

>> Interviewer: Okay, please tell us your name and where and when you were born.

>> Rossinger: My name is Lewis Laszlo Rossinger. I was born August 31, 1928, in Hungary; Szakoly, Hungary.

>> Interviewer: Tell us a little bit about Szakoly, what life was like for you there.

>> Rossinger: Szakoly was sort of a remote area. It was quite a distance from a larger city, and it was more like country than anything else. We had Catholic and Protestant schools there; didn't have any other schools. The only religious school close by was approximately 5 miles from Szakoly, so I had to go to a Christian school, which is Protestant or Catholic. First grade, I believe, it was the Protestant school. Second grade, when the Second World War actually began, the anti-Semitism started growing, and I have had a rough time in the second grade.

>> Interviewer: Give us an example or two of the kind of experience you had with anti-Semitism.

>> Rossinger: In the -- the first experience I encountered?

>> Interviewer: Yeah, in second grade, what you remember.

>> Rossinger: Yes. The bullies -- they had sort of gang bullies, two or three big boys and the rest of them little bullies, who started calling me "Dirty Jew," and sooner or later, they had got to the point where they started beating me up, and my father pulled me out, and I went to a Catholic school. It had a reputation of a tough school, and the teacher was a tough teacher, and he didn't put up with that, and I finished up elementary school in a Catholic school.

>> Interviewer: In a Catholic school. Tell me about your father and mother. What did they do for a living?

>> Rossinger: Well, my father was a breeder, horse breeder and stock breeder. He knew all about horses, and by trade, he was a butcher. And he was in business with a very good friend of his who survived the Holocaust. Unfortunately, my father didn't. He died in Mauthausen two days before liberation.

>> Interviewer: Okay. And how about your mother?

>> Rossinger: My mother was a very beautiful woman. She was a county beauty. She was a designer, fashion designer, a tremendous gourmet, super pastry-maker. I remember the Dobos that she used to make, which is a Viennese-Hungarian pastry, and I long for it all the time.

>> Interviewer: Did you have brothers and sisters?

>> Rossinger: Yes. I had one brother, who was next to me. I was the oldest. His name was József [phonetic], who was very close to me. He was a year younger. I was always hoping that he survived, and I'm still looking for him, still haven't given up. The next sister after him was Éva [phonetic], who was -- the last time I knew of her being alive was ten years old. And the youngest one, whose name was Lili [phonetic], was a beautiful little girl, four years old.

>> Interviewer: You told us that you finished elementary school in a Catholic school.

>> Rossinger: Yes.

>> Interviewer: What happened -- do you remember the year that you finished? What was elementary school age? How many grades did you have?

>> Rossinger: I think it was 1940.

>> Interviewer: In 1940. what happened -- from the time the war started, how did you become aware of what was going on in Europe? Did it affect your life?

>> Rossinger: After the war started?

>> Interviewer: Right.

>> Rossinger: Well, I was in the capital. I was fortunate enough -- I don't know, maybe it was written that I was there. I went up alone on a train, and I was 13, just bar mitzvah. Went to Budapest to study.

>> Interviewer: This was -- so at 13, you left home.

>> Rossinger: Thirteen and a half, close to 14.

>> Interviewer: And at that point, had your family been affected by the events of the war?

>> Rossinger: Oh, absolutely.

>> Interviewer: Or by anti-Semitism in the place where you lived?

>> Rossinger: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell us something about how life changed at home as a result of the Nazis?

>> Rossinger: Oh, things have gotten very bad. They have taken away every religious possibility from the Jewish people. The Hungarian Nazis started coming into power. They were throwing rocks at people. If you went to a synagogue or a temple, you were attacked on the way and attacked on the way back out. They would break out the synagogues' windows, sometimes interrupting the services, that I remember. You couldn't keep kosher because they wouldn't let the proper method to proceed in the kosher laws, so therefore, they had to hide. And I remember my father and his friend used to go in the middle of the night with the rabbi to do the kosher processing.

>> Interviewer: Was your father's work, his way of making a living, was it affected during this time?

>> Rossinger: Absolutely. It didn't take long to be very poor because they choked off everything. They started confiscating things, and little by little, you got to the point where you were so poor that you didn't know where the food would be coming from. And that's why they decided that I am old enough to be on my own, so they sent me to Budapest, and I've never seen my people after that.

>> Interviewer: When you left home at 13.

>> Rossinger: Yes.

>> Interviewer: You left, and you never saw them again.

>> Rossinger: Yes.

>> Interviewer: I see. Tell us about your trip into Budapest and what happened to you.

>> Rossinger: I remember the train. They didn't have any seats available, so I had an old suitcase, and I sit in the middle of the aisle going all the way there and noticed in the train that there were some Hungarian Nazis, and unfortunate for this fellow with -- an Orthodox fellow who had the long hair on the side, they got ahold of him and pulled them out of the car, and I don't know what they did with him. And I guess they didn't know I was Jewish, so I just went right on and got to Budapest. And I lived with -- I had an aunt in Budapest, and I lived with her for a couple of months until her husband got killed -- and I don't remember what the reason was -- and she couldn't afford the place she was living, so I had to find a place for myself while going to school.

And that's when things started to be more intense prosecution of the Jewish people. But they didn't do anything on the open in Budapest, not on the open, not as much as it was in the smaller

towns which, as you know, were the first ones to be deported from. They didn't do anything in Budapest until 1944, the mass deportation and the herding of people on the main arteries, guided by Hungarian derelicts. I call them derelicts because they probably couldn't get a job. And they had some pretty sharp people after a while joining it. I don't know for what reason, but they joined on. I guess the disease was contagious, so they got to be numbers of people there. And it was the henchman of the Gestapo, and they were worse than the Gestapo, and you know how the Gestapo was.

>> Interviewer: Were you in contact with your family from the time you left home?

>> Rossinger: I had letters from my parents. Not many numerous letters, and all of a sudden, the letters stopped coming. And I really wasn't aware -- to answer your question -- the seriousness because I didn't read the paper. I was too young to read papers, and I was too busy. I worked, and I also went to school. And about two or three months after -- and this is, we're talking 1943 -- two months after I didn't have any letters, suddenly I got a card from -- the only word that I remember -- from my father. Am Waldsee, Germany -- it's either Bavaria or Germany. And I found out later that they made him write this letter to people who were in capitals or larger cities to cover up what was going on, that they were treating them royally. This is a mastermind of the Gestapo.

>> Interviewer: Did you have any word from him after that card?

>> Rossinger: No. That's it. That was the last word. I saved that card until -- for long period, and everything is gone.

>> Interviewer: Were you aware of the deportations? Did you have any idea where your parents might have gone?

>> Rossinger: No, no. It was so suppressed that they did not let the Hungarian media say anything about it. I don't remember anything, the rhetoric what's going on, and they blamed the Jews

for their downfalls, as you know, all the way down from Hitler to the smallest derelict, you know, who took up the disease of Nazism. And I call it a disease.

>> Interviewer: So in 1943, you found yourself alone.

>> Rossinger: Oh, absolutely. I didn't have any money, no clothes, no -- I didn't know where the food was coming from, and people felt sorry, you know. Occasionally, you know, they pitched in. And then I used to pick up little extra job, picking up bicycles, and they had a rental agency that rented bicycles and motorbikes to people who were on vacation on Lake Balaton, which is a resort area in Hungary. And I -- they came back, and they checked in their bikes, and if I picked it up, I made an extra forint, which was like a dollar. So, you know.

>> Interviewer: Where did you sleep, and how did you -- did you buy your food from these small jobs that you had?

>> Rossinger: Yes, whenever I had it.

>> Interviewer: Describe to us what a day was like for you in Budapest.

>> Rossinger: When this was going on, I had a friend who went to elementary school with me, and his father -- he was from the same town, and I went to elementary school. We were in the same grade. His father went to elementary school with my father, so we became friends because he knew -- he was a decent person. His father was a decent person, and he looked me up, and he wanted to know if he could help, which is a godsend to me. And he was an apprentice butcher, and he would steal a kidney or a piece of meat, and he would bring it to me, and both of us, we made a fire outside of somewhere, and we roasted the meat, and he brought some bread, and I ate, and he ate with me. Occasionally he would carry me somewhere, and he would cover for me. He got me things that I needed, some of the things that I needed to get by for a period of time; I would say two months. And then he made a mistake. He got me a room with someone, an old, old lady

who was an ardent Nazi, and he didn't know about this until he found out, and he told me, he says, "Get out of there. Leave everything there" -- whatever little I had -- "and get out of there." And I didn't even go back over there. And I started wandering on the street. I was a street kid. And occasionally I would get in touch with him. I'd sneak into him or let him know where I am, and he would, you know, help me sustain.

>> Interviewer: Did you ever live in his home?

>> Rossinger: He was living with someone too; I think his boss. I think, he was living with his boss, and his boss -- even -- I think he confiscated a couple of extra dollars for me, which I don't think was a sin, you know, from the check-out register. I think that's the only thing I could think of. He got it, and he told me about it. He says, "God won't strike me dead for this."

>> Interviewer: Where did you generally sleep after you left the apartment of this woman?

>> Rossinger: I got a room with someone after I left, and it was another lady, another old lady who was -- I don't remember exactly what she did, but it was a remote area, and nobody knew me, so I felt comfortable for a couple of weeks, or maybe a month, and my friend told me he'll take care of the -- whatever it cost to be there. And sooner or later, I found an agency that -- people who saw, who were more knowledgeable about what's going on, left the country, sometimes to Switzerland and other times possibly to go overseas. I don't know where they went, but they left a lot of money for this agency. It was a Hungarian Jewish help relief agency that got ahold of me, or I let somebody know that I needed help. And I got some clothing. They gave me some clothing, and they gave me sustenance, gave me help to get by, but they told me to be very careful. This agency was operating -- apparently they contributed to -- either the Gestapo wealthy inheritances or wealthy money, bank -- whatever, jewelry or whatever they gave them to try to appease them, try to save some lives. And this agency, probably if it wasn't for

them, I wouldn't be here now. But my running around the city became very dangerous, and I got caught. I was going to the railroad station, and they caught me at the railroad station.

>> Interviewer: Who caught you?

>> Rossinger: The Hungarian Gestapo. The Gestapo and the Hungarian Nazis.

>> Interviewer: And what happened to you after you were caught?

>> Rossinger: Well, you know, they have a concentration point, these people. They started bleeding the population, the Jewish population over there. And they took me -- it was outside of Budapest, and they took me to a point where it was a lot of other people. Had the same thing, they pulled off. They were trying to escape, and they -- somebody -- the reason I -- I told them I wasn't Jewish. I tried to get by, and somebody in the Hungarian Nazi Gestapo say, "Yes, you are. I know who you are." I don't know whether he did or not. Maybe he just decided it at random, you know, took a chance. He couldn't lose anything, you know, but he said he knew me. When they loaded people up and they were going to take people, at that time they were still loading them on trucks because after that, they started driving them like cattle. They were going to put us in a remote area where they pushed some railroad cars ready to deport me. In the confusion of getting off the -- they made a mistake. They were too close to other loading areas, and I escaped for the first time. I was very, very tough, and I was very frisky, and I just blended in with the people loading over there, and I made like I was one of them and started loading, helped them load, and I got away at that time.

>> Interviewer: Where did you run? Where did you go then?

>> Rossinger: Went back to my friend.

>> Interviewer: You went back to Budapest.

>> Rossinger: Yes. Went back to my friend, and he wasn't exactly reluctant. He was afraid because he knew what was going on. But he still helped. He still helped, and he had friends, and I stayed one place a couple of nights and I stayed another place a couple of nights. When things started getting bad, I moved on. Sometimes didn't even have a decent place to stay.

>> Interviewer: Lew, this friend seems very important to you. Tell us his name and whether you --

>> Rossinger: His name is Laszlo Kokrák, spelled K-O-K-R-Á-K, Kokrák. And I repaid him right at the Hungarian Revolution by bringing his sister, who escaped to Austria from Hungary during the revolution, 1956, against the Russians. He wrote me a letter and he told me that anything that I could do for his sister, he'd appreciate it, and I got the ball rolling with the Jaycees, and we sponsored them -- her -- to come to the United States. And we got her a job in Winston Salem, North Carolina, in one of the Hanes mills and kind of got her -- paid -- I felt good paying him back for what he did.

>> Interviewer: After your return to Budapest, how long did you spend?

>> Rossinger: The agency that -- the relief agency that helped me, this is occasional sustenance because I couldn't go there every day, and it was sort of an underground agency. But I think they paid off the Gestapo, the Hungarian, because, you know, they felt like then they could always kill us, you know, or kill them. They'll get the money, and then -- fortunately, I lot of people got saved by this agency. And incidentally, I think I saw Wallenberg. I think Wallenberg had to do with this agency. He had a track record of bringing a lot of money and being in touch with diplomats all over. And perhaps from out of the continent, or perhaps from his country and the Hungarian people who had the money to give to save people, I think he saved some children by marking a complete train of Red Cross young kids. They were younger than I was. I was around 14. Unfortunate for him, he

didn't survive. The Russians, you know, got him, but I think I saw him, and I feel good. I know that he did and perhaps, maybe, saved my life.

>> Interviewer: How did he affect your life?

>> Rossinger: wallenberg? When I saw that story -- I see it over and over again whenever it's shown. He's a beautiful person. He's an angel, I think, angel in disguise versus demons in disguise of a human body.

>> Interviewer: Did you use some of the facilities that he set up in Budapest? Is that how --

>> Rossinger: Yes. I was suggested that they have made an agreement with the Gestapo that they will send laborers to every one of their offices and headquarters to do whatever they ask you to do. And I decided that that was the thing. For some reason, I felt like it was a safe thing to do, being right along with them and not being hunted down like an animal. And they assigned me to Hotel Royal to the kitchen to wash dishes and peel potatoes, you know, the usual KP work, you know, cleanup work. And then after they saw that I was a young boy and I couldn't hurt them, they trusted me a little bit, so they put me on a truck that -- with another old fellow who was older than I was to load truck to get sustenance for themselves, you know, from the market, like vegetables and beef. And we loaded the truck and unloaded it at the basement at the kitchen. But I could never go anywhere other than the kitchen or the basement.

>> Interviewer: How long did you work at the Hotel Royal?

>> Rossinger: Until it got tough for the Germans. The Russians were approaching. The Russians started circling Budapest, and the Gestapo, overnight, pulled up, but they left a unit across the Danube that -- it was sort of a representation, a few Gestapo members and not many guards, maybe two or three guards. It was a satellite hotel to the Hotel Royal, which was a very famous hotel. Eichmann, incidentally, was headquartered in the

hotel. And I am not saying that I saw him a hundred percent, but I think I saw Eichmann. I didn't know who he was. He had a entourage of spic-and-shine officers around him, constantly surrounding him. And he came down to the kitchen one time, and there were approximately 20 officers, high-ranking officers with him, and they kept us at bay. They got us out of the kitchen when he came down. He was inspecting.

>> Interviewer: What were the conditions in Budapest at this point for the non-Jewish citizens in the city?

>> Rossinger: It was normal for non-Jewish citizens. They felt the pinch because of rationing and everything, but it seemed like, to me, that everything was normal. They could go on a weekend. They could go swimming. They could do anything that they did before.

>> Interviewer: Were you aware that Jewish people were being moved from the city in large numbers?

>> Rossinger: Of course, I was aware after, you know, started running because I think I had to be ahead of them all the time. And I didn't have a radio. I didn't read any newspaper. I wouldn't dare to buy a newspaper because a lot of Jewish people got caught buying newspaper. They suddenly realized that they could pick out several, and the Hungarian Nazis were very bad, very disgustingly bad, doing the dirty work for the -- and by now you know that I don't have anything good feelings for some of these people.

>> Interviewer: At this point, did you understand what was happening to the people who were taken away from their homes from Budapest?

>> Rossinger: Not really. Not really. However, one German officer who was pretty drunk, or -- I would say he was too drunk to drive, but he was driving the truck anyway because they were sweating the Russians approaching. And I saw the emergency food that went from the kitchen to the defenders of Budapest. And I

knew -- we heard bombing and we heard the artillery explosions, and we knew they were getting close. And all of a sudden, he says, "You don't worry. You're not going to make this alive." And when he said that -- and he says -- and then he was telling another -- overheard -- you know, of course, I understand German. And that's one of the reasons I'm alive too. He says, "I wonder where they're going to take them. They'll probably go to Auschwitz, straight."

>> Interviewer: Did you stay in this job until the end of the war, or did you have to leave?

>> Rossinger: No. Well, you know, they encircled Budapest, and it was getting wintertime. It was late fall, and they started pulling up stakes, and we knew it was getting close. Didn't know how close, but we knew, and we had hopes, and all of a sudden, I generated a lot of energy in thought, in body, to go without food and don't worry about food. Just survive -- and thinking of revenge. This -- there were five of us in the satellite place where the Gestapo left a few people; a skeleton crew, so to speak. Communications crew; I think that's what it was. I think they got caught and they became prisoners of war or the Russians shot them. They didn't take too many SS prisoners.

We were aware of it, very much so, and at this place, they had Jewish women, cooking. Apparently the agency sent them over there like they sent me to this other hotel, and including the women, there was a pregnant lady, and I felt really sorry for her because she was really bad shape. She wasn't able to stand too much. And the other ladies were mid-age, and about two or three days after we were there, all of a sudden, they got orders to pull up stakes. And one of the SS came down and says, "Okay, we need two men to load the truck, and we want volunteers. We're going to leave the rest of you here, but we need two men." And nobody answered. There were four or five of us there. All of a sudden, this friend of mine who was 19, and I was, you know, getting close to 15, say, "we'll go." We knew -- we looked at

the ladies, and we knew that we were going to save them, and we didn't know our fate. Apparently, you know, they had plans for us, but we loaded their trucks.

On the way out from Budapest, they robbed -- threw grenades in front of the stores, opened up the doors. We loaded up some cordials and liquor and whatever they decided to -- what store they decided to go to. And that convoy -- they got into a convoy going out from Budapest. And the convoy was cut in two. I mean, it was stopped. They run into a horseshoe trap, and we were in a convoy. We were in the back. It was snowing and it was cold. It was getting wintertime. And I believe one of the reasons we could keep warm is because my friend opened up one of the cordial bottles, and we were drinking some of the cordials, but we were afraid to get drunk -- we didn't want to get drunk, although I think it would have been good to numb your feelings -- because we knew there was something going on. And all of a sudden, there was some holes in the canvas of the truck, and my buddy says, "You see those holes? They weren't there before." And all of a sudden we heard a machine gun, and then a few seconds later, hand grenade, and as the convoy went in -- I think the convoy was about a mile, 2 miles long pulling out, and they were late because the Russians got them. They went into a horseshoe trap, and the Russians closed the trap and they opened up with everything that they had. And that was hell. So I can say I was in hell.

And my buddy says to me when it started, bullets flying all over, he says, "This is it." He says, "This is the way we jump." We jumped -- we were on an embankment. They built a highway from Vienna to Budapest, and it was sort of like an expressway but it wasn't an expressway like we know. And we jumped, and it was approximately 15, 20 feet down, and we rolled down into water. And apparently, the fire was coming from the other side of the embankment, so for a while, we were safe. Ice was broken, and I was pinned down. We wouldn't move, you know. I was pinned down, and my feet were in water, in freezing water. And it started

snowing, and when the fire quit, we didn't hear too many shots, and my buddy says, "I hear a cow up the road, mooing." He says, "We can go into the barn, and at least we'll be warm." And every time we moved, he said, "Let's go." And we were creeping; not crawling, but creeping. If you raised up -- apparently, I don't know whether they saw us or they thought we were Germans. And it was approximately, I would say, a thousand yards or more to a ditch, sort of a -- two rows of trees divided one property from the other, and it was another cover that we -- we were creeping all this way up to the farmhouse or the barn.

And make a long story short, we got in one house that the roof was blown off, and at least the wind wasn't so bad. And then my buddy says, "well, let's go into the barn." And little did we know -- we went into the barn, and there were about a dozen SS soldiers in the barn, taking cover. The barn was in the ground. The hole was dug into the ground. It's a winter barn, and they put straw on the top, so it was warm because the cows warmed it up. And we went in there, and all of a sudden -- and we just couldn't believe it. And it was SS people. And I says, "Oh, my God," in Hungarian. And he says, "Don't say anything. Just don't say anything." On the way up there, I was so cold -- because my feet were in water -- that I pulled off a dead soldier's boots. The boots were about twice as big or three times as big as my foot, but I tore out some lining from the German soldier's coat and wrapped it around my foot and put the boots on. I pulled his pants down, too, because my pants were wet, and it was an interesting situation because that branded me to be a German soldier when the Russians came up.

Russians finally came up to the barn, and they were going to throw grenades because they knew that there were some soldiers hiding there. And this soldier, I didn't understand him, but my friend understood Slavic language. And he says, "He's going to throw a hand grenade. Let's get out of here before -- we don't have anything to hide." And we didn't know whether the SS is going to shoot us while we go out, and we didn't know whether

they're going to shoot us. He says, "well, we can't take too many chances," so we just decided to come out. We come out, and there was a big partisan, Russian soldier. He had a [indistinct] on his right-hand side, hand grenades hanging from his -- and he was half drunk. He said, "Oh," he says, "*Germanski*." It means "German," and he was cussing me and everything. I says, "No, no," and my buddy says, "*Ja evrej*," in the Russian language. "I am a Jew." And he says, "Oh, I don't believe it," and started scratching his head.

And while this was going on, there was a Jewish officer behind him, a tank commander. A big tank was right behind him. They come up as armored infantry probably. And he cocked his submachine gun. He was going to kill us. He says, "I'll enjoy killing you. I love to kill Germans." And the Jewish officer pulled out his gun, and the pistol was about that big, and he put it to his head. He says, "You pull yours, and I'll pull mine," after he heard my friend saying in Russian that we are Jewish people, we are your friend. And the guy says, "Oh, well, I'll let you have your Jewish friends." And then we had to prove to the officer that we were who we were. He says to me, "Make a blessing in Hebrew for me. Prove to me you are a Jew." And I did. And then he says, "Now, make kiddush for me." He says, "I don't remember anymore. It's been so long." And we made the blessing to the wine, and he put his arm around us, and he pulled out his canteen, which had hot coffee in it. I think it had some rum in it. And he says, "Drink some more. Drink some more." And I drank a little bit. Of course, it felt good. My buddy drank, and he says, "I'm going to have you -- have the farmer women fix you some breakfast. It was the middle of night.

This whole thing went through from early dark in the evening, all night, so it's a night of horror. And that was one of my guardian angels. And he had them fix us some food, which you didn't have for a while. And he gave us a paper to identify us. He says, "If anyone stops you, tell them my name is so-and-so, and I liberated you and to order you passing on because I want

you to walk this way because the front line is moving back and forth." You know, western Hungary, that was -- it was a front line. We were right in the middle of the front. And he told me to walk south to cross because there's no bridges left to cross, and there's a war going on inside the capital. He says, "You want to go around the capital." And we walked 50 miles down and then continued on. But while we walked, about 10 miles down the road, we couldn't walk anymore. We went at the house, and the lady was afraid to let us in. She says, "If they find out that you are" -- she didn't know -- we didn't tell her we were Jewish people. She says, "They will hurt us." She gave us some soup, hot soup, and I passed out on the bed. She had me set -- she says, "You look terrible." Because we were walking in snow, you know, 10 miles, and she gave us some soup and it kind of revived me, but I passed out. I just went to sleep because I didn't sleep at that time for, I think, one or two or three nights. And we went on, and we got into a point where they caught stragglers from the Hungarian army and the German army and the SS, of course. And this is the Russians, and they didn't care who we was. I showed them my paper. He says, "I don't believe it," and threw it away. And we were there -- they kept us for two days on bread and water.

>> Interviewer: Where did they take you?

>> Rossinger: well, it was a concentration point where they were going to get us as prisoners of war. They didn't take me anywhere, but it was a trap for people walking -- it was a main artery -- people avoiding, going around from Budapest, you know. We knew now that the other people -- some of them were soldiers, some of them were Germans, and they were sorted out.

Fortunately, I heard a lady making a remark in Yiddish. And I told her -- and I could communicate with her, and she was a Russian -- she was a -- I don't know if she was an officer or not, but she was a clerk, and I said to her, I told her, I says, "I don't know what they're doing over here, but I am not -- I found out these people are soldiers, and I am not a soldier."

She says, "Who are you?" And I told her who I was. And she told the colonel, and he asked her how old I was. He didn't care either. He asked her how old I was, and because I was under 15, they let me go. Not because they should have, but because I was too young.

>> Interviewer: Where did you go from there?

>> Rossinger: This is a story by itself. I began a long trip on foot, which would have been 200 kilometers, approximately 300 miles, to my home where I was born. And the line going backwards and forwards, the Germans caught up with me again. They caught us, and we couldn't give them any identification or anything, and they saw -- they found -- unfortunately I forgot the piece of paper. They found the piece of paper on me that told the story, and to make a long story short, they were speeding everything and everybody up to Austria. They couldn't get back to Germany because the Russians were really getting like flies all over over there. And in a few days -- these are the late-comers -- they took me to Mauthausen -- I didn't know, but my father was killed there -- which is near Linz, across from Steyr, a big defense plant, and these were laborer camps who were strong enough to work in defense plants, young men. And it was chaos over there when I got in. And I was very sharp, and one possibility and I was gone. And I got my chance to get away. I was there for a short three months.

>> Interviewer: Describe Mauthausen to us.

>> Rossinger: You know, I didn't see too much of Mauthausen. After we got there, there were a lot of dead people, and we knew what was going on. And the people told us that the guards are ready to move, and all the young people are requested to try to see if we can take over the camp -- I got there at that time -- take over the camp. And they got three of us. The guards were getting very thin. It wasn't like it used to be, and these people -- we were on a detail work -- I don't remember -- cleaning up and carrying dead people, you know, and a guard was

watching us, and he was eating bacon, raw bacon with bread, I guess because he didn't have anything else to eat. And he had a long knife. And he had a pistol on, but he had his rifle down, and he apparently got too lax, and he was -- they all were drinking. And we have decided -- and we had a signal. We had decided that we were going to try to get him and make a break for it, and the other people were ready to make a break. This was in a side area of Mauthausen where there was a gate, and the reason the gate was open is because they were pulling out. And one of the boys somehow got behind this guard and killed him. But before he killed him, he managed to work my thumb with a knife. I didn't have any -- I still don't have much feeling in it. But he killed him, and we got out. Got back again, and I got on a trek, and I was liberated this time by the 42nd Armored Division, American 42nd Armored Division coming up through Austria, and started another trek back. And I met a very interesting major who guided me. I was sort of a mascot, and he says, "I know that you want to find your family, so," he says, "I'm going to get you well enough to" -- because we started getting pretty weak.

>> Interviewer: Did you meet these soldiers on the road as you were leaving --

>> Rossinger: Yes. Yes. They liberated the camp, 42nd Armored Division. The major and I -- you know, I know his name. I can't think of the name to save my life. I was his mascot, and he hang around with me until he knew I was all right. They cleaned out a *Hitlerjugend* camp near Braunau, near where Hitler was born. I think it's a resort area, Kammer Schörfling, a very beautiful lake there. And then they put us there to rest and get well. And they had an American hospital there right next to us, so they kind of got us where we were strong enough, you know, to be on our own. And I hitchhiked back sort of to the Hungarian border. We didn't know what was going on, but we got back to Hungary, and it took me four weeks to get back to Szakoly, the Hungarian town that I was born in.

>> Interviewer: What did you find when you got there?

>> Rossinger: Nothing. Nobody. If you can imagine "Gone with the Wind," everything -- what the Germans didn't take, the Russians got, and the town under -- sort of like under siege. I went to the place where we were living, and the neighbor, of course, you know, they came, and they say they were glad to see me, and all of a sudden I see my mother's belongings worn by some of the people. I went next door. The sewing machine and things that we owned, it was in their house. And it was a disgusting, nauseating situation. And these people who were neighbors of ours, and understanding that they want to be considered friends, they let me stay there for a few days until I was ready, and they were telling me that I got to be careful how I walk or where I walk because there are still Hungarian Nazis who were leaders doing the Gestapo dirty work. And they kind of scared me, and I didn't have any reason to stay there because I didn't see anybody that I knew alive.

>> Interviewer: Do you know how many Jewish people lived in this town?

>> Rossinger: In this town, approximately 50. Approximately 50. Later on I find out that a few came back, not more than five. A few came back because I got in touch with someone who knew about the situation.

>> Interviewer: Were you able to find out what happened to your mother and your sisters and brothers?

>> Rossinger: Oh, I've been searching for them, you know, and still, I am, and I haven't been able -- the only thing I know, that her group went to Auschwitz, and with the two young girls, she wouldn't separate. She went to Auschwitz, and immediately she wouldn't separate from the girls, immediately they sent her to the gas chambers. My father was in the same camp that I was in, and I didn't know about it. And this business partner of his was with him, and those few days that I was there, I got word

that he wants to see me. He's got information about my father. I went to see him, and he wasn't there. And his nephew gave me the message, and the nephew didn't want to tell me. He told him not to say anything, just bring him here. I understand that he killed a man who abused his family.

>> Interviewer: This is your father's friend.

>> Rossinger: That's my father's friend. When he came -- he survived. And because of it, he was in the jail. And I went to jail to talk to him, and he didn't want to see me. He told his nephew, he says, "I don't want to break down because I know how much his daddy was thinking of him," hoping that I would get to the United States to my uncle over here if I survived. And he was hoping, and he was strongly feeling that I'll make it from the family. And he told me -- I asked his nephew to go back and ask him how he died, and he told me that he was hit in the head with a rifle butt two days before liberation, so approximately the time that I was there, or maybe a little later.

>> Interviewer: What did you do after you returned home and found everything gone? What did you do then?

>> Interviewer: I came back -- the next town -- I had a cousin that survived in the next town, Balkány, which is approximately 5 miles from there, and I stayed with him because he had a huge place. His grandfather and his mother and father lived there, and nobody came back, so he had a huge place. So I found out that he was alive, and I went to him, and he was glad to see me, and I stayed with him for several weeks until I decided to come back to Budapest. And from Budapest, I went back to Austria and crossed to the American side, you know, where I was liberated. I still had the paper that American officer gave me, and I told them I was liberated here and I have business to come over, and they let me across, and I didn't have any problem. And I was in the DP camp in Austria for over a year until -- I had written a letter to my uncle. I remembered his address in West Virginia. I memorized his address because I took a picture, a mental picture

of the envelopes that he used to send us preaddressed. It was stamped. And I wrote him a letter, told him that I was alive and I was the only one from the family. And he loved my mother because she was his pet before they came over here. And he started the ball rolling. He found out a friend of his son was stationed nearby and sent some money with him to me, and he looked me up, American soldier, he looked me up and told me that my uncle is trying to do everything that he can to help me. And a few weeks later, I think my uncle got in touch with the embassy staff in Vienna. It was military attaché sort of embassy, and in turn, they sent me messages, a message first that my uncle is in touch with them, to stand by, and I will be going back to the United States on a troop carrier. Three days later, I was on a truck to Munich, and they processed me in Munich, and sailed from Bremerhaven July the 15th, 1946, to a different world.

>> Interviewer: Can you take a few minutes now to tell us how you have gone on with your life? You were a young child during all of this, and you were alone, and now you found yourself in a new place. Tell us how you carried on with your life.

>> Rossinger: You know, when you go through -- Mother Nature gave me something, and I think God gave me several guardian angels all the way through this because I've been through all sorts of things. There's no way anybody could survive it. And people don't believe it, and I don't talk about it. There's no sense to talk about it unless you have an intelligent person to absorb what you are saying. It was a bitter beginning because I didn't trust anybody. I still don't trust a lot of people. I was living with my uncle who sent me to -- not speaking English much, you know, but words, a few words -- sent me to school to polish up my language, which was nice of him, and I went to Berea College, Berea, Kentucky, and the school was a self-sufficient school. You could not -- you didn't have to have money to go to school there. You could work your way through, so the first year, all they did is taught me English, built up my

vocabulary. They put me in the eighth grade and the ninth grade, and finally, about a year and a half after I was there, I took the GED test and I passed into the college. But all this time, still on my own because I found out that my uncle's family wasn't exactly crazy about me. They were afraid that I was going to take something away from them, so I told them that I want to be alone. And this school helped me be alone because you didn't have to -- you had your lodging, food, and books taken care of because you worked. You can be a whole-day student. You can be a half-day student. And people who had a little extra money, they were half-day students, and I was a whole-day -- I mean, a whole day student, and I was a half-day student. I worked half day and go to school half day.

>> Interviewer: And so that's how you started.

>> Rossinger: It makes a tough person out of you. Unfortunately, the bitter -- I have -- I can't forget or can't forgive them, never. And I had a very interesting psychology teacher who helped me a lot, and I used to think in Hungarian and translate it in my mind into English, and I was stuck for words sometimes, and she asked me if I was thinking in my native tongue, and I said yes. And she says, "Try to build up your vocabulary and think in English." And I did, and, thank God, I did pretty good."

>> Interviewer: Are there any other comments that you'd like to make before we end to leave to people in the future?

>> Rossinger: Unfortunately, it is a constant fight. I found people all the way from Europe to the United States who has to hate. Anti-Semitism is a disease. It's a mental disease. And I have encountered people that didn't know I was Jewish, and they were telling me that they don't believe the Holocaust happened. And I says, just a short reply, "well, friend, I think you better change your mind because you are meeting one right now. You're talking to one." They don't know what to say, and they laugh, sort of a "I don't believe you," and walk away from you.

But I think it should be taught. I think it should become history, and I don't think they should sweep it under the carpet like they do in Germany, like they do in Hungary, like they do in the small countries there now, and I'm afraid that the situation in Russia, I'm afraid for anti-Semitism reviving in all the countries, simply because they have to blame somebody. They have to have a scapegoat, and it's an easy thing to blame it on the Jews. But Israel -- I was going to Israel. I was in a kibbutz with several children -- I didn't tell you that -- while I was in Austria in the DP camp. And we were all going to Israel in '46. And when my uncle got into the picture, it was a different story. He told me, he says, "Get an education. Come over here, and then if you still want to go to Israel, you should." I didn't, but my son is there. I didn't go there. He's a dual citizen. I have a son, Michael, the oldest son, who is a very happy Israeli citizen. He is now serving with the UN, the United Nations people, and Israeli military as a liaison officer. He's fluent in Hebrew and fluent in English. And other time, when he's not in service, which he pulled already, he is working for Lloyd's of London, one of the greatest insurance companies in the world. He's a computer analyst.

>> Interviewer: That's wonderful. One last question I'd like to ask, and that is, how did you come to South Carolina?

01:03:14