyone else or any group could do anything about. And second it isn't anything I caused or any person caused and brought upon himself. It's over long periods of time, and the eighteenth or nineteenth century they had the Germans, you go back more there were other nations and nationalities of peoples who tried to exterminate the Jews for one reason or another. It has happened in every generation and it will most likely continue to happen, in every generation. I don't know why. I know how I deal with it and it's taken a while to deal with it. I am not a very, very religious Jew. I don't wear a skull cap, I don't wear many of the garments you are supposed to wear, I don't say the prayers we have been instructed to say.

IN : Is there a special time that you are supposed to wear the yamulka and...

CH : You are supposed to wear the yamulka all of the time. I wear it when I pray for the simple reason that it is a symbol of respect to cover your head. And I have somewhat off the wall views of religion as a whole and my religion in specific.

IN : Do you think this stems back to your parents' experience?

CH : No. I don't know, it stems from my own pigheadedness and the fact I, I'll look at some information and I will get as much information as I can and I'll make my own decision and it is my own opinion. My opinion is neither right nor wrong, is what I want to do though. I don't pray to a "god." I don't say that God created the earth, because God is not a carpenter. I don't say that God wrote the Bible, Old or New Testament, because God is not an author. I look upon God as an idea. And an idea is a noun, you learn in grammar school that a noun is a person, place or thing, or idea, so in my eyes God is a noun and when I pray to, when I pray, I don't pray to a "god," I don't pray to a picture, and I don't pray for any reason. I can read Hebrew, not very well, but I can read it; but I don't. You can say what I do in a synagogue is meditating. I pray to myself. I don't say God give me strength to

do this, I say I hope I can find the strength to do this. I don't say God let me do well on the test, I say well let's hope that I'm disciplined well enough to study enough to do well. I don't keep kosher and one of the reasons or one of the things I look upon as a religion, its functions, is that it disciplines you not to kill your neighbor, because you are jealous of his wife. It disciplines you not to steal just because you want something. The dietary laws and the kosher, they are discipline too. Let's see if I am disciplined enough not to eat milk and meat together in the same four hour period. Let's see if I am disciplined enough not to eat certain animals. Now at one time it was very healthy not to eat pigs. You got trichinosis, the Jews learned that, they made it a religious reason. I wouldn't eat that, you say you eat that you get sick. I won't eat it. Not because a "god" told me to...

IN : But now with all the new...

CH : That is why I don't keep kosher. Because I don't see a purpose for it. Now in some respects I am a scientist that says, show me and then I will believe. But I'm not going to pray to God for a miracle, saying well you know, if a lightning bolt comes down there, there must be a God.

IN : You mentioned that your parents weren't very religious, how do they feel about your religious views?

CH : They, well, they guided me. They took me to Hebrew school and they paid for the tuition. And when I had a question they did their best to answer it. And they did it with not only religion but with a lot of things. Stemming from music, I can play a half dozen musical instruments. They did it with languages, I can speak three languages. They did it with a lot of things in general. Just to expose me to it. One of the biggest gripes I have about Americans, and yes I am an American, but I am not a sixth generation American who doesn't know what difficulty is. I really don't, but I've got an idea.

IN : Because of your grandparents' experience and your parents' experience?

CH : Right. I look upon my Judaism as giving me a certain sensitivity. And it is something that a fourth generation American whose family has three cars and two drivers— they don't have it. They have a pool in their backyard, we don't. It doesn't make me better or them better, it makes us different. I have a sensitivity that I have learned. It isn't something that you can read in a book, you have to live it. And in my own special way I think that I have lived it. And my parents made sure that I have had these experiences in music, with art, with literature and with everything. Because if you don't know about something, you can't like it or dislike it. At least if you know about it, you can dislike it. But for someone to say "Gee, I don't like the opera," and you say "Have you ever been to it?" and they say "No." So how do you know you don't like it.

IN : Exactly. I see your point.

CH : So exposure is something that my parents worked real hard on.

IN : Maybe because they didn't receive the same exposure, especially your mother, at an early age, because of the difficulties that were taking place in Germany. Getting back to the concentration camp, are there any other stories that you can think of that you would like to relate?

CH : Well, my best friend back home is named Ira. And his mother is a native American and his father is from Poland. He was in the Warsaw Ghetto, he was a thief then. He is a real

small man and he was a very good thief. He took bread and could feed all sorts of people and on his arm there is the tattoo numbers. And anyone in the United States or anywhere in the world that is walking around with numbers on his arm, they were all in one place and that place was Auschwitz. And he doesn't talk much about Auschwitz. He will talk about his Warsaw Ghetto days, because it is a little bit light-hearted ; "then he stole this and then he kicked a soldier and then he ran" he was a young boy. Less than sixteen, seventeen somewhere around there, I mean probably he was. And he also made sure his children were exposed. They happen to be much more religious than my family or I, that is their choice.

IN : That was done in Auschitz, to tattoo numbers on all the prisoners?

CH : The Germans were very methodical. And they tattooed everyone with a number who came into Auschwitz. And they have complete records of who has, they have mounds and mounds of glasses, and mounds and mounds of hair, and there are pictures of all of these. They took the hair and made wigs and they took the hair and made pillows and they performed most of the scientific experiments, quote/unquote experiments on the people and I don't know if you are familiar with the story of a Nazi who was a doctor, who performed all sorts of vicious experiments "Let's see what happens if we take out half of this man's brain. Oh my gosh, he died!" Well, that is one experiment.

IN : I see.

CH : That isn't a particularly welcomed subject in Jewish circles, they don't want to hear about that. There is a memorial in Jerusalem called the Yad Vashem which is a memorial to the six-million Jews who were killed by the Nazis. There were six-million Jews killed, there were also six-million Gentiles killed and on top of that a million babies. So the Jews were half of what was killed, about. No other singular group was picked out, to be exterminated as the Jews were. Which is why it's a big deal and all the Russians, which may be half a million, or three-quarters of a million, it isn't such a big deal. And in the exhibits and displays of remnants of what the liberators saw when they first walked into the camps. It wasn't believed by the American people. When the stories came out and until the news reels came. And then they saw it. And a lot of the news reels exist and they are shown every week somewhere. In schools primarily with Jewish kids. And many of the people here in Indiana have a very limited knowledge about it.

IN : A conservative state...

CH : Right, well, it isn't just, Indiana is a bad example. There isn't, it's anyplace where there isn't a main Jewish population. New York you can't say and in Chicago, there are big concentrations of Jewish populations there, and the children there learn and its not that you are like dwelling on the past and it's not that we are paranoid Jews, it's that any political scientist will tell you something like the Holocaust could happen again. And it could happen in the United States. And history will show that it is going to be the Jews, in the recent times when there were problems in Poland, there were one-thousand Jews in Poland and they were blamed. We might be smart, but we can't screw up a whole country. So we are an easy target, a scapegoat, all of those catchy phrases.

IN : So you do believe that this is very capable of happening again?

CH : I wouldn't say very capable, I'd say it, all I said before it is possible. When the times are hard, and they are, they are getting better but I think they are hard. The Jews are a

scapegoat. And that isn't paranoia, that is fact.

IN : Throughout the years.

CH : And even, even here. And it's laughable, I bring up the situation in Poland again. That a thousand Jews, we don't control all the banks, we don't control all of the doctor positions, it is that it is very easy to put us together. We aren't as easily identifiable as the blacks, who are also persecuted in much of the same way.

IN : I wanted to ask you, the stereotype of the Jews are very distinct, but Hitler had a very distinct stereotype of the Aryan as well, being very tall, blond, blue-eyed. I personally know blue-eyed Jews, why do you think there is this stereotype?

CH : Well, it's possible.

IN : Of course, but there are Japanese Jews, there are Scandinavian Jews but I think it is a fallacy when one thinks that you can look at somebody and say "he's Jewish."

CH : O. K., it's, I was a biology major and *Mein Kampf* is genetically incorrect and...

IN : That is Hitler's book?

CH : That's Hitler's book, right. He didn't really write that, all he did was dictate it to a group, and then the group, when he was in prison, which wasn't really a prison, a country club prison. It's genetically incorrect and if you look real carefully Hitler wasn't an Aryan, he was an honorary Aryan.

IN : He could have been one-quarter Jewish also because of his grandmother's uncertainty of who his grandfather was and not knowing exactly if his grandfather on his father's side was Jewish or not.

CH : It wouldn't matter, because according to the Jewish religion the religion of the mother is the religion of the baby. And the reason for that is just that, you never know who the father is but you always know who the mother is.

IN : But don't you think that it still was in the back of his mind, and maybe that could be the hatred he had for the Jewish people?

CH : He didn't hate the Jewish people. He was an excellent politician. What he did I don't admire, how he did it has to be admired. He was an excellent speaker and I've heard, well I don't speak German but I can understand intonation and I can understand crowd reaction, and I have seen films of speeches he has given and the way he speaks, it's unbelievable. Any American politician would be proud. And the crowds reaction, millions of people, somewhat like Martin Luther King when you see the "*I've Got a Dream*" speech. That is what it is like, when he was speaking to the Germans. He was a good organizer, he was very, very efficient with what he did, he was an excellent politician and a ruler. I don't like what he did, but it doesn't take away from the way he did it. And in fact, if you take the bad things he did and made them good, he would be going down in history as a hero, he would be *Time's* "Man of the Year," also, he would be for good reasons, instead of for bad.

IN : Then why do you say he didn't hate Jews?

CH : He needed a scapegoat. As a politician he looked at it and said well, we got, you see, economic problems here in Germany and a a lot of it has to do with World War I and which is why when Paris, France surrendered they signed it in the same car that they signed the treaty of Versailles. The same railroad car. He needed, you see, he looked at his situation in his beloved nation and he saw economic problems. He created the Volkswagen, because

it was a nice kind of car. Volks— — folks car, Volkswagen. Because he wanted a car that they were going to have mass produced and all that. An excellent idea. The American dream is two cars in every driveway and a chicken in every pot, and all that. He wanted the same for his German people. He saw economic problems, he saw social problems, he looked for a cause and he probably couldn't find one, historically, stereotypically and sometimes truly and sometimes not so truly, actually the Jews were in control of the money. And the banks, and the systems there and we were always kind of weird and kind of funny, and we don't need to eat in the same place as the others... there must be something wrong with us. Well, we must be causing the problem. And yet he saw an isolated group that could be very well causing the social problems. He saw a group that was in control of the money, stereotypically and actually. Well, we must blame the Jews. And, hey looking back in history other people blamed them, too. I guess it is the thing for me to do.

IN : But even at an early age when he was an art student in Vienna he hated Jews, before he even got into the political arena?

CH : I know people here in Indiana that hate Jews, and I'm the first Jew that they have ever met. Learning, learning how to hate someone is real easy. That is why so many people hate blacks. And the blacks are easier to hate than we are. Because they are identifiable. And Casper Weinberger, he isn't Jewish but a lot of people think he is.

IN : Because of his name.

CH : Because of his name.

IN : And Paul Newman is [Jewish], but a lot of people don't think he is. And he has blue eyes.

CH : And so is Bernard Epton, who is running for mayor of Chicago, against a black. And the Irish people of Chicago one day woke up and realized that their choice for mayor was a black or a Jew, and they were in big trouble.

IN : Ron, do you have any closing comments that you would like to make?

CH : Closing comment?

IN : Regarding the concentration camps and your parents' experience and how it had affected your life, and how you feel?

CH : Well, how I feel is sensitive. And this I get from my father, I've seen my father cry more than I have seen my mother cry, and my mother cried three times. At the grave of her step-mother, and at one other time and at my bar-mitzvah. My father on the other hand, I've seen cry more often. And it's a sensitivity that I have, that as I say I didn't learn, I experienced it. It sounds a little philosophical and three-dimensional but that is the only way I can explain it. Because I can't explain it. I can't explain it to an American Jew who lives in the North Shore of Chicago, whose mother has three mink coats and all sorts of diamonds and the father makes this six figure income, the kid gets a car when he is sixteen, on his sixteenth birthday. Yeah, they're Jewish, and yeah, they probably fit the bill, their last name is Rosenstein or something like that and the father is a commodity broker, so he works with money and the mother sits at home because she is a Jewish-American Princess [JAP]. And for some reason the attitude possessed by many, generalizations are generally wrong so I won't generalize. The attitude that many of those snobbish, stuck-up Jews have really isn't quite right. I challenge any of them to go to the Yad Vashem. Or to go to places that I have been in Hungary and point to a plot of ground and say that's my grandfather's

grave— he died because he is Jewish. That, that type of a Jew is a stereotype and I probably shouldn't be making it. I dislike and I have a real hard time coping with it, because my dad doesn't make six figures, we drive a car that is a 1972 Dodge Dart, its got a big dent in it and doesn't always work, my mom doesn't have a mink coat, they are not better than us, we are also not better than them, we are different. I've seen both worlds. I haven't lived in that world, maybe one day I will. But I hope I never get the attitudes they have. I don't want to be a JAP, I don't want to marry a JAP. Because they don't know what it's like, they haven't been there, I have. They haven't felt it, I have. They are going to get persecuted, hypothetically, and not understand it. If I get persecuted, I'll know why. My grandmother sewed and cut out Mogan Davids, which have the six pointed stars, and sewed them on my father's coat. And it said *Jude* on it in Hungarian, it was *jude* as is *jude* is German for Jew and everyone knew it and no one really gives a damn that a Hungarian twelve year old boy is Jewish, especially when he swings your papers. But that North Shore Jew doesn't understand it. That North Shore Jew doesn't have the background I have, nor do they care. Generally, stereotypically. Also probably wrongly, but this is, this is personal experience and it is not necessarily fact; the fact that they don't have the background I do, I won't hold against them, the fact that they don't care, make no attempt to care, and their idea of bar-mitzvah is when you rent the Ritz-Carlton and have a big party and 450 people show up. My barmitzvah and my brother's, which is coming up in July, we went to Israel, to the Western Wall. It's different. We didn't have a bar-mitzvah party. I don't want one. To me a bar-mitzvah is a religious thing, a meaning that my mother cried. That exemplifies it. It isn't a party in that form. If there was some magical way I could make all Jews understand this, I would do it, I'd give my right arm to do it.

IN : Regarding the Holocaust, do you have a quick closing comment?

CH : It happened, and there is nothing we can do except remember it and remember those that died. They say people die, dreams don't. The dreams that those people had are still going on. The sensitivity that we have from what they died for because they were Jewish. We have, I have and I could understand the survivor who is bitter against God, because he allowed it to happen. I can also understand the survivor who says God saved my life. And that is why I don't want to be religious, I know both types. And I can understand it, and I'd like to think that I have an open mind about it. I'm going to say it again, because this will probably be the most important thing that I've learned, I wasn't taught it, I just learned it, is the sensitivity. It gives me another point of view and another perspective, and I cherish it.

IN : Well, thank you very much for the interview. I really appreciate your taking the time to come and talk to me. This is the end of the interview.

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