



UKHMF TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPT – GABOR LACKO

[Testimony: 1hr 39". Artefacts: 11' 59"]

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10:00:00:00

Gabor Lacko

My name is Gabor Lacko. I was born on the 10th July in 1931 in Baja, Hungary and in 1944, 45 I was in the ghetto in Debrecen, in the brick factory, and I was taken to Strasshof in Austria, Sitzenberg-Reidling and Vienna where I worked in anti-aircraft gun factory called Ostmark Werke.

[fade to black and back up]

10:00:44:07

Interviewer

[...] Um, so, thank you very much for agreeing to be part of this project. Um, and the first question is really why you decided to be part of the project, and, and whether it was difficult to, um, make that decision?

10:01:00:13

Gabor Lacko

Well, until about two or three years ago, I never talked about what happened. And then, I thought, people should know about it, and I became very open about the whole topic. And whenever I'm being asked, I talk about it. I wrote it down, and I think, the more of us talk about it, the better it is. What happened in '44, it should be known, and should be preserved.

10:01:32:16

Interviewer

But for the majority of your life, you kept your silence.

10:01:35:06

Gabor Lacko

Very much so.

10:01:36:07

Interviewer

That must've been very hard.

10:01:38:02

Gabor Lacko

No. I didn't think about it.

10:01:39:19

Interviewer

At all?

10:01:40:08

Gabor Lacko

No.

10:01:40:24

Interviewer

It was just your way of coping?

10:01:42:09

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:01:43:15

Interviewer

You just blocked it. So, what was the deciding factor to make you talk again?

10:01:49:01

Gabor Lacko

I became older and older, and older, and I didn't want to take it with me.

10:01:57:15

Interviewer

Was there anything specific that occurred that, that you, that, that happened that made you think, actually, now is the time I do want to talk? Or is just the passing of time?

10:02:09:10

Gabor Lacko

No, some of my friends who've been through it died.

10:02:14:17

Interviewer

And that prompted you?

10:02:16:18

Gabor Lacko

Yes. That they cannot tell their story.

10:02:23:11

Interviewer

And it's your responsibility?

10:02:24:19

Gabor Lacko

I think so.

10:02:26:16

Interviewer

Do you find it very hard?

10:02:27:18

Gabor Lacko

No. Not my favourite topic, but, it has to be told.

10:02:37:24

Interviewer

Thank you, because that's why we're here. Um, we all believe that. How much of your story does your family know?

10:02:49:13

Gabor Lacko

Well, I spent every minute of my story with my family when I lived it.

10:02:55:03

Interviewer

But the, moving on, through the rest of your life.

10:03:01:17

Gabor Lacko

What happened later? Well, [*talking over each other*] we were very close family, we shared everything all the time. I had no secrets about my f, life in front of my family. We shared everything. I'm very close to my niece, who is probably the only relative I've got.

10:03:25:20

Interviewer

And you've always spoken openly to her?

10:03:27:13

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:03:31:14

Interviewer

Why do you think it's important? You've, you've given me an answer already, but I'm going to ask you again. Why do you think it's important to record the testimony of survivors?

10:03:40:23

Gabor Lacko

Well, I hope that somebody will see it, and somebody will learn from it. What happened just last weekend, that proves that it it's a story to tell.

10:03:59:00

Interviewer

So, let's talk about last weekend. Has that upset you? Do you feel,

10:04:02:18

Gabor Lacko

Yes, of course it upset me.

10:04:04:11

Interviewer

Tell me why.

10:04:05:09

Gabor Lacko

Because, I've been through it, and I don't like to be spat on it, and I don't like to be beaten up, and I don't like they have graffiti about my race or religion, or anything.

10:04:15:20

Interviewer

So, do you feel that the fact that we have voted to leave the EU is a danger sign?

10:04:23:24

Gabor Lacko

Not necessarily it's a danger sign, but it turns out to be like that. Just because, you join an organisation that is specifically anti-something, you don't have to be anti-Muslim, antisemitic, anti-Polish, anti-anything. We are all human beings.

10:04:42:21

Interviewer

But what, specifically, about the result did you highlight that's upset you?

10:04:47:10

Gabor Lacko

Well, I don't see why, just because some people voted in, or out, a bunch of people should go round and swear at others and put awful graffiti on mosques and other buildings.

10:05:12:00

Interviewer

So, you feel that that has invited the racist behaviour?

10:05:15:06

Gabor Lacko

It brought it out in the open. I don't know why people have ideas that it justifies it, but obviously, they do.

10:05:28:13

Interviewer

When you look back to the period of your life that was spectacularly disrupted by the Nazis, what do you feel towards them?

10:05:38:17

Gabor Lacko

The Nazis then, or the Germans now?

10:05:41:21

Interviewer

The Nazis then.

10:05:43:06

Gabor Lacko

I could strangle every one of them. They hated me, and I hate them.



10:05:51:16

Interviewer

With the passing of time, is there forgiveness?

10:05:59:05

Gabor Lacko

Yes, there was a time when I didn't buy anything German, or didn't go to Germany, or didn't do anything that has something to do with Germans. And, I distinctly remember, there was a train disaster in Germany, and 390 people died, and I was upset and sorry for them. And I thought, hell, they are Germans, and you are sorry for them! That's it.

10:06:33:04

Interviewer

So, you tell that story to show how you actually moved on from hating Nazis, to actually feeling sorry for modern day Germans, is that what you [*talking over each other*] mean?

10:06:41:24

Gabor Lacko

Yes. Modern day Germans are, I think, in Europe, the only people who accepted responsibility for what their so-called ancestors done in the 40s.

10:06:53:03

Interviewer

Has anybody in modern day Germany apologised to you?

10:06:58:01

Gabor Lacko

I've got German friends. In fact, I've got one German friend whose father was a Nazi.

10:07:04:19

Interviewer

But I'm, I guess, I mean, er, in more of an official capacity, did you ever receive a formal apology?

10:07:10:10

Gabor Lacko

Not really. I don't even expect it.

10:07:16:03

Interviewer

And you may not want to accept it, either.

10:07:18:13

Gabor Lacko

The present-day Germans have nothing to apologise for. And the ones who should, they are dead. And so they should be.



10:07:35:20

Interviewer

What about, um, the other countries? Germany, obviously, was the start, but there were many other countries that were involved, the Hungarians, the Ukrainians, how do you feel towards them?

10:07:48:16

Gabor Lacko

I can't stand them, even now. They have no regrets. They've got no, they don't mind what happened. They are antisemitic now, as they used to be, or as they were, and if you have a look at the political life in Hungary, now, it's not much different from what it was in the 30s, 40s.

10:08:17:06

Interviewer

So, you feel that, culturally, Germany has moved on, but the other countries around them have not?

10:08:24:00

Gabor Lacko

Yes. Exactly.

10:08:26:12

Interviewer

What evidence do you have of that? You don't need it, by the way, I'm not testing you. I, I'm just interested to why you feel like that?

10:08:33:18

Gabor Lacko

Well, the way Germans relate to people is quite different from the way Hungarians and Poles relate to people. Er, the Hungarians are probably the most extreme, right-wing set-up in the whole of the European Union. The Germans are a different bunch of people now, from what used to be.

10:09:09:19

Interviewer

Do you visit that part of the world? Do you have reason to go back? Do you want to go back?

10:09:15:22

Gabor Lacko

To Hungary, or to Germany?

10:09:16:21

Interviewer

Any of that, er, the, any of those countries.

10:09:19:05

Gabor Lacko



I've been to Germany as a tourist in the last ten years, and before, several times. I went to the opera. And I felt like, in a civilised, western European country. Er, er, Hungarians are different. They still beat up, sometimes even murder gypsies because they are inferior, and I remember the days when somewhere you were not allowed in, "No dogs, no Gypsies, no Jews".

10:10:04:11

Interviewer

So, to ask you that question again about forgiveness, do you feel that forgiveness is possible?

10:10:15:13

Gabor Lacko

No. No. If I would meet somebody who was there when it all happened, I wouldn't forgive him. I don't forget, and I don't forgive. But I don't believe in, for three generations or more. The sons are nothing to do with the sins of the father.

10:10:40:21

Interviewer

How much of your life has been affected by what happened to you when you were young?

10:10:47:14

Gabor Lacko

Every minute of it.

10:10:52:13

Interviewer

Tell me why?

10:10:53:11

Gabor Lacko

I'm a different person. You never know what will happen, as a central European Jew, I'm a born pessimist. Nothing wrong with that. Precaution is better than cure.

10:11:16:23

Interviewer

So, you have lived your whole life set by what happened to you when you were [talking over each other] younger.

10:11:23:18

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:11:25:11

Interviewer

How, how often do you think of your experiences?

10:11:28:20

Gabor Lacko

Every day.

10:11:33:11

Interviewer

What makes you think of them?

10:11:35:17

Gabor Lacko

I don't need a prompt. I've got some friends, [*clears throat*] when we get together, we start talking about the weather, or an opera, or a Mozart concert, and we always finish up talking about the camp.

10:12:07:20

Gabor Lacko

You don't have any need for a specific prompt, you just remember.

10:12:27:19

Interviewer

And, giving your testimony today helps to remember those who can't be here to speak?

10:12:36:01

Gabor Lacko

Yes. It does, but I remember them in any case.

10:12:42:03

Interviewer

I'm thinking more for future generations, that there are millions of voices that can't tell the story of what happened.

10:12:48:13

Gabor Lacko

That's right.

10:12:49:21

Interviewer

And your voice is very important in that testimony project - as hard as it is.

10:12:58:17

Gabor Lacko

Yeah. 600,000 Jews died from Hungary. I was lucky not to be one of them.

10:13:13:03

Interviewer

And what do you put your survival down to?

10:13:16:17

Gabor Lacko

Um, my mother. Because, quite interestingly, we were taken to the brick factory, and from the brick, er, factory, four trains left. And when we arrived in the brick factory, we were put into the loft, because that's where all transport was placed. And, I'll never forget that night. It was hot, humid, crowded. You couldn't sit down, never mind lying down. You just perched yourself on your rucksack and waited for the morning.

10:14:06:08

And, in the morning, we went down from the loft to the dryers, which had no sides, because they were for the bricks to dry. And there were people there, and my mother asked one of them, "How did you get here?" He said, "Well, we were placed here." And mother said, "We shall move down here," and we did. And the loft went to Auschwitz, and we went to Strasshof.

10:14:35:20

Interviewer

It's the cruelty, isn't it, of such small decisions that meant life or death for so many people?

10:14:43:01

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:14:44:16

Interviewer

And your mother was instrumental in your survival, and your relationship with her was obviously very special.

10:14:52:03

Interviewer

Yes. Always.

10:14:58:10

Interviewer

We'll go through that story again a little bit later, if that's okay, Gabor? Um, just a couple of, of, of other general questions before we move on. Um, what do you think, if anything, we have learnt from the past?

10:15:13:02

Interviewer

Who? You? Me, or the others?

10:15:15:11

Interviewer

Everybody.

10:15:16:12

Gabor Lacko

Everybody? [*talking over each other*] Well,

10:15:17:11

Interviewer

I think you and me have probably learnt lessons. But what about others?

10:15:20:20

Gabor Lacko

Some of them didn't. Absolutely not. I find it very interesting that after the war, Hungary became a socialist, or a communist country; call it what you like. And on paper, antisemitism was, was not allowed, because religion didn't exist and there was no discrimination. And then came the end of the socialism regime, and Hungary became democratic, and the churches which were deserted for 40 years filled up. And the same people who suddenly started to go to church again, suddenly came out with their antisemitic feelings. Now, that generation must have, it's either in the genes - which I don't believe - or they got it from mummy and daddy that, "those bloody Jews are doing this to us". Does that make sense?

10:16:24:20

Interviewer

It does. And before, before we move on, um, we have a chance through the technology that we use, to speak to generations to come. And, er, I would like, now, to ask you whether or not you have a life lesson, something that we can learn from your experiences that is worth passing down to the generations, a lesson?

10:16:50:06

Gabor Lacko

Just be, treat people like people. Everybody can be a friend of yours, unless you push him away. [*Becomes emotional*]

10:17:12:08

Interviewer

I understand how hard this is to talk. It's, um, a very difficult experience, isn't it, to relive everything? But it's so important that we hear from you. So, thank you.

10:17:26:13

Gabor Lacko

Okay.

10:17:27:06

Interviewer

And just so that you know, 'cause we didn't talk about it before, that almost everybody who sits where you sit cries, and I cry too. So, um, please don't worry about that. Let's start from the beginning. You were born 10th July 10th July, you were born?

10:17:50:17

Gabor Lacko

10th July [*talking over each other*] 1931.

10:17:51:18

Interviewer

[*Talking over each other*] In 1931. So your birthday's coming up?

10:17:54:19

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:17:55:10

Interviewer

[*Laughs*]

10:17:56:03

Gabor Lacko

A week on Sunday.

10:17:57:08

Interviewer

A week on Sunday! May I ask how old you'll be? My sums aren't quick enough.

10:18:02:07

Gabor Lacko

[*Talking over each other*] 85.

10:18:03:15

Interviewer

[*Talking over each other*] 85. Well done! Amazing! Um, you were born near the Serbian border, weren't you, on the Danube, in Hungary? Can you tell me about your family? Did you have brothers and sisters? Tell me about your dad, your mother, [*Talking over each other*].

10:18:17:21

Gabor Lacko

[*Talking over each other*] I had one sister, four years older than I am, and we lived in a small town, about 40,000 people.

10:18:30:16

My father had a very nice job. He was working with one of the Hungarian banks. And then came the 1930 recession, as a result of which, some people lost their job in the following three or four years. My father was one of them. And when it came to sacking people, if you were Jewish, you already have to be sacked. So, he lost his job, and we moved to, what I consider my hometown, Debrecen.

10:19:11:15

My mother was born there, and her three brothers went to school there and excelled there. They were all fantastic people. And I went to school there, that's where I started my school in the local Jewish elementary school, age 6, 1937.

10:19:44:04

Interviewer

Were you a very close family?

10:19:46:00

Gabor Lacko

Very close. Very close indeed. We sat down for breakfast. We sat down for lunch. We sat down for dinner.

10:19:55:16

Interviewer

And you, you didn't have just the four of you, did you? You had your wider family around, as well. You lived nearby your mother's brother, [*talking over each other*] elder brother.

10:20:03:06

Gabor Lacko

Brother. Yes.

10:20:06:02

Interviewer

Yeah. So, you were a, a big family?

10:20:08:21

Gabor Lacko

Well, before the war, yes. In 1936, my mother's brother, one of them, died. It had nothing to do with politics, or anything. He just had a sudden stroke. And in the traditional Hungarian, or Hungarian Jewish manner, my mother mourned him for one year, wearing black, and didn't go to the cinema, and, you know, it was a different approach to life, different approach to death. And she never got over that. And two brothers left, and well,

10:20:56:20

one of them in 1944, when we were in his house - because his house became part of the ghetto and he was a member of the Jewish Council - he came home with a loaf of bread and gave it to my mother, "That's for the children," [*Becomes emotional*] and hanged himself.

10:21:32:18

The next day, we went to the brick factory, and I was worried on the way to the brick factory in a horse drawn cart, with my sister, because mother went to the funeral of her brother. And I was worried that, "Is she going to find us?" But she did, and we got together again.

10:22:05:01

Same time, my father was in Arbeitsdienst, or Munkaszolgálat, or forced labour, or call it what you like, because Jews were not allowed to be part of the army, they were not soldiers. Soldiers wear a uniform. Hungarian Jews were given a shovel and a yellow armband, and that's how they served King and Country. Some of them, my father included, was taken to the Ukraine, but he was fortunate, he survived and came back.

10:22:42:11

Interviewer

The story of your uncle is so hard, isn't it? When I read it, I couldn't believe the tragedy of it, and the kindness of a man who, obviously, wanted to leave something for his nephew and his niece, and wanted to be remembered like that.

10:22:59:21

Gabor Lacko

Yes. We were very close.

10:23:07:04

Interviewer

What, what do you think it was that made him commit suicide like that? Do you think it was the fear, or the pride? What, what do you think it was?

10:23:17:03

Gabor Lacko

He was always a leading person in anything he did. He was a leading banker. He was a leading person in the local community - until he was allowed to be. And later, he became a leading person in the Jewish Council. He was born to lead.

10:23:43:15

Interviewer

Did he, [*talking over each other*]

10:23:44:02

Gabor Lacko

He, he couldn't have faced deportation. He did the right thing. [*Becomes emotional*]

10:24:01:15

Interviewer

Did he have his own children?

10:24:03:12

Gabor Lacko

He had a son. He was taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and he was a drummer in the Birkenau orchestra. He came back, and said, "I'm spending 72 hours in this bloody country," and he went to Brazil.

10:24:31:05

Interviewer

But to go to your uncle again, the fact that he thought of you and your sister said so much about the man, didn't it?

10:24:41:00

Gabor Lacko

He was very close to us, and very close to his sister, my mother, very close. When I came to England, and I heard on the radio those mercy messages that, on the radio, that, "Joe Soap, last seen 12 years ago, in the Lake District, his mother is dangerously ill, can you please contact," You know what I'm talking about. I never understood that. I just couldn't understand that somebody doesn't see his mother or father, or brother for 12 years. It is completely contrary to our ego. We were close.



We were in contact.

10:25:34:16

Interviewer

But you say that you feel like he did the right thing, because of his standing in society, is that what you mean?

10:25:42:12

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:25:43:10

Interviewer

That it would've been too difficult for him, and actually, in a way, it was, he kept his pride by doing what he [*talking over each other*] did.

10:25:49:20

Gabor Lacko

[*Talking over each other*] Yes. He wouldn't have survived. Not because of being burnt or executed, or whatever, he would have died of shame. [*Becomes emotional*]

10:26:09:21

Interviewer

But he could, he took control of his own destiny is what you're saying?

10:26:13:02

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:26:14:01

Interviewer

I understand. Are you religious?

10:26:20:00

Gabor Lacko

No. If you ask, I am Jewish, I am more Jewish than anybody, but kashrut and going to schul, don't mean much to me. But anything you do or say against Jews, I explode. You can call me a fucking Hungarian, that's all right. But if you say, I'm a bloody Jew, I murder you. [*Becomes emotional*]

10:27:02:20

Interviewer

Do you want to have a break?

10:27:05:14

Gabor Lacko

No, I'm all right.

10:27:06:12

Interviewer

Are you okay? Are you sure?

10:27:07:13

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:27:08:09

Interviewer

Okay. I understand why you feel so angry. Of course, I've not experienced it, but I can, I, I do empathise why you feel so angry.

10:27:18:06

Gabor Lacko

Well, you are lucky.

10:27:30:08

Interviewer

Do you, um, So, let, let's go to 1937, you're, you're six. You say that, um, Debrecen - is that how I pronounce it? Debrecen?

10:27:39:18

Gabor Lacko

Debrecen.

10:27:40:00

Interviewer

De, Debrecen. [*Talking over each other*] I'm sorry.

10:27:41:09

Gabor Lacko

Debrecen.

10:27:42:11

Interviewer

Debrecen, is your hometown?

10:27:44:13

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:27:45:04

Interviewer

Um, did you feel a great deal of antisemitism around Debrecen when you were growing up?

10:27:52:21

Gabor Lacko

Yes, but it didn't bother me. It was part of life.

10:27:55:22



Interviewer

That's bad enough as it is, isn't it?

10:27:58:09

Gabor Lacko

Well, I didn't think much of it. I just realised that we are Jews, and they are not, and that's how it is. And I had non-Jewish friends, and I had Jewish friends. And you didn't associate with the antisemites. They were a different world.

10:28:15:10

Interviewer

Do, did your parents, um, try to explain the differences to you, and why there was so much tension? What, how, what did you understand was happening?

10:28:25:01

Gabor Lacko

Well, you didn't have to explain it to us, you know. When we were in school, and suddenly, a brick comes through the window. Then, you don't need an explanation. You might like to know why do they do it, but you just get used to it. And it happened quite often. And then, er, we just put the lights out, as if nobody was there, waited until they disappeared, and that was it.

10:28:51:18

Interviewer

So that was part of life.

10:28:53:02

Gabor Lacko

Yes. It was part of life.

10:28:55:09

Interviewer

Did you ever think to emigrate?

10:28:57:02

Gabor Lacko

No.

10:28:58:07

Interviewer

Because Hungary was your home?

10:29:00:15

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:29:01:23

Interviewer

So, you are proud, or at least then, you were proud of being Hungarians as a family?

10:29:06:06

Gabor Lacko

Yeah, I love my city. Yes, I love Debrecen.

10:29:09:08

Interviewer

But you're not proud of your nationality?

10:29:13:03

Gabor Lacko

No. No. They sold me, literally, they got paid for it. For every Jew who left Hungary, the Germans paid the Hungarian government. I don't know how many dollars, but it was, We were paid for.

10:29:42:10

Interviewer

So, you don't have any loyalty to Hungary, because they didn't have any loyalty to you?

10:29:48:11

Gabor Lacko

I'm, occasionally, I feel sorry that they didn't allow me to be Hungarian, because that was my home. I had no reason to leave it. My reason to leave was that they didn't consider me Hungarian. Right from the word go, I always knew, I was a bloody Jew.

10:30:18:21

Interviewer

And that was supposedly a bad thing.

10:30:21:01

Gabor Lacko

I beg your pardon.

10:30:22:07

Interviewer

And that was supposedly a bad thing, rather than something to be proud of.

10:30:26:09

Gabor Lacko

Well, they didn't use it as a complement.

10:30:29:10

Interviewer

But, within your community, you must have felt a great deal of pride.

10:30:32:23

Gabor Lacko

Yes. We were very happy, and we, er it was a, it was a good life. It was a lovely town, and, until 1944, the 19th March, the day when the Germans marched in, in

spite of everything, you. we had; we had the anti-Jewish Laws. We had the first anti-Jewish Law in 1938, when they decided that maximum 20% of employer, employees in any factory, or institution, or hospital, or anywhere, can be Jewish. And fairly soon, it was reduced to 6%, and then it became nothing. And Jews couldn't have a telephone. Jews couldn't have a radio.

10:31:26:24

Interviewer

Er, at that invasion in, on 19th March, in 1944, you were about eight, is that right?

10:31:33:13

Gabor Lacko

I was 12.

10:31:35:24

Interviewer

12. Okay, you were 12. Can you remember what that actually felt like to, to know that the Germans were coming, and what it actually meant to be a child at that time?

10:31:50:02

Gabor Lacko

Well, it meant nothing to me, because we didn't know what was going to happen.

10:31:57:02

Interviewer

But you knew that Germany was invading, and that wasn't a good thing?

10:31:59:15

Gabor Lacko

It wasn't a good thing, because we knew what the Germans did in other countries: in Slovakia, Poland.

10:32:08:05

Interviewer

And, er, one of your memories, I understand, is that there were lots of bombs that were falling, so that was an indication of what was happening, is that right?

10:32:16:01

Gabor Lacko

Well, there were bombs falling, but that was no problem, honestly, that was absolutely no problem. We had air raids, and [*talking over each other*] and the,

10:32:25:09

Interviewer

Can you tell me the story about, um, you going home from school one day, and there was a little boy who was, his mother told him to move?

10:32:36:09

Gabor Lacko

[*Talking over each other*] Oh, that wasn't going home from school. That happened when we were going home from the camp.

10:32:43:23

Interviewer

I think, he was on his way home from school, is that right?

10:32:46:11

Gabor Lacko

No. He was when the Russians liberated us, and we were leaving Strasshof, after about half-an-hour or so, there was an air raid, and the Russians were coming from Vienna, and the Germans made a last-minute stance, and there was an air raid. And we all looked for shelter, and yes, there was a little boy with his mother, my school mate, Pista Weiss, and when the air raid was over, we all got up and started to walk, and his mother says, "Come on, Pista, stop mucking about. Let's go!" He was dead, from the German aircraft. One bullet hit him, and that was that. And nobody noticed when he died, but he didn't get up again. I find it particularly disturbing and sad, and tragic, that he survived the German occupation, he survived deportation, and on the way home, he got killed. Not fair.

10:34:18:23

Interviewer

I'm sorry if we have that in the wrong order. I have that as a story that was, um, chronologically where we are now, but [*talking over each other*] forgive me for that.

10:34:24:20

Gabor Lacko

[*Talking over each other*] It means nothing to me, and it means nothing to Pista Weiss.

10:34:28:08

Interviewer

Well, thank you for telling me the story now. Um, so let's talk a bit more about what it meant when the Germans were invading for you as a young child. You, you've talked about the, the new laws that were put in place: radios, cars, telephones, shops. Um, do you remember what your parents explained to you. Why, why this was happening, what they told you and your sister?

10:34:51:00

Gabor Lacko

Well, I was reading it in the papers. I knew why it was happening. It was nothing new was surprising about it, we were expecting it; and we just didn't know what the future is going to hold.

10:35:09:24

Interviewer

What happened to your father?

10:35:13:02

Gabor Lacko

He got back from Arbeitsdienst, so forced labour, and eventually, we got reunited after the war.

10:35:24:03

Interviewer

Sorry, I was, can you, can you just tell me the story about how he was taken to forced labour?

10:35:28:16

Gabor Lacko

Well, er, he, he, you were called up, and you went. You know, it was a simple fact of life. You received a piece of paper via the post, and within 24 hours, you had to report at the local station, and you were lucky if you see him again.

10:35:53:21

Interviewer

How long had he, how long was he gone for?

10:35:56:24

Gabor Lacko

Um, he went in the first week of April 1944, and until we got liberated, and got back to Budapest, which was April 1945. We didn't even know if he was alive.

10:36:20:08

Interviewer

Did he ever tell you what happened to him in that year?

10:36:23:06

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:36:25:08

Interviewer

So, he was open, he shared his story?

10:36:28:10

Gabor Lacko

Yes. He shared his story. He was lucky. A lot of friends of his didn't come back, because when the Germans started to lose the war, it all happened in, you remember Stalingrad, the Russian army, and the Russian winter? And they started to withdraw around Germany. They told these Jews who were on forced labour that, "Just dig a grave," and they stood on the edge of their own grave, and they shot them into it. [*Becomes emotional*] So, my father was very lucky.

10:37:25:03

Interviewer

And while he was away, you were moved into a ghetto, yes?

10:37:29:02

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:37:29:20

Interviewer

Can you tell me about that experience?

10:37:35:16

Gabor Lacko

Well, the radio announced it, which we didn't hear directly, because Jews had no radios. And the newspapers, and there were couriers from the Jewish community, they spread the good news that we within 72 hours, we got to go to the ghetto. And two parts of my hometown were designated as the ghetto areas. And we were fortunate that my mother's brother, the one who hanged himself, was in the ghetto, so we had somewhere to go.

10:38:21:09

And, initially, there was absolutely no problem. "Why don't you come and stay with us?" There were two of them, we were three. Five people in that nice house, perfectly all right. But then, we found out that some other people had to go to the ghetto too, and soon we became nine, and then we became 13, and then we became 15. And the number grew, and we're getting more and more crowded. But that was all right. We were still in a relatively civilised home.

10:39:06:17

Now, two parts of the town was, were designated as ghettos, and a main thoroughfare went between the two. And the local authorities didn't find it very agreeable that the main thoroughfare of the town goes in the middle of the ghetto. So, they decided the smaller part of the ghetto is going to be closed, and all those people move into the bigger ghetto. So, can you imagine, when 10,000 Jews in the ghetto? There were also, all the Jews who were in the surrounding little villages; so there were about 12,000 people there in a large ghetto and a small ghetto. And the large ghetto had about 8,000 people, and the balance was in small one. And those people had to move in with the large, within 24 hours.

10:40:11:18

So, they found a home for themselves, and the problem of the thoroughfare in the middle of the ghetto was solved. Now, it was get ghetto free and Jew-free, so it was a, and it also had another benefit, when all those houses, fully furnished and equipped were emptied, they were all at the disposal of the local population. It solved the housing problem. Wonderful! Not a nice way of doing it, but they solved it.

10:40:50:00

Interviewer

Can you tell the story about your mother and her key, and locking your house?

10:40:54:11

Gabor Lacko

Oh, that was when we left our flat, because we had to move in the ghetto, and I never forget it. Mother carefully locked our flat and put away in her handbag the key. I don't know what the hell for, because we had no idea if we ever come back. But she put the key away. We did not need the key again for a long time.

10:41:33:17

Interviewer

How long?

10:41:35:00

Gabor Lacko

Well, we got back to the same place about, exactly a year later.

10:41:39:21

Interviewer

And the key still worked?

10:41:41:17

Gabor Lacko

No. My father already lived in the place. So, we didn't need that key.

10:41:50:04

But I had the same sensation when I left Hungary during the Hungarian Revolution, and I decided to leave Hungary and came to England. I locked the door, left everything inside, my clothing, my CDs, my records, my pictures, whatever I had. But that was my decision, and I didn't care whether I come back or not, and I knew it's not mine anymore. Who cares what happens? That was my decision.

10:42:32:24

Interviewer

So, in terms of the chronology, um, the, the next bit of the story is when your uncle hanged himself. Your mother then went to the funeral, and whilst she was at the funeral, you were moved to the brick factory?

10:42:49:23

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:42:50:11

Interviewer

How did you move? How did you get there? [*Talking over each other*] When did you get there?

10:42:52:18

Gabor Lacko

[*Talking over each other*] On a horse drawn cart.

10:42:55:02

Interviewer

Who took you?

10:42:56:18

Gabor Lacko

Er, they were local peasants, the closest who had transport. By transport, you mean a horse and a cart. And, we had to get on that cart and took us to the brick factory, which is about 6 kilometres away, and the roads were lined by lovely, jovial Hungarians, who were clapping and cheering, and celebrating that we were taken. [*Becomes emotional*] Now, that I shall never forget.

10:43:41:16

Interviewer

The cruelty?

10:43:43:17

Gabor Lacko

Yes. Yeah, I don't know if it's cruelty. It's not cruel to hate somebody, it's ignorance. I don't think they were cruel; they were just too damned stupid. They didn't know what the difference between Jews and non-Jews. They were brought up to hate you, so they hated them. I don't think it's cruelty. It's j,

10:44:07:21

Interviewer

But they were joyous, weren't they, in, in [*talking over each other*] your journey?

10:44:11:03

Gabor Lacko

[*Talking over each other*] They were celebrating that all those bloody Jews are, who are causing all our problems, are being taken away.

10:44:19:08

Interviewer

So, you were on a horse drawn cart with your sister?

10:44:21:04

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

10:44:23:02

Interviewer

And can you describe that scene again? I know it's hard, but can you describe what it felt like?

10:44:31:16

Gabor Lacko

We were going somewhere, and we didn't know where. And we didn't know when we get there what's going to happen.

10:44:39:23

Interviewer

And can you tell me about the Hungarians on each side of the road?

10:44:43:06

Gabor Lacko

Well, they were just lining the road, looking at these people being taken away, and they were clapping and cheering. There were noises, "Now, you had got what you deserve." I didn't know what I've done to deserve it. Yeah, I was 13 years old. Mind you, I mustn't be too egoistic. They were not just clapping me, they were clapping everybody, so, I can't take credit for all the cheers.

10:45:22:19

Interviewer

And you were going to a destination that you did not know?

10:45:25:06

Gabor Lacko

Absolutely. No. No idea. And when we get there, well, we knew that we can't stand in the brick factory for the rest of our life. But what will happen after that?

[Cut for card change]

10:45:44:02

Interviewer

Um, before we return to, er, the brickyard, will you allow me to make two observations? Um, the first is how extraordinary it is that you kept your silence for so long, and that you didn't speak, and I wonder how you managed?

10:46:03:06

Gabor Lacko

I always thought it's nobody's business.

10:46:06:18

Interviewer

But how did you cope with your day-to-day life? Because it's affected you, understandably, of course, so dramatically. How did you cope?

10:46:16:09

Gabor Lacko

It was part of my life. I accepted it. You know, it's there in the background. I don't want to forget about it. I don't want to put it behind me. It's part of my life. I accept it.

10:46:37:01

Interviewer

But that you kept your silence for so long?

10:46:46:02

Gabor Lacko

It's not something I wanted to broadcast. I also considered it fairly private. But when I realised that people, some don't know about it, and some don't believe it, then I thought, I have to come out.



10:47:10:08

Interviewer

Thank you for answering that question. And the other question, or observation, is, with, about your anger, and how, how you can ever express how angry you are about what happened in your life. And if there is anything that ever makes you feel better?

10:47:35:10

Gabor Lacko

I just learned to accept it. And it's irreversible, so there is nothing I can do about it, and whatever I do, it won't make it unhappen. I went through it, I survived it, and I consider myself very, very lucky. And I think of the people who didn't, and they had the same background as I had, and it's pure coincidence that I'm here, and they are not.

10:48:13:02

Interviewer

I'm interested in what you just said. Er, with your last answer, you said, "It happened, and I don't want to forget about it. It is part of my life." There are many people who do want to forget, but you don't want to?

10:48:26:20

Gabor Lacko

No. No. I definitely don't want to forget it.

10:48:39:04

Interviewer

You don't want to forget in honour of those who were lost?

10:48:43:06

Gabor Lacko

Yes. Yes. I always consider myself exceptionally lucky, and I could have been one of the 600,000, and one of them could be alive.

10:49:13:24

Interviewer

And would it be fair to say that you have thought about that every single day since?

10:49:18:14

Gabor Lacko

I think about it every day.

10:49:22:23

Interviewer

But for the majority of your life you thought about it, but didn't share it with anybody?

10:49:27:12

Gabor Lacko

That's true, I didn't. But there is always something that reminds me of, you know,

there are so many things happened in that year that it's not difficult to find something that reminds me of an episode then; and then it just goes on, and on, and one thought follows the other one, and you're back to square one area, thinking about the whole business.

10:50:02:13

Interviewer

Do you mind giving me example [*clears throat*] of what are the kind of things that prompt the memories? I hear exactly what you're saying, that so many things happened in that year that almost anything in a day can bring back the memories; but I think it would help other people understand how it permeated your life if you could just give a, a few examples of, of what prompts those memories?

10:50:24:01

Gabor Lacko

Well, I worked in this enormous, big anti-aircraft con, factory, and when I go to any factory, or industry I automatically compare my first experience in a factory with this one. That was a wonderful factory, you know? I don't consider myself lucky to be there, but as an engineer, it still interests me how beautifully kept, how beautifully managed, and how interesting the perks were, and the machinery they had. And that's a very interesting reference point for me.

10:51:15:11

And you hear on the radio, bombings, and yes, I know about bombings, one or two. We were bombed in Vienna, and Vienna was bombed when we were not there, and I was bombed when I was in the wagon, and I didn't know where we were being taken there, and then we weren't taken anywhere, because the bombs destroyed the railway that would have taken us. And that is another episode when I'm extremely lucky I survived it. The nearest bomb fell about six metres from our wagon, and, when the air raid came to an end, and we were getting out of the wagon, there was no earth to tread on, because the crater of the bomb went under the wagon, and the wagon, and one rail was swinging in the air. I never heard noise like that. You know, when we've got thunder and lightning, ah, that's chicken feed. You have a bomb falling six metres from your wagon, and you can't even escape. You are shut in, and you don't know what's happening. And then suddenly it finished. The air raid was over, and we were told, the train is not going anywhere. You go back to your barracks. And, a few days later, we were liberated.

10:52:58:01

Interviewer

But the point you're making is that just small, small references to other things in life [*talking over each other*]

10:53:04:03

Gabor Lacko

You would associate some of them, yeah.

10:53:06:06

Interviewer

straight back there, and that's why you can never forget, and you don't want to

forget. So, let's return now, Gabor, to the, the brickyard. Um, you arrived there with your sister, and you have just described a haunting scenes of, of going down on the wagons, with Hungarians cheering, er, and celebrating the fact that you were being taken away. What happened when you got there? What did you find?

10:53:32:24

Gabor Lacko

Well, fortunately I found my mother, who came from the funeral of her brother, and then we went to that loft I was telling you about, where we had, probably the most horrendous night of our life. We had nowhere to sit, nowhere to lie, nowhere to breathe. Just hot and humid, and dust. And about 3,000 people in the same, under the same roof. That was probably the most awful night I ever had. Which is a good thing, because had it not been so awful, my mother wouldn't have said, "Let's move from here," and, had we stayed there, I would have finished up in Auschwitz, and if I would have finished up in Auschwitz I would have been finished off.

10:54:23:23

Interviewer

So, by chance, she suggested that you move?

10:54:26:15

Gabor Lacko

Yes. My mother said that "There is no air here, I can't stand it," and it, her, her words were, "It's much better to have nowhere to sleep than no air to breathe."

10:54:40:19

Interviewer

And what happened to the people who remained there?

10:54:42:17

Gabor Lacko

Went to Auschwitz.

10:54:44:00

Interviewer

They were collected? How did they move? What happened?

10:54:46:08

Gabor Lacko

Well, they were designated areas, and there was a railway yard fairly close, and there was a bunch of wagons, and we were told, "Get on the train, we are going," and we were going, and we didn't know where and when, and how and what. Nothing. And the people in the loft, after we were taken, they were the last lot. They were going to Auschwitz. And not many of them came back. We went to Austria. We had a good chance to survive.

10:55:24:01

Interviewer

Can you tell me about the wagons that you were in?

10:55:27:13

Gabor Lacko

Yes. They were very ordinary wagons, according to the inscription on them, in Hungarian. It said, [*Hungarian words*], 40 people, or eight horses. That what it was designed for. Now, it meant people: 40, not Jews. If it's, if you are Jews, then we can squeeze 86 of them in. And in my wagon we were 86, and you are about two metres away from me. In that space, probably six other people would have been sitting, squeezing, squatting. There was nowhere to sit down properly.

10:56:21:14

And we're sitting there for three days, and one of the most dreadful aspect of the whole business was, of course, there was no loos. There was, one bucket, and 86 people was using it. So you got full up fairly soon, and then some unfortunate soul had to empty the damn thing. But there was no window wide enough to put the bucket out, so through the slot that was the only opening on the wagon, they tried to empty it, and some of it came back. And the unfortunate soul who volunteered to do it, well, he knew what it was, being in the shit.

10:57:23:13

And occasionally the train stopped, they opened the door, either a German or a Hungarian soldier poked his head in. "Wie viele toten?" - "How many dead?" In our wagon there was four children, and we all survived the three days, and we got to Strasshof, which was a [*German for temporary camp*], a temporary camp. That's where they received us, registered us; and that's where, from, they distributed us in different places to work.

10:58:13:07

Interviewer

In other carriages, in other wagons, people did die, didn't they?

10:58:17:17

Gabor Lacko

Well, when we arrived I got off. I was reasonably cheerful and inquisitive. It was so nice to be out in the blazing summer. It was July. Heat, but at least we were not closed in. You can't imagine how hot it gets in a wagon like that. So, I decided to go for a little walk and, like, any other 12 years old would do, I decided to count the number of carriages. And I got to the next carriage, and I turned back, because the next carriage there were three old ladies, dead. I never saw a dead person before. So, I went back to my mother and sister, and didn't count, didn't count the coaches.

10:59:22:15

Interviewer

It seems, when you talk, that you can still see everything in front of you.

10:59:27:22

Gabor Lacko

Yes. It's always there.

10:59:35:13

Interviewer

How do you sleep at night?

10:59:38:16

Gabor Lacko

When they let me? Very well, thank you.

10:59:41:21

Interviewer

Really? You do sleep well? You can switch, you can switch it off?

10:59:43:24

Gabor Lacko

I don't have nightmares.

10:59:45:13

Interviewer

At night, you can switch it off?

10:59:46:01

Gabor Lacko

No, I don't have nightmares.

10:59:47:18

Interviewer

But it seems that all the memories are very vivid for you.

10:59:51:03

Gabor Lacko

Yes, but I learned to accept them. I told you, it's part of my life.

11:00:08:16

Interviewer

But the images are very clear for you, aren't they?

11:00:10:13

Gabor Lacko

Yes. Yes.

11:00:13:13

Interviewer

Some people, some people remember, but I think you see, don't you?

11:00:16:20

Gabor Lacko

I can see the faces that are dead. I can see the faces of the SS soldier who opened the gate. I can see it well.

11:00:39:18

After that point, the barracks was quite refreshing, quite relaxing. It was, it was good.

11:00:52:03

Interviewer

It was better?

11:00:52:21

Gabor Lacko

Oh, yes. No comparison. You can't imagine 86 people in a wagon covered in shit, in the heat. It was awful.

11:01:11:02

Interviewer

Do you think your ability to see, and to remember, is a blessing or a curse?

11:01:21:14

Gabor Lacko

I don't think it would make any difference whether I see it, or only think about it, or think about it and also see it. It makes no difference. I've got very, visual memory, and you can tell me names, and I don't remember them ten minutes later, but I, if I see a bunch of numbers, for example, written down, I can recite them [*talking over each other*].

11:01:44:19

Interviewer

It's almost like you have a photographic memory of the past.

11:01:47:11

Gabor Lacko

Not quite as good as that, but I remember. But, funnily enough, I don't remember faces. You can introduce me to the same girl twice a day. I meet her again as a newcomer. I don't remember faces. Probably because I don't spend enough time to observe the features.

11:02:07:10

Interviewer

But you said that you remember the faces of the, of the people who opened the wagons, but those faces are imprinted in your mind?

11:02:13:21

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

11:02:14:08

Interviewer

And the faces of the dead women, and everybody that you met there?

11:02:17:15

Gabor Lacko

Yes. That's the difference.

11:02:21:10

Interviewer

Um, so you were in Strasshof. You, you had left your mother and your sister to count the wagons, but you decided not to do that anymore, and then you were back with them?

11:02:32:03

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

11:02:33:11

Interviewer

And what happened next?

11:02:34:13

Gabor Lacko

Then we got separated, because I was a man, aged 13, and they were females, and then we had to go for a medical examination to make sure that we don't bring any disease to the Third Reich. We were, we were even given an X-ray, believe it or not, to make sure we don't have TB. I, I find it absolutely astonishing that, not so far away, in Auschwitz, they were burnt to death, and here, they were X-raying us. It's, it's crazy.

11:03:24:10

And we were all registered. Magnificent, precise German administration. We were given a piece of document, which I still have. You will see it later, with my name, age 13, that I passed my examination,

11:03:46:01

and then went into a shower, and we showered. And interesting is that we didn't even find it surprising that water came off the showers, because usually shower comes out of a, usually water comes out of a shower. In Auschwitz it was gas, and we never heard of that. So, we went and had a shower, and we dried ourself, and we collected our beautiful new document, that we were clean and healthy, and fit for I don't know what.

11:04:25:18

And then I separated from the men, and I hid in an empty barrack, because I was hoping to find my mother and sister next day, and I did.

11:04:42:19

Interviewer

And you were with them for the rest of your journey, weren't you?

11:04:44:16

Gabor Lacko

Yes. I [*talking over each other*] was lonely. Evening, when I was on my own, and I was hungry, and there was nothing to eat, I had a little experience which probably

influenced my attitude towards Ukrainians, because in Strasshof there were very few Germans, and most of the guards were Ukrainians. And one of them was sitting there quietly, having his dinner, and when he finished I asked him, "Can I have your leftover?" And he looked at me and said, "Sure, but first I piss into it." So I declined to take him up on the offer, and I didn't have his leftover.

11:05:35:15

Interviewer

What was the food like there?

11:05:37:15

Gabor Lacko

[Laughs] Monotonous. We had a cup of black liquid, they called it coffee, but it wasn't anything like it. It was made from chicory, with a piece of cornbread sawdust. That was the bread. That was breakfast. And there was a, I think it was an invention for camps, called der gemüse. Gemüse means vegetable in German, and it was sliced turnips and swedes, and all sorts of little vegetables, boiled in water. And that was it. And we had one ladleful of that for dinner, and one ladle for lunch. Again, with a piece of compressed sawdust. And that was the food.

11:06:39:13

Interviewer

What does it feel like to you to have choice over food now, and to have a full plate of food?

11:06:44:16

Gabor Lacko

Well, when we got out of the camp and got back to Hungary, for a little while it made a big thing. But, you know, we get spoiled, and I take it for granted. It's all there.

11:07:03:09

Interviewer

Thank you. Um, eventually you left Strasshof, didn't you?

11:07:08:06

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

11:07:09:16

Interviewer

Actually, just before that, the women who served your food, you didn't like them very much either, did you?

11:07:15:18

Gabor Lacko

Now that's what I call an English understatement. I bloody hated them. They were the worst kind of Ukrainian bitches you can think of. They were awful, and so were the Ukrainian men. You see, they came from Ukraine, and when the Germans occupied the Ukraine they changed side and joined the Germans. And that's how they became in the German service. Their most dreadful servants. There is not one



good word I can say for any Ukrainian. Now, that's a hate which lives in me, and probably forever.

11:08:16:14

On the other hand, I've got a lady helps me keep my house twice a week, and she's Ukrainian. And when I told her my story with the Ukrainian guard who says, "Sure, but I first piss into it," she burst into tears, because she had a 12 years old son, and how would she feel if somebody would tell her son the same? So it's quite possible that there are decent Ukrainians, but I haven't met many.

11:09:00:24

Interviewer

So, let's move on and talk about leaving Strasshof. You were 12, and you were put on a train to Vienna.

11:09:12:09

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

11:09:14:08

Interviewer

Where did you, how did you get there? What happened when you got to Vienna? Where did you go?

11:09:18:01

Gabor Lacko

We went to a building which was called [*German word*]. It was a building for old and disabled people, which was fairly deserted and empty, so we were all housed there for one night only. And following morning we went on foot, because it was [*German word*], it was an ominous anti-aircraft gun factory. Ostmark-Werke it was called. And because the whole bunch of buildings, big, old, like Victorian, red brick buildings were built in the middle of the 19th century, to house the Austro-Hungarian army, it was called - the whole district - Arsenal. And Ostmark-Werke was built on the edge of the tenth district, and third district, on the edge of the Arsenal. Ostmark-Werke was a modern factory, beautifully kept, with manicured grass between the buildings. Any factory manager should be proud of running a factory like that.

11:10:57:03

Interviewer

And did you work there with your mother and your sister?

11:10:59:16

Gabor Lacko

Not with them, because they worked during the night. I worked during the day.

11:11:04:18

Interviewer

What did you do?

11:11:07:13



Gabor Lacko

Er, the anti-aircraft confection, when it is not in use, they lock the four barrels in a situation, in a position, so that it's very difficult for transportation. It's fixed, and there was a little key-operated lock which fixed it in that position. And I was fitting that lock.

11:11:42:04

Interviewer

Before we move forward, there was a story about, um, potatoes, and you being so hungry, with your friend. Do you want to tell that story?

11:11:50:06

Gabor Lacko

Er, that was before we got to Ostmark-Werke [*talk over each other*]. We spent about two and a half weeks, roughly, in a place called Sitzenberg-Reidling, in a factory, making concrete bricks for a company called Adalbert Kallinger in Vienna. And that was so bad that even the Austrians realised that it's not the sort of work that women should do, so that's when we were moved to the anti-aircraft confection factory.

11:12:43:23

Originally potato is that we were hungry, always hungry, because the Lagerführer's wife, Frau Schmidt, was the cook, and she not only was a lousy cook, but I think she also stole half the ingredients. So it was bad, and not sufficient. So, with my schoolmate - there was only two children in the whole bunch of people - we decided to go and steal some potatoes from a potato field, and, picking about a dozen potatoes each, and we were going back to the barrack when my mate said, "We've got to go back," and I said, "You must be mad. Why would we go back?" Well, he lost his *tzitzit* while stealing potatoes. Now, it's not a good thing to leave in an Austrian potato field, a *tzitzit*, which probably was, you know what *tzitzit* is? It's a, a religious garment which also only Jews wear, so if they find it then obvious where it came from. So we went back to the potato field, and there it was, waving about in the wind on one of the potato plants, and he put it on, went back, and that was that. But I never realised what a religious man my mate was. He was wearing *tzitzit*.

11:14:44:03

Interviewer

Um, let's move on now to talk about, um, another time when you were in trouble, when you were in the factory, and you used the lift instead of the stairs. What, what happened to you?

11:15:00:08

Gabor Lacko

I was carting some gun components from one building to another, and I had a little, red cart for the transportation of the components, which was all right, but taking them down from the first floor to the ground floor was not so easy. So even though that we were not allowed to use the lift, I made a key to the lift and used it, and I used it for a couple of weeks with no problem. On one occasion, when I got down with my components, there was a Polish guy who, in absolutely no uncertain terms, told me what will happen to me if I use that bloody lift once more, and what will happen to my mother, and my father, and my grandmother. You know how it is. And took the key to the lift away from me,



11:16:01:00

and I was very annoyed, and very upset, and I went and told my foreman, Herr Kuplent, this is what happened and, to my great surprise, he came down with me, he got hold of this man, and told him that this boy works for me, and got the lift key out of his hand, gave it back to me, and said, and the Pole disappeared, and that I shall never forget. He said, "You think nothing of that. You will be a good engineer, and nobody will remember Hitler". Can you imagine, when the foreman of one of the most prominent German war factories does that?

11:17:10:11

1967 I visited Vienna, and I went to see him. He was a very old man, dying of emphysema. So I thanked him, and that's that.

11:17:50:07

Interviewer

You were a very enterprising young man. And how wonderful that you had the chance to say thank you.

11:17:57:08

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

11:17:59:15

Interviewer

But how extraordinary that he trusted you, and that he gave you that strength inside. He was kind.

11:18:11:10

Gabor Lacko

When we started work on the first morning he brought a loaf of bread with him and cut it up into as many pieces as many children there. He was a Mensch.

11:18:37:16

Interviewer

It's very important for you to have had the occasional,

11:18:43:16

Gabor Lacko

Good experience.

11:18:44:21

Interviewer

good experience, because otherwise you would just, you would be so depressed now. But at least you had some shining light. Throughout your journey you had experiences of people who did offer you kindness. Not much. Not much, but a bit.

11:18:59:04

Gabor Lacko

I had another woman on the day we started to wear the yellow star. I had a medical appointment, and I had the star here, and I put the newspaper halfway over it so people can't see it, and a woman stopped and said, "Little boy, don't cover it. Nothing to be ashamed of."

[Cut for direction]

11:19:33:10

Interviewer

It's very clear that you can remember everything. Um, you ended up going back to Strasshof, didn't you? From Ostmark you went back to Strasshof?

11:19:48:11

Gabor Lacko

Yes, when the factory got bombed to blitherins, and there was nothing left, and there was no production. Then we were taken back to Strasshof, yes.

11:20:06:03

Interviewer

What happened when you got there? You, you have a story about finding jam. Can you tell me that?

11:20:14:08

Gabor Lacko

There was very little food in the last days, because the kitchen staff escaped, and we were left to our own devices. So we broke open the kitchen, and there was a big barrel of jam. And I found a container. I fill it with jam. Even if I didn't want to go to the jam, I was propelled by the other people, because everybody was heading for the jam. And I practically finished in the barrel. I was covered in jam, and I was going back with my hoard to my mother and sister, and I met a friend of mine, Agnes. She's still around. She lives in London. And she looked at me and started to take the jam from my jacket and licked it. And funnily enough, on my 75th birthday she was one of the guests, and everybody had a little contribution. Her contribution was Gabor and the jam and the barrel.

11:21:45:22

Interviewer

That's a nice story, isn't it? You haven't told many happy stories, but that, at least, is one [*Laughs*].

11:21:51:13

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

11:21:52:20

Interviewer

Your mother and your sister must have been very pleased to have jam, as well.

11:21:59:10

Gabor Lacko

Yes, but next day there was nothing to eat.

11:22:02:10

Interviewer

Yeah.

18:03:14:14

Gabor Lacko

And, then I decided to explore, and I went to one of the neighbouring villages. By then there were no guards, so I just got under the fence and got out. It's very funny, because we were told, "Mind the fence, because probably it is electrified," and we didn't know if we should believe this story or not. But then a couple of cows came in the field, and they licked the fence, and they didn't die, so there was no electricity in the fence. Anyway, I got under it, and went to the next little town called Gänserndorf, and that was pretty deserted, because it was quite wealthy little village, or town, and a lot of the local inhabitants went with army and left the village. They were Nazis, obviously. Must have left in a hurry, because on the stove there was two pans, still warm, and one had soup in it and the other one had, like, [*chorlat?*], a mixture of meat and beans, and it was absolutely delicious. And I decided to take it back to my mother and sister, and then the door opened, and three German soldiers came in. Er, two young ones, and an older one, about 40, 42, with a couple of extra stripes on his shoulder, showing his age and superiority. And the youngest one immediately started to shout, [*German word*] "A Jew?" [*German words*] "Not true. Is it not true?" And he must have stated the obvious, because I had a ten-centimetre, big yellow star on my chest, so there was no question I was a Jew. And he got out his revolver and put it to my head, and then the old one grabbed his hand, put the gun back into the holster, and turned to him and said, [*German words*] "What are you doing?" [*German words*] "He's only a lad." He picked up the container of the food, gave it to me, and said, "Okay." [*German words*] Go. People usually ask me, what does it feel like when you have a gun at your head? Well, you pardon my French, I shat myself. So, with a load of bean, beans in the container, and another load in my trousers, I went back to my mother and sister. They were very nice beans.

11:26:04:11

Interviewer

Again, a moment of kindness.

11:26:08:04

Gabor Lacko

Yes. I don't know how much of it was kindness, or he just realised that the Russians are six kilometres away.

11:26:23:22

Interviewer

The game was nearly up.

11:26:25:11

Gabor Lacko

The game is up. Not nearly, it was up. It would have been a bloody shame to get

shot then, there, because next day we were liberated.

11:26:38:01

Interviewer

And what did it feel like when you, when you were liberated, and the Russians were there the next morning?

11:26:42:20

Gabor Lacko

Well, we threw ourselves in their neck, and kissed them, and well, you can imagine. The first thing he was doing, er, two of them only had machine guns, sub-machine guns, but the third one was with a shovel, and he kept on hitting the barbed wire on the fence until it broke, and said, "Go home." So, we set out to go home.

11:27:16:01

Interviewer

That was a long way to go?

11:27:18:01

Gabor Lacko

30 kilometres or so to get to Bratislava, which was the nearest town, and we were hoping to take a train from there to Budapest.

11:27:31:01

Interviewer

How long did it take you to get home?

11:27:40:11

Gabor Lacko

We stopped first in a village called Obersiebenbrunn and spent the night in a haystack. And next day we wanted to spend the night in a town called Marchegg, and the local residents greeted us with great joy, and told us that there are two houses that are empty, you can spend the night there. What they did not tell us, that the same two houses were offered to the Russian army to use it as a brothel. And you probably know the old joke, when chap goes to the pub and says, "Do you serve women here?" And the answer is, "No, you've got to bring your own."

And some Russian soldiers brought their own, and some wanted to use our women, and that was when my mother had the first confrontation with a Russian soldier, because he fancied my sister, and my mother told him that, "If you take my sister, I'll go anywhere where you go," and after all the pleading and bargaining he went somewhere else to try his luck. But then we realised that that's not the place to spend the night, so we carried on.

11:29:24:08

By then we were pretty tired, because there was no food, and no rest. We found a cart. No horse, just a cart, and there was about a dozen of us. We all put our belongings on it and pushed it and pulled it, and that was great, because we also could lean on it, so it didn't collapse. So we decided to carry on, and about 2 o'clock in the morning we heard another cart approaching, but that one had a horse. In fact, it had two horses. Driven by a Russian, a Russian soldier. And he stopped, and first

pointed to us, then our luggage, then at the cart. We all jumped on, and Bratislava, here we come.

And then he stopped and went like this. That means 20 kilometres to the centrum. Not 20 kilo, 20 minutes to the centrum. So we rode for 20 minutes, and we got to Bratislava.

11:30:45:17

Interviewer

What an achievement.

11:30:46:20

Gabor Lacko

It was an achievement, and there was a building there, an unfinished block of flats, which was a temporary reception centre for people like us, and they registered us. There was a guard on the door. I never managed to work out, was his purpose to stop people coming in, or going out?

[Cut for card change]

11:31:21:00

Gabor Lacko

[..] after, a few days in Bratislava, where we went to the railway station every day and we asked when is the next train to Budapest, we er saw our guy who kept on telling us we've got trainspotters on the timetable, we don't know when the train goes. And then, we heard that one day the train, was going to go. So, we went there and there was no train. It was just a train of open platforms. And we got onto one of them. And, obviously, many people heard the news that there's a train going to Budapest because all the platforms fill up with people. And that was a very slow journey, the train was doing no speed at all; but it was going.

11:32:24:01

And very late night, about two o'clock in the morning, it stopped, and six young Slovak jumped on the train and run around from one carriage to the next one and kicked on all the belongings what we had, and then the train started. So, I think they were in collusion with the train driver. He stopped the train, and they robbed the train and then he went.

11:33:00:02

Interviewer

Just a little bit more cruelty?

11:33:01:23

Gabor Lacko

Yeah.

11:33:03:00

Interviewer

Why not?

11:33:03:17

Gabor Lacko

And then, we got back to Budapest and there were people from the Jewish community at the station; and they said that there is a reception centre where they will sort us out, so we went there.

11:33:22:01

Interviewer

Before we talk about that, in the time that your father, you had been separated as a family from your father, did you feel a sense of responsibility for your mother and your sister?

11:33:35:11

Gabor Lacko

I think we all felt responsible for each other.

11:33:38:10

Interviewer

Yeah, but you're not, as the only boy, you didn't feel that you were taking your father's role to look after them, or anything like that? I'm, I'm just interested.

11:33:45:01

Gabor Lacko

No.

11:33:45:04

Interviewer

No. Okay.

11:33:46:03

Gabor Lacko

No.

11:33:46:19

Interviewer

It was all equal.

11:33:48:18

Gabor Lacko

No.

11:33:50:21

Interviewer

So, you went to the reception centre?

11:33:53:09

Gabor Lacko

We went to the reception centre, and we decided, my sister the next morning to go and get some bread from the baker. And that was quite an experience, because we actually bought some bread, and it was handed to us by a smiling person wearing a white apron. And that was, for the year, that we had a piece of bread that wasn't



thrown at us by a Ukrainian bitch, and it was bread. And, while we were in the bread shop somebody asked my mother, "Have you seen our [*Hungarian words*]" Which meant my father. And mother said no. "He was seen yesterday. He's going to come; he comes everyday looking for you." And, while we were in the shop my father turned up and looked at my mother who was standing there on her own and she didn't say hello, he didn't say anything, he just looked at her and said, "Where are the children?" "There, in the baker shop." And that was it. So, we got united, and that's the end of the story.

11:35:37:21

Interviewer

What did it feel like to be back together again as a family?

11:35:40:22

Gabor Lacko

Well, you can imagine that. We didn't even know if he was alive; and he didn't know if we were alive.

11:35:59:20

And the next day was the first of May. There was May Day celebrations because Hungarians and socialists or communists or, whatever, and we looked at the May Day parade from a window, and after went to the station and back to Debrecen. And back to the flat with the ominous key that my mother put in her handbag. But there was no need for it any case, it got lost. So that's it.

11:36:46:23

Interviewer

Thank you. How does it feel to have told your story?

11:36:57:15

Gabor Lacko

Well, I've been there before.

11:37:01:12

Interviewer

Many times?

11:37:03:06

Gabor Lacko

Yes.

11:37:10:14

Interviewer

But, as you said in the beginning, you only started to talk a few years ago for the voices that have been lost. And so, to record your testimony, it's a very important thing.

11:37:25:15

Gabor Lacko

Well, I am glad that somebody might see it and learn from it.

11:37:33:23

Interviewer

What do you think is the main lesson?

11:37:37:13

Gabor Lacko

Not to let it happen again. Hate is no solution to anything. Not to mention that I never gave any reason to anyone to hate me. I often wondered why it happened to me. But then I learnt to accept it. They did. And here endeth my story.

11:38:54:24

Interviewer

I think you have been extremely brave to share it with me today, so thank you so much.

11:39:01:01

Gabor Lacko

Thank you [...]

- END OF INTERVIEW -

ARTEFACTS

ARTEFACT 1: Gabor's star

11:39:06:11

Gabor Lacko o/o/v

If you were a Jew from April, I think the 6th 1944 you had to wear one of those [...] That's a little homemade effort, it didn't live up to the German's expectation, but I used to wear it [...]

Gabor Lecko iv

when they realised that every Jew wears a yellow star and they're all different and, and it's not nice so let's have a uniform one, so then they started factory produced them. [...]

Gabor Lacko o/o/v

We were given a beautiful factory-printed yellow star, with *Jude* printed on it.

Gabor iv

This is very amateurish effort [...]

Gabor o/o/v

I accepted why we had to wear it; I didn't know why we had to wear it. We were told the Jews have to wear it, so I accepted it [...] well you need things to remind you [...] not as if I would forget otherwise [...] Why do people keep the first shoe of their baby? It is sentimental value.

ARTEFACT 2: Gabor's Father's armband

11:40:21:13

Well, every Jew in Munkaszolgálat or Arbeitsdienst, or forced labour had to wear one of those. That was their uniform - and a spade. They all had a spade which was

very important to carry out their patriotic duties [...] instead of military service they were on forced labour, and they had a spade - to dig [...] it used to be my father's, so it's sentimental value.

ARTEFACT 3: Scan of Austrian Health Certificate, June 1944

11:41:17:10

Gabor Lacko

That's the piece of paper the Austrians gave me when in Strasshof we went through our medical examination and they declared me healthy and fit to join the Third Reich in, I don't quite really know in what capacity, That was after the x-ray and the shower , yes, that piece of paper goes back to June 1944. Nothing was significant about it then, but now that we know from the showers in Auschwitz gas came, I find it interesting that we took for granted that from a shower water comes and it wasn't so true in the other camps [...]

Gabor Lacko iv

I shall make sure that before I kick the bucket they will go to a place where they will keep it as interesting memorabilia but I'm not looking at it.

ARTEFACT 4: Scan of Registration document

11:42:35:12

Gabor Lacko o/o/v

That's our registration document from Bratislava [...] They asked where do we want to go? And when do we want to go? So we said we want to go to Debrecen and want to go as soon as possible. But we didn't go fast enough, it took time to get a train. Yes, that was [...] April 1945.

11:43:09:23

Gabor Lacko o/o/v

everything I managed to hang onto from those days, I've got, that's why I've got my yellow star, my I'm just very sorry that the proper yellow star I had, which had *Jude* written on it the Germans gave it to us. We discarded it,

Gabor Lacko iv

then the Russians came in, everybody tore it off, saying and thinking that is something we shall never need again, and we threw it away, which is a great shame, I should have kept it.

ARTEFACT 5: Scan of photo of Mother aged 45

11:43:43:02

Gabor Lacko o/o/v

[...] that's my mother [...] aged about 45, fairly soon after we got back from deportation [...] it's a picture that was made for a document which everybody had to carry in Hungary, something like a ID card that was made for that.

ARTEFACT 6: Scan of photo of Gabor's father

11:44:11:10

Gabor Lacko o/o/v

That's my father, I was at university at Budapest, and I went back for one of my summer breaks and I had a [...] camera and took a picture of him [...] He was very, very, very nice guy, he was my best friend [...] Lorenz, Lorenz which is Lawrence.

ARTEFACT 7: Scan of photo of Gabor's father

11:44:42:14

Gabor Lacko o/o/v

That's a different picture of my dad from the same time [...] Aged 55. He had a hard life, he spent five years in Siberia, after the First War and he was taken to the Ukraine, the Second War. He was a well-travelled man. [...] it was in 1916, he was born in 1896, so he 20 years old when he got captured and 25 years old when he got back from Siberia. While he was there he learned to speak Russian.

Gabor Lacko iv

I don't think I would like to be in Siberia for five years, I don't think he liked it either. It wasn't a matter of choice.

ARTEFACT 7: Scan of photo of Gabor's mother

11:45:44:16

Gabor Lacko o/o/v

That's my mother [...] mother was Elizabeth - Erzsebet [...] She was very neat, very lovely [...] She always had to look just perfect and expected us to look just right. She ruled our family with a very strong hand [...] I was very close with both of them. We were a very close family [...]

Gabor Lacko iv

But I was the youngest of the two children, so probably mother had some sort of affinity, I was also a boy. But I'm pretty sure they went out of their way to treat both of us equal. With the same amount of love.

Gabor Lacko o/o/v

It was a great family.

11:46:44:08

Gabor Lacko iv

[...] if you look at those photographs there is not one of them from before the war or during the war because they are all lost. My mother's parents, my grandparents, whom I never, I didn't know any of my grandparents, they all died before I was born. But they had their pictures beautifully framed, it used to hang in my mother's, in my parent's bedroom. We found those pictures after the war, but some kind Hungarian poked their eyes out of the picture, just to give you a little insight on the mentality of some idiots.

ARTEFACT 8: Scan of photo of Gabor's mother with her first grandchild

11:47:29:17

Gabor Lacko

That is my mother with her first grandchild. [*Hungarian word for Susan*] or Susan [...] 1953.

ARTEFACT 9: Scan of photo of mother and father, 1956

11:47:50:00

Gabor Lacko

This is a picture of my mother and father in 1956 August. We went to Transylvania on a company outing with the company my mother worked for and that's, er, historical and geographical spot in Transylvania and anybody who visits the place should go to that monument, so I took their picture there. [...] it was in 1956 but two months later, came the revolution and three months later I left the country, and six

months later my father was dead [...]they both look right as rain and it's hard to believe that, that was the last time when we were together [...] I went back several times to Hungary and I saw my mother, but father was dead. He died in February 1957, aged 60.

ARTEFACT 10: Scan of photo of his sister Julia aged 79.

11:49:09:13

Gabor Lacko o/o/v

That's my sister on my 75th birthday [...] she was four years older, so she was 79 then and she didn't live till her 80th birthday, so she probably died six months later or so and she looks as right as rain but she died [...] She went [...] to university [...] and got a degree in Hungarian Literature and she became a very important person in the Hungarian Library network, [...] she loved literature and she knew a hell of a lot about it.

Gabor Lacko iv

I came here on my own and nobody ever even considered to join me because of everybody had a profession which tied them to Hungary. Being an engineer like me is fairly portable, but with an Hungarian degree in literature or my niece is a solicitor, it's not so easy.

Gabor o/o/v

[...]I would have liked them to leave but whenever I brought up the subject, "and what shall we do over there with our profession?" and that was the end of the question.

Gabor Lacko iv

But being a solicitor in a different language, in a different law, is not so easy

11:51:02:21

Caption: IN 1967: GABOR VISITED THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE COMPANY HE HAD LABOURED FOR UNPAID DURING THE WAR

11:51:04:05

Gabor Lacko

It was 1967 and I was visiting Vienna and I remember the name of the company we worked for Adalbert Kallinger they are still around and I went to their headquarters and I said I used to work for when I was a young boy aged 13 in 1944, 45, 44 and I never got paid for it and they said yes, we paid the German state and I said well in that case it's perfectly good, I thank you very much, goodbye. I just wanted to see what they looked like and interesting is that a few years later I went to Budapest and my sister is a very mysterious mind said when you go to the centre, have a look at the town hall and I said why, she said you will see. So I went to see the town hall and there was a notice on the building that Budapest town hall being extended and rebuilt and renovated, architect Adalbert Kallinger and that was the same company that we were working for in 1944 ... well as slaves, we were, but they are still in existence and I looked at, I googled them not so long ago, they are still around.

11:52:47:02

Caption: HE WAS NEVER PERSONALLY COMPENSATED