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# Arthur Salcman oral history interview by Chris Patti, May 3, 2010

Arthur Salcman (Interviewee)

Chris J. Patti (Interviewer)

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**Chris Patti:** Okay, today's date is May 4, 2010. We're interviewing survivor Arthur Salcman. I'm the interviewer; my name is Chris Patti. We're in St. Petersburg, Florida, the country is the United States, the language is English, and the videographers are Jane Duncan and Richard Schmidt.

Okay, Mr. Salcman, could you please tell me your name at birth?

**Arthur Salcman:** That's Salzmen.

CP: And was it—can you spell that for me?

AS: S-a-l-z-m-e-n.

CP: Thank you. At birth it was spelled with a Z, is that correct?

AS: When I was born, yeah.

CP: Okay, thank you. And did you go by any other names during the Holocaust?

AS: Oh, yeah, I had many names during the Holocaust. I have names that they gave me, the partisan group. I was working on the rail station, and I was shipping—can you imagine?—wood to Germany. They didn't know my real name. And the place was Vranov nad Topľou, the area. And as a young man—

CP: Can I interrupt you for one second? Before we go into that story, you had one main name that you went by during the Holocaust. Is that correct? Szabo Miklos?

AS: Szabo Miklos, yeah.

CP: Is that S-z-a-b-o?

AS: Yeah, it's Hungarian spelling.

CP: Okay.

AS: S-z—it's S. Szabo, b-o. Miklos is M-i-k-l-o-s.

CP: Okay, thank you. And that's the name that you went by, that was your—the fake name that you went by, correct?

AS: Oh, I went by another name too; you know, it depends where I have to change the name.

CP: Oh, okay.

AS: If they were on top of me and I knew they know my name and [that] I was there, I had to change my name.

CP: Do you remember one or two other main names that you went by at that time?

AS: Ah—

CP: If not, it's okay.

AS: I don't remember, but I remember that I came—the way I served the—saved myself, that I have to do the last escape from a hiding place that I was working. I had to escape from there because the man said—I walked in there and I was working there—the half of the division that I was working in Bratislava—Bratislava—knew how I am because I helped him to get a unit lathe, a big lathe that wasn't available during the war. Because everything was cut off from Czechoslovakia, you know. England and America, they didn't deliver anything.

So he saw a lathe where I was in charge. That guy took me in, the person; he had a tractor service—it was called tractor service—in Michalovce. And one day he came after me and he says, "Look, Arthur, I'm not an engineer. I'm a businessman. And by the way," he says, "You are not a businessman," because he says, "You are not—I know you is an engineer, but not a businessman. I will handle my part, and I will handle yours. The Russians are getting closer, closer to occupy the city here." The city was Michalovce; it was in East Slovakia, and there was his factory. And he says, "I have plans, and I want to put you in charge. You will save my machinery and I will save your life. That's how we will work it." And he was shipping to me—he told me where his plant was. His plant was in a city on East Slovakia, not far from Bratislava—what was it?

**Lilly Salcman:** Banská Bystrica.

AS: Banská Bystrica—no. Banská Bystrica was already (inaudible). The plant was in the other city.

LS: Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš.

AS: Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš.

CP: Wow.

AS: Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš.

CP: I don't suppose I could ask you to spell that; it sounds like a lot of letters, though.

AS: (laughs) I could spell.

CP: Okay. But before we continue with this story, I was hoping if we could start at the beginning and then pick it back up once we get to there. Do you know how old are you, about when this is happening, when that story is?

AS: About thirty-four.

CP: Thirty-four, okay. So this is around the end of the war—

LS: Yeah.

CP: —that you're talking about? Okay. Can we start back at the very beginning? You were born—is it correct that you were born June 10, 1911?

AS: It's correct.

CP: And so, can you tell me your age today?

AS: Ninety-nine.

CP: Ninety-nine. So you got a big birthday coming up?

AS: Yeah. (laughs)

CP: And is it true that you were born in Poša, Czechoslovakia?

AS: Poša. Poša, P-o-s-a. On the S there is a mark; it makes it soft. Poša.

CP: Poša.

AS: Yeah.

CP: Okay, thank you. Can you tell me what your life was like as a child?

AS: Oh, beautiful. We had a part of a small town, small, and we were like one unit. All of us used to dance together. Like, everybody knew my dad and he knew everybody.

LS: Christian and Jews.

AS: What you said?

LS: Christian, and Jews.

AS: Christian and Jew. Yeah, that's true. Our best friend was—our (inaudible). He was a teacher's son, and he slept with us in one—in our building with us, with the two boys, Alfred, my brother, and me. And he was with us like a brother, because we had twice as big a place as they had, so he was with us and we were playing soccer all the time, always. And in the wintertime they had to help my brother to take me to school there, because the school was on top of a hill and they had to drag a—

LS: Sled.

AS: Sled. And so my brother was insisting, he says, "You won't be—I won't let you to play with us if you don't help me to drag the sled with my brother."

CP: (laughs) He told that to the (inaudible) character?

AS: The (inaudible), yeah.

CP: Can you tell me why were you being taken on a sled to school?

AS: Because I had swollen legs from the winter, frozen.

CP: Oh, okay.

AS: Frozen, you know.

CP: And so, you had—

AS: And we had to carry—we weren't so lucky as the kids today, you know. They're like directors. They have schools, beautiful; they get to eat and to drink. The only thing they have to do for themselves [is] the work. But we had to carry the wood to school, two, three pieces of wood, each one. Otherwise you would have cold, so you would freeze then. So, that's what we had to do.

CP: Can you tell me a little bit about your family, how many brothers and sisters you had, and your parents?

AS: I had seven—we were seven sisters and brothers, five girls and two boys. So, there were seven of us. And my closest friend, who I met after the war just before he died—I meet and Lilly met him in Israel, because he changed his name, you know, again. His name was Ernamsky; he was born Ed Namser. We grow up together. He started building houses at the university and I studied machinery, engineering.

LS: Mechanical.

AS: So, but we were very close friends. If his mother wanted to go to the city, my mother took care of the whole bunch of his group and our group. If my mother wanted to go to the city, his mother took care of the whole group. Yes, that's how people lived in those days. There wasn't hospitals like now, for every little thing. You wound up in the hospital: the hospital was your home. Grandpa is being taken care [of] by his sons, by his grandsons; the family took care of people. And today, it depends on strangers; money will do it.

CP: Can you tell me a little bit about your father?

AS: My father was a very nice person, tall man, very well liked. He was so well liked. When he was a young man, he was in Budapest in the Jewish church, in the Jewish synagogue. He was singing—



LS: In the choir.

AS: In the choir. He was one of the best singers they ever had. So after the war, I went there with my brother, and I wanted to take pictures of us that—we got them to let us in, in that big synagogue, and someone was taking, but by the time we came home it was—we came home and it was black.

LS: It was too dark.

AS: We didn't get nothing. Well, anyhow, so he used to do his prayer Friday evening, for Saturdays. And the priest in the town was such a close friend to my dad that when—they put down the screens and Dad was singing and he has this choir there. Everybody was good; I was the bad singer, because I didn't have good hearing. So I had to be quiet while the rest was a group. And the pope—suddenly, in the dark, the pope couldn't reach it, because there was a fence in front of the house. So the priest, I see him, and he took his stick—

LS: Cane.

AS: And he knocked on the window, he says, "Mr. Salzmen, continue, continue; it's beautiful!" (CP laughs) He loved it. "Continue—it's beautiful!" He was listening all the time in the—he was love, he was just love. Christians, they wanted to have him for—

LS: Weddings.

AS: Weddings. He says, "Look, I will love to come. I'm not so religious, but I cannot do it for the people; you know, that is something that you have to respect other feeling—other people's feeling, too. So I cannot do it, because I kept kosher, I have—" "Don't you worry; you will have everything good you have to have. You will have a special table, but we want you. Our daughter is getting married." The man owned a mill—where they make flour, you know—and he was very well to do and he loved my dad. And he knew what a good singer he was, and so he wanted to have him at the wedding. So they had him.

My daddy could make a deal. It's like this girl, my granddaughter said, "I'm going to do business with Grandpa, because it's tougher to do business with Grandpa."

CP: Because you're easier to do business with? (laughs)

AS: No, she did the business—she wanted toys—with me, because it's easier for her to do business. My dad, it was easier to do business with him than with my mom. Mom was a little bit tougher.

CP: So you inherited that trait, but you didn't inherit any of the singing ability?

AS: (laughs)

CP: Can you tell me about your mother?

AS: My mother was a short lady, maybe an inch higher or taller, but I wouldn't know today if she was taller or the same size. And all her kids were bigger—not much bigger but bigger, taller. The oldest sister was tallest among us. Szidonia was her name, and that's her son, that doctor of engineering. Dr. Polak is his name. His mom married a Polack, so his name is Dr. Polak, Arnold. He was teaching engineering at Cincinnati University.

LS: Aeronautics.

AS: He could have stayed down forever there; they wanted him. But the time came in and he said, "I have to go, because I've had enough."

CP: So did your mother just stay at home and take care of the house and the kids?

AS: Kids, yeah. And that's plenty. You know, today you have all of two kids; it's a big job. The whole world knows about it, how hard it is to take care of that one or two kids. In those days seven was nothing hard, they were doing—and as I said, they were helping each other. Strangers would cross the street when my mom needed someone. The lady from across the street would take care of us, all of us, and vice versa: when they need something she would take care of their kids. It was a different life all together.

CP: What did your dad do for work?

AS: Well, we had a store. What do you call—a (inaudible).

LS: No, a grocery store.

AS: Grocery, grocery store.

CP: Okay.

AS: And we then leave—he married that—my grandpa moved to the city, so he inherited the store what they had. But we didn't conduct it; we hired someone who was conducting—that was butcher shop—that was conducting, because he was no butcher. He was a singer, but not a butcher. (laughs)

CP: Can you tell me how religion was in your family when you were growing up, and religion in the area that you were growing up?

AS: Very nice and very respectful on all the sides, you know. My dad was a joker for—I'll just tell you how well he was liked and how people appreciated talking to him, and he appreciated talking to those people, because in front of the building, our building, he's standing, and suddenly goes a gentleman with his grandpa. And my daddy calls out to the kids, all the kids, and grabs the kid and picks him up and start to kiss him. He said, "Don't kiss him, he's Jewish! He's Jewish. They killed Christ. Don't kiss him." And other people would get mad. Daddy said, "Don't listen to Grandpa. He knows he's wrong. I didn't kill; the Jews there in the next town killed him. I love them!" (laughs) So the guy started to kiss my dad!

CP: Wow. So he could just take anti-Semitism and defuse it in a joke like that.

AS: Absolutely.

CP: Wow.

AS: That kind of a guy he was.

CP: That's an amazing guy.

AS: Yeah. So was my brother, too. My brother was like this one. And he was going to *gymnázium* in Michalovce, because we had to move to a city to go to higher education. So he moved there, and he was in a play that they put him in; he was a singer, and he inherited it from Dad. So in the play was a—like you were—what is Joshua, was he—?

LS: Yeah, Joshua. Joshua was in *My Fair Lady*.

AS: *My Fair Lady*. And suddenly, after the game was over, it was performed in the *gymnázium* in the school. So a gentleman who was working on the—

LS: Radio.

AS: —a radio station in Czechoslovakia wants to talk to the parents of my brother. He went up to the director. “I want to see—” “What do you want?” “Well,” he says, “that boy shouldn't waste his time. He's beautiful, he's an exceptional singer.” And they want to talk, so they got in touch with my dad and got the permission—very gladly because that was in his heart, you know. And he became a singer for every week in Košice—the city was called Košice. That was the biggest Slovak city that we had.

LS: After Bratislava.

AS: What place?

LS: After Bratislava.

AS: After Bratislava, yeah. Bratislava is the capital. So they invited him, and you know, we didn't have radios like they have now. We have to make the radio. We had to make ourselves the students, had to make to be able to listen. So we build ourselves—teachers were helping us and we built ourselves radios because Alfred—that was his name—was going to sing. So we had—everybody was calling everybody. “Alfred is going to be on the program.” And he was making more money as a student than many people who were professionally employed. He was very good, exceptional.

CP: Wow.

AS: After the war—after the war, he was hired. He came back from Auschwitz, but he didn't know my name. When I came there here to speak next to him, I said, "I'm your brother, Alfred," because I'm the only one who wasn't in concentration camp, you know. And I met a doctor who was helping him in the hospital, so he told me, "That is your brother; he came back from Auschwitz." So I went to him, and he's talking. I don't know what he was talking, I still don't know. But he said, "(inaudible) spent a few weeks there." And finally he said, "(inaudible)." And he came out to the United States, but surviving.

After he survived, they called him back to his job and he refused. He was in charge of a big company where they were publishing—a publisher was the company. Mazáč was the name of the company. He was in charge and they called him back, that his job is open for him. He says, "No, thank you." He took a job with the airline, because he spoke a few languages: English, Hungarian, German, you know, a little Spanish, and they appreciate that, so they wanted him. So he was (inaudible) the planes at night from Prague. Starting of the flight, always he was there, you know. He helped people to get out, who were supposed to escape and couldn't escape.

CP: Wow.

LS: (inaudible)

AS: It was very special person. And with me, (phone beeps) I came to the town after—I had to prove that my name is Salcman because after I was free, so I still had the name Szabo Miklos.

LS: That's the telephone.

AS: The telephone. Is the—

CP: Yeah, it's okay. But before we get to—'cause we'll get to that story in just a little bit—I was wondering—it sounds like you had a very idyllic upbringing. Everything sounds like it was beautiful when you were growing up. People were getting along. When did you notice things were changing, and how old were you when things started to change?

AS: I was about fifteen. Fourteen, fifteen. No, I must have been older. I was seventeen, eighteen, something like that. And I saw friends that I played with them: they were such close friends, and they turned their back on me. Kids that are like—they used to run up to me, “Hi, Arthur,” and hug me and I get the bike and go. They didn’t do it. They turned the other way because they were afraid to have Jews as friends. So they turned their back. Then I realized, “Oh, that’s not the same thing anymore.” And I felt very bad, and I still feel very bad, because if there wouldn’t be such a good guys in the world, I wouldn’t be sitting here today. There were good ones, too. They helped me to save my life.

And the good ones—I will tell you when I was in the railroad, escaping, because I knew somebody’s watching me at night to escape. So at night, the planes were dark, out of the lights. They were afraid in Czechoslovakia they will bomb them, the English. First we were friends, but then later on, you know, we were enemies. So there I’m sitting, I was on the—no, he was on the other side and I was here. There was just rows in the train at night. And the one who was controlling the seats and giving out the tickets has a little flashlight, and took and checked. Everybody had to have a name and a badge. As (inaudible) the badge or as horrible as it was, you had to have, otherwise—

So he looked and sees then Arthur Salzmen. He was going with me to college. So, all the time I was hoping, “Oh, that guy won’t give me up, he wouldn’t hand me over.” No. God blessing my hopes, or is blessed, because that was the best person I ever met. So I go out of the train and he [said], “Arthur! Don’t rush for me, Arthur. I have a beautiful apartment; I work here in Bratislava. I see you didn’t shave, you didn’t clean. You can stay over with me one night.” And he let me stay over. In the morning he says, “I go to work and I cannot let you here, because they will find out. You have to go.” So I had to go; but this is the guy who instead of handing me over is protecting me.

And after the war, I came home. The town had about—I would say about seven or eight hundred people, that’s all. It was a big town, big department stores there, and they have a camera company there where I lived. In the department that they were looking for me—the Skoda Works with a German engineer, was my head. Schtager was his name. And the German engineer, Schtager, called me in and says, “Look, you have to go because they pointed their fingers at you. You have to go.”

CP: So you got laid off? They had to—

AS: Yeah. It was lucky, it was a help, you know, because they pointing. The Germans moved in, you know, Plzeň. I worked in Plzeň at the Skoda Works where the borderline of the Sudetenland. Sudetenland was the land went to all Germans. So he said, “They were pointing at you.” So after the war, I came home and I found an empty house,

everything gone. All the furniture, animals, everything is gone. But people, some of them carried back, on their back, furniture that they took from them on the boat. And the head of the office was Mr. Novak, Geza Novak, and in the office was a note from the Skoda Works. "If Arthur Salzman is alive, his job is waiting for him."

LS: He meant telegram.

CP: Wow! And you went back? And you worked there until you moved to the United States, correct? Can you spell Skoda Works for me?

AS: What?

CP: Can you spell Skoda Works for me, where you worked?

AS: S-k-o-d-a.

CP: Okay.

AS: And I have a little—

LS: Sculpture.

AS: Sculpture. When I came back, they gave me a dinner and they gave me a sculpture. And when I came to the United States, I didn't bring money, but I brought very good memories.

LS: And the sculpture.

CP: That's amazing.

(doorbell rings)

AS: When you walk into my son's house, who has everything, full of expensive pictures there that he picked all over the world and whatever, because he was head of the—he was chairman of (inaudible), a president of culture (inaudible).

(to someone else) Tom!

**Tom:** Hello!

AS: Hello, Tom. (CP laughs)

**Jane Duncan:** Real life.

CP: Yup, yup. Well you have—

AS: He's the most—I mean, he's so—he works here. He's in charge, and when he saw our kids here and they had—from the school, sweaters on or something. (inaudible) So, we became very close. Well, that's a different country. I hope it stays like this one. This is great country.

CP: Can I ask you to share the story about the last Passover with your family? Do you remember that story?

AS: Yeah, I do.

CP: Would you share that?

AS: Yeah. I mentioned that the last time?

CP: Um, yeah, we talked about it a little bit.

AS: The little—my sisters. My sisters were there, my brother-in-laws were there, and the little kids were there, the tiny kids. One, the little boy, he was of all of them the youngest one. The youngest kids wasn't walking yet; you know, she's just staring. Her mother all



the time had the baby in the hands, and the other one was about five, four or five years old, I don't know exactly what they were.

And the guy was telling us. This was—this guy who was talking now wasn't a friend anymore of humanity. But he wasn't a friend not only not Jews; he was like this one, he was born. So he says, "You girls, you come next. But if your husbands give up their jobs and report themselves to the German people and they are waiting there when they're taking you, [they will get to] pick the finest jobs." He was lying. Such liars, you know. And people gave up to save their wives, to save their children. The little boy was about four years old and he said, "I don't want to go, I don't want to go!" You are the man that's talking; can you imagine an old guy, he's talking how good he will have the parents. And four, four and a half years old—Tommy was his name, Tom. He was, "I don't want to go with them." And he cried loud, but he went. His mom wanted to save his—the husband and the other sister wanted to save her, and he yelled.

There was a mixture of people, you know. There was good ones and bad ones. The bad ones, the reverse; the good ones would have been the majority. The good ones saved some people. Now, I had—for instance, I was at the military, and when I was at the military—

CP: And this was before—

AS: You want me to wait?

CP: And this was before the war started, correct, when you were in the military?

AS: Yeah. Oh, I was before the military. When I came home and I found it there, that "If Arthur Salzman is alive, his job is waiting for him." So I went back. I couldn't—if they gave me all of Czechoslovakia, I wouldn't have stayed there. I was disappointed. So I was running then.

CP: So you—when you were talking about the last Passover, you told about hiding in the hay, and your family ran out—

AS: That's right.

CP: Can you tell me about that?

AS: Yeah, the (inaudible) you mentioned. So my brother and myself, we were the only one that left behind the building. A little dog was there, a favorite of my dad. The dog knew that they're beating the animals, they stealing them, you know; instead of paying really the price of what they were, they were getting them for nothing.

CP: So the dog—the dog could tell that it was wrong, that they were stealing?

AS: The dog knew that this grabbing of the sleds and fighting with the people—"Don't take this! This doesn't belong to you!" Unbelievable. The dog taught the lesson to the human beings how to act. And I and my brother, we are watching in the place where there was full of—*sneo*—

LS: Hay.

AS: Hay. Loaded with hay, and between the cracks of the boards.

CP: Wow.

AS: And then we saw all the friends—we thought they are friends. Oh, they were grabbing the things.

CP: So you could actually see it through the boards while you were hiding?

AS: Yeah, because they were the cracks there, you know, you match the boards. They were cheap and we could see. So then it came down, and it was everything over with my brother and we decided, and I had—I had in my hand a hammer, a big hammer, a sledgehammer, and my brother had an axe. And you know between the two roads there was a wall there that my dad, he was—(inaudible) there in the middle. There was a big wall there, big; it was bigger than this wall. It was big enough that a man couldn't jump it; he had to walk through.

So we were going, the two of us with these hammers, one and the other one. And he said, "Now, you come—any one of you who come here is asking for something that we normally we wouldn't do it; but we have to save our lives, and we will try to save it." They didn't touch us. We went through the forest. And they went up then in the city

where I was working for a German company, and when they were loading—the closest city was called Vranov nad Topľou, Vranov nad Topľou.

LS: Just right.

AS: Vranov, V-r—

LS: —a—

AS: —a-n-o-v.

CP: Thank you.

AS: Nad Topľou is over the Topľa [River]; that's the water. Anyhow, the man that gave me the address Szabo Miklos came to me; his mother-in-law came to me. I was control of them. I was in charge of the five or six people that were loaning money (inaudible), because everything was to Germany. And he came to me and he says, "Arthur, I have bad news for you." And I said, "What is the bad news, Miklos?" He was a communist, but he was a good human being. I don't care what he was; he was a good human being. He wanted to save a person, a person's life. He came to me and says, "You got to disappear, because they said, 'Tomorrow he is going in there.' They pointed the fingers at you. Tomorrow you will leave." So he said, "Before you finish up tonight, I'm going home. My wife will prepare for you bread and *saláma*." I don't know what you call it. It's from a pig.

CP: Salami?

AS: *Saláma*.

CP: Or ham?

AS: Ham! Ham. And he says, "I'll prepare for you this and that," and he says, "Disappear." And that's how I disappeared and started in going with those people in Michalovce. He said, "I want you to—I'm not an engineer, I'm a businessman. And I want you to take care of my things; if we save them, after the war, if you want to you stay with me." So after the war he came after me and he says, "Would you like to stay with

me?” I said, “Thank you for saving me.” He wanted to give me money, a suit I should buy myself. It was nothing. I say, “You are great, but I cannot work anymore.”

CP: So Szabo actually gave you his papers, right?

AS: Yes, Szabo Miklos. I still have his papers.

CP: So was he risking his life by doing that?

AS: Oh, absolutely; if they caught me and they go—and so they take him.

CP: I’m going to ask you to share another one of the, I think, your saddest stories, and that’s the last time you saw your parents. Would you tell us about that, please?

AS: My sad story was—

CP: Okay.

AS: And here I would be—my nephew, you see, he knew already, the boy—he was here teaching thermodynamics in the United States. And he knew where they are and he was hiding with me, but they caught him and they broke up the line between him and me, and I lost. I just found him after—I went after the war and I could travel, and we went with Lilly. And I went to this, where he was kept in, that place. And there was his name, Arnold Polak; he was fourteen years old. He’s asking me, “Go there at such and such a date.” He was put on the train to Auschwitz, and I wait for him (inaudible). So anyhow—so what was the question?

CP: The last time you saw your parents?

AS: Oh, I was thinking. So I came to the place where my mom was, and I came to her as a partisan, you know. She had a tough time to recognize me, the way I was dressed up, you know, and the way I spoke, but she did. And the fence is normal, what they ask of us, not too high. They put them in a school. On one side were the men and on one side were the women. So I came there, and there she is. And first I went to visit Dad, and then I went to visit her. But when I came to her, it was (inaudible). She said, “Son, will I see you again?” She never saw; she never saw me again.

CP: And they were taken to Auschwitz, is that correct?

AS: And she knew that, she felt it, but she wouldn't leave Dad; he was by himself. I had—my brother has problems, too. And in Prague—he was working, as I said, in Prague at the airport. We were sitting in a restaurant during Hitler's time, before they found out who we are. We were sitting a restaurant, and the head of the police department was Dr. Jaroslav Mareš; he was with me in the officer school, in the reserve officer school, so we were very close friends—trained to be friends, not enemies, you know. And there we are sitting, and suddenly in the door someone is waving with his finger. I see my brother get up and walk out, but they didn't let him in anymore; he just walked out. He got lost. So, they took him to the police department. They took him to the police department, and he took some time for my friend Dr. Mareš, who was a police department chief in Prague. It took some time to find out where, in which department, who did it. It took him over a week. But once he found out, he got him out. So there's another one, Dr. Jaroslav Mareš.

And when my wife was pregnant and then she had the baby, Michael was born, so he used to send me—it was after the war already; the war, you know. He came back and he got his position back, so after the war. So he used to say—not to say, but he used to put in an envelope to them, the tickets. You see, they were—just pregnant women would get permission to get bananas, chocolate, milk, special items; they were controlled. And he would send it in an envelope and mail it without his address, just my address on top, and put in his tickets and mailed it from Prague to Plzeň. I should have—she was in those days supposed to have the baby. And the answer was, when I told him, “Don't do that, Jaroslav, don't do that; you need it as badly as she does.” “No, she needs it more; you don't know what she needs.” And he was sending his ticket, and we didn't leave Czechoslovakia. He was sending these tickets to me.

LC: This was after the war.

AS: After the war. Can you imagine? This is another one where they would have caught him, and his father was the head of the rail—the big railroad station in Prague. He was head of the police department, but his father was the head of the police—of the railroad department.

CP: Should we take a break? Yeah, I think—is that okay? You want to take a quick break while we change the tapes?

AS: Yeah, sure.

CP: Okay.

*Part 1 ends; part 2 begins.*

CP: Okay, this is tape two of our interview with Arthur Salcman. And I was wondering if you could tell me the story of how your nephew came to hide with you: how you went into hiding, and then when did your nephew join you?

AS: Well, my nephew's father was in business with a gentleman who has a very big farm, and we were exchanging live animals with—so I don't exactly know the detail, you know. And he was hiding both of them and his wife—his mother, Joshua and his mother. And the man who told them, who gave them the secret where I am hiding, was the railroad manager in the town there. And he gave out the secret. The railroad manager walked under the windows [of] the train when they were loading the Jewish people there. And his father was already on the train, and he was saying, "Your dad is there on the top of the building with me—your grandpa, your grandpa." And that's how they got really to think where I am and that I escaped, because at the time being we didn't know about nothing. Since they caught him—he knew he was the only one that knew where I lived. He could come to me, come my way; but since they caught him I have to change many times the places so he didn't know anymore.

So around twelve o'clock at night, when it was dark and the train started the route, the father was telling him, "Josh, I want you to go after your uncle." And he still feels today like I am more of his father than his father was. "I want you to go after your uncle." But he didn't want to leave him. But he says he was pushing me so hard, working on him, that, on one occasion, he says, "I broke down and the train started to slow down, and he practically pushed me out." He says, "That's how I escaped."

And then, around twelve o'clock at night, someone comes in the railroad station and knocks on the door. That's where he lived, the man who was in charge of the railroad. Knocked on the door—Joshua was the one who knocked on the door, and he sees there in front of him a kid, a grown up kid that's dirty, you know. He says, "My uncle is here with you." And he says, "Yeah," and that's how we got together. And he took us down then in the basement. They had people who were making pictures, a whole area, and were very much politically involved in everything. So that's how we got together. And then with him, from there we had to escape, because they took his mom and dad. And when we went—you found the book?

LS: No, but I'll find it. It's here because I looked at it the other day.

AS: Yeah, I'm sorry that I—

LS: (inaudible)

AS: Anyhow, he took me there to the wives—to the gentleman's wife's sister. They had in Bratislava, in the city, under a hill, which was getting up the top. He had a sister living beautifully: they were in high positions to everybody, was in high position. And she was crying on our shoulders every day that we should go already, but she wouldn't give us away because she's afraid, afraid. We didn't have anywhere to go.

But then we had to, because—for instance, we were watching every day a truck going up with four or five or six people, up the hill. And it was daytime and they stayed there almost till the evening. And then suddenly we lost it, because there in the place there were trees and stuff. And there was the place where they getting rid of the people, their political enemies. They were killing them by shots, and we were counting: shot one, shot two, shot three, shot four. So, you know, they were all shot by them. And then back—it was coming the truck, already, by one driver. Took care of the deaths of our—and then he had to escape, and I had to hide. So I found myself a place there in that city by a factory. What was the name? You can—do you remember the name of the factory where I got myself a job there? This is the fellow that needed the—a very big—

LS: Lee.

AS: Lee. And we had a lathe and I helped him to get the lathe, because it wasn't easy to get a lathe then. People were giving money—

LS: (inaudible)

AS: Yeah. What is it?

LS: You are repeating; you already—

AS: Yeah, yeah, I said it. So that's how I got—so when I had to hide then, later on, I went to—even though I was yelling already from a distance, “Hi, this is Szabo Miklos,”

because I didn't want that they should give me away, you know, or he should give me away. I was yelling to him under what name I am going to meet him.

CP: So he didn't say, "Hi, Art."

AS: No, he was just saying, "Hi, hi," he said to me. And I had to escape. So the reason I had to escape was because—sometimes it's good if you don't know things, you know. I had to do some work in the factory. I put on myself all the oil and everything that I should look like a mechanic. But I acted like no mechanic, because I needed to cut some gears, and I knew how to figure out how to do things myself, and they were watching. And then I go to the place—they had a little café room where you could buy sandwiches, rolls. And there is a man sitting in black uniform and a black hat, initials from Germany, all trained well, and after a while he looks at me. I got myself a coffee, he looks at me, and he says, "Gee, I think I know you." I said, "You know me from where?" He says, "Aren't you the Jew from the east coast?" And he told me that—

LS: He was from eastern Czechoslovakia.

AS: And I say—so then I knew, and I recognized him right away. I used to play soccer with him when I was a little boy, twelve years, thirteen. And he said, "Jew," and when he said once more, I said, "You SOB, don't call me Jew!" he said, "You must be the Jew!" I hit him and it took him back for a while, but I didn't think that he was disarmed completely. So I left the place and I went to that director and I told him, "Look what happened to me; I have to leave." And I tell him what happened, and he says, "You must leave right away." So I left right away. And I came out to a place not far from there that a heavy-set lady—you know, good, well-built, about fifty-five, maybe sixty—comes in and puts in her leg between—I rang the bell. It was at night and it was snowing and (inaudible).

And by the way, I got there, so one of the German guys was killed, an officer. So they asked him if they want some help. He said, "Yeah, if there is a doctor." So there was one, and he was from Prešov. Prešov is a city. And then they ask him if he is Jewish, and the guy who was dying there was a German officer, laying on the ground dying. And he says, "No, if he's Jewish I don't want him." He was dying, but he didn't want him because he's Jewish. But I don't think that that man survived. I never saw him anymore.

So, that's why they saved me. They threw in some luggage on me—not luggage. In the bag they threw me, dungarees and a shirt. I picked it up because they were throwing—the people from the town were helping the prisoners there. And over the fence they were throwing in food; but I, instead of food, I got a shirt, which was more important for me.



And I went in the restroom at night and then dressed up put just the shirt and this on, and I was waiting when the occasion will be there and jumped in some (inaudible). Then when I escaped—so that was the reason (inaudible).

And I came there and I ringed the bell. I didn't know who was there; I just knew it's a big house, very big. It was very impressive, so they must be some well-to-do people here; maybe there is also somebody there with feelings, I don't know. When you try to save your life, you accept anything. So I put in—where she had her foot I put in my foot, and she wanted to close the door, the gate, and I wouldn't let her. I said, "Look, if you don't let me in"—and I named the name of the partisan unit, that everybody knew in the town there is partisans—a Russian, you know. And I named him, and I said, "If you don't let me in here, by tomorrow morning you won't have a house here." You know, you became as dirty almost as they were already; you were lying just to save your life. So, she let me in. And she let me in her house, although all the time she tried to tell me that her son would be at home, and that she couldn't do that because he's very much against.

Anyhow, she came to a corner there in her property where there were iron, brass, iron rusting on top of each other, a load. She tries to clean it away, and she opens about two by two feet, an opening, a small opening, and she lets me down. And she says there are other two people there—there are not two, there are three people in there, a husband and wife, and the child. The husband and wife—when I came there, I just couldn't believe it, you know, in the troubled world, how that could measure. There was Mr. Laufort, a fellow I knew personally—this is Mrs. Laufort—when I was on the train working and I knew everybody. And they have a daughter with them who's about seven, eight years old. And that was a pail and that was our toilet and our washroom, everything: one pail, and our water and everything. All the dirt, but that's what it was, all the equipment. And she had the sense to drop down—if she would have been mean she could have called the police, and they would have made her probably the head of a city or something, you know, the government.

But anyhow, there was five, six days later the Romanians. I hear already catching chicken there on the yard, because they were grabbing chickens, putting their own (inaudible). Anyhow, she comes out and she lifts up the thing and she says, "You're free now." I said, "Free?" I couldn't believe it.

LS: The Romanians were with the Russian Army.

AS: The Russian—the Russian Army freed us together with the Romanians, together. So the Russian officer there tells me, "What are you going to do now?" Because the people, the Lauforts, they were there. But for me, knowing that I was a partisan, so she was

looking for some reward—you know, she deserves; she saved a partisan. And so she says to me, “You don’t have to go down anymore; you are free. I have a couch there in foyer, and it’s a beautiful couch. You can stay.” So there I stayed. That night comes to me the officer, a Russian man, and wakes me up, shakes me, and says, “Who are you?” “Well,” I say, “I am a partisan and I’m from this and this group, and she gave me a place to stay here so I am staying here.” “And are you Jewish?” I say, “Yeah, I am Jewish.”

And then I wanted to get away from this one and I needed someone to tell that I’m not Szabo Miklos, but I’m Arthur Salzmen. So I needed witnesses, because the Russians wouldn’t let me just go free. I had to prove who I am. So I had to look for two people who can witness who I am and the witness one set of people. And the Lauforts had a daughter. I lived in Brooklyn and they lived in another part of Brooklyn, and they had a daughter who became a teacher who was teaching there in a school, in high school. But I never met her. On the phone I had discussions with people who knew the story, but not with them. We were all busy; we all had our own problems, you know. So this is the story—

CP: I just have a couple more questions to ask. And the first one is, can you tell me about how you became a partisan?

AS: Yeah. I’ll tell you; it’s very interesting. I became a partisan. Here I’m working and going to the railroad bringing machinery, and I am the one who is in front driving the tractor, and the people that I employ driving behind on the other tractor to prepare them for business. In about five, six weeks after this, suddenly two officers come in in a Jeep—an American Jeep automobile, a small one—come in into my office there and say, “Lieutenant Salzmen?” *You know, I still get goose pimples when I just mention it. “We know about you. Plukovnik (inaudible)—(inaudible) was the head of the army then. “He knows he went with you to school; he wants to see you.”*

*He knew of me, and he let me get by without telling me that he knows of me. But when he needed me, he did call. He says, “Do you know where your parents are?”*

*“I don’t know. I know they must not be alive anymore. I don’t know.”*

*“Where are your sisters and brothers?”*

*“I don’t know nothing.”*

*“So your place is not to go back anymore? You stay with us. I give you so many people.” He gave me 180 people, put me in charge. “And tonight we have a big discussion, and we’ll disarm them.” And I went and that was my first job, to disarm people. And people were happy to give up! (laughs) So that’s how this—that was—but that was—no, that was Kyslinky, the fight that the Germans caught me.*

*LS: The mountains.*

*AS: In the mountains. It’s named Kyslinky, the mountains. It’s a name that—*

*LS: K-y-s-l-i—*

*AS: K-y—*

*LS: —n-k-i.*

*CP: K-y-s-l—*

*LS: K-y-s-l-i-n—*

*AS: And the reason how it happened—that was—*

*LS: —k-i [sic]. Kyslinky.*

*CP: K-y-s-l-i-n-k-i [sic]? Okay.*

*AS: But this was why it happened. Unbelievable, you know, how things happen. There I am, and the first night when we are there—for me—there are horses that were here that were left, that people—because we are bombing from the top.*

*LS: And you slept in tents.*

*AS: You what?*

*LS: Tents. You slept in tents.*

*AS: Yeah, we slept in tents. So finally, one night we hear snaps. You know, it's funny; even an animal is more than a murderer of a human being. An animal! I step out from there, took my gun and step out—and there are the horses, the lost horses that felt that there is life somewhere around them. Looked for life, and there we are. So the other night I didn't pay any attention, and the third night—and then when I did not pay at all attention, there were the Russians. The (inaudible), we called them. They were the Russians who wanted to turn up—Moscow wasn't good for them. They wanted to change*  
—

*LS: They wanted to be Nazis.*

*AS: They wanted to be Nazis.*

*CP: Wow!*

*AS: And they took me and there I went, in a row of about 2,000 because there were so many strangers among us. And we weren't even partisans, you know, but they were there hiding. Hiding with us, you know, with the partisans. And they were taking us, and then I met a guy there—I didn't, but I'm standing there when they ask the fellow, "Is there any doctors among you?" So he said, "Yeah, there is a doctor; here he is." And he said, "Your name?" and he says his name. And he says, "If he's a Jew, I don't want a Jew." The German didn't want to have the doctor because he was Jewish.*

*CP: So that happened once you were captured by the Russian defectors?*

*AS: Yeah.*

*CP: Yeah.*

*AS: Yeah, when I was really captured. So they would capture all kinds of private people: doctors, lawyers, and this one; they were hiding among us, too. They went—the partisans, some were partisans and some didn't, you know.*

CP: Can you tell me about that captivity? What were the conditions like?

AS: What?

CP: When you were captured by the Russians?

AS: Oh, what was the conditions? It was horrible, because—for instance, when I was—when they were carrying us about four in a row—and the rows were a mile long; I don't know how many people there were. And the one that knew a little bit Russian and learned a little bit German in the meantime thought that they are guards already. So they have all the rights and stuff. For insistance, the guy who was next to me, he says—in German, and he speaks to me in German. And I turn around to my neighbor, and I tell him, “I don't talk German, I don't know German.” And he says to him “*Nicht spreche Deutsch,*” in the bad German.

LS: Broken German, yeah.

AS: In a bad German, yeah. I knew how to say it but I didn't say it, I didn't know. But he knew, so he hit me with a bayonet, you know, on the mouth. “Dumbbell!” All the way I had to be hit by the guy whose dumbbell I was, because I didn't know what he was talking. I didn't know because I wanted to save my life. So, that was the story.

CP: And how did you—

AS: And then they let people—and the men they had easier, because in America there was—for medical reasons, I understand, they had circumcsions. Boys are born and circumcsised, Jew or not Jew, because they said medically—

LS: (inaudible)

CP: So some people were not Jewish, but they were circumcsised. They had to die because—

LS: But not in Germany, not in Europe. In Europe only the Jews are circumcsised, in Europe.

AS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but—

LS: In the old Europe.

AS: Yeah.

LS: After the war they (inaudible).

AS: But let's not confuse them. But some I say were—they were not Jews that came from America, who were teaching me music. He was an American, and he was circumcised here in America; he was born here. And he wasn't Jewish, he was Christian, but he was circumcised.

LS: He wanted to bring us—if the Germans wanted to prove you are Jewish, they pull the pants down. That's it.

CP: Can you tell me, how did you escape once you were captured by the Russian defectors?

AS: Well, I'm telling you it was—when they were capturing us and the Jews—if they knew that they were Jewish people, they killed right there, one shot. Anybody could shoot a Jew; it wasn't nothing wrong with it. They should get from them some diploma for it, you know, a reward. Jews wasn't handled as a human being; it wasn't a human being. But the non-Jews were handled bad, too, you know, because they weren't Jewish and they were treated exactly the same.

CP: Can you tell me, then, what happened—

AS: So they left off the pants, you know, when they got us already to the final place, which was about one block, a big building—the high school. High school or elementary I don't know, but it was a big school, so it's one or the other one. It was loaded full, all around us, white this—the fences all around, and the guard was Germans mixed together with the very reliable Slovaks, Slavs who spoke already a little German and they got their education in Germany. They send them for a few weeks to Germany and they came back. They made up the officers.

So, they were to kill a human being because he's an officer now, you know, and so they let even—they went one by the other one day, [asking] your profession. You had to prove that—they even have interviews with each and every one. And I was waiting until he comes to me for an interview, because I knew for sure that I will be one of them, that I will not make it to the interview. So one night when I didn't hear anymore the work outside—it was raining, too—when I didn't hear any steps because they were at the other end, and I jumped—

LS: Out the window.

AS: And I went to the place where I got back, you know, and they accepted me with open arms and I didn't have to worry any more.

CP: So is that how the war ended for you?

AS: For me ended one way, the war. But I still have to—until it completely ended. It completely ended the war when the Romanian in that place where I said—the lady, she didn't take her foot out from the thing. And I stayed there, and then a few days later the guy came. She came and she said, "You are all free." But for me she had a place in the foyer; there was the couch. I don't have to go back. But the Lauforts, they were the real Jews. (laughs) They're such a—

CP: So after the war was over and you were liberated, you said that you got your job back at the Skoda Works?

AS: Yeah, I did.

CP: Did that happen pretty quick?

AS: I came very quick. I came to my town there, and I wanted the house to be rewritten to the original owners—the ownership, which was my father and my brother-in-law, you know, and another one. Three of them had the ownership. And the head of this office was Mister—

LS: Geza.

AS: Geza, what—I mentioned him before.

LS: (inaudible)

AS: Novak, Geza Novak. Novak. And when he saw me, he knew me when I was a free man, and his children and me, we played together. So he treated me like a human, especially after the war, when I was with him in his office and I had a gun on myself and a uniform, so I was thinking that he thought, “Here is somebody who is going to take advantage, now.” And I didn’t want to take any advantage. I just wanted peace and quiet, and I wanted the house back because it’s my house. So right away, he gave it in my name. Now I lost that house, and I have a nephew in Slovakia; he’s at the University of Bratislava. He is the mathematic department head. Otto Grošek is his name. He had a Christian name, kind of, but not made for saving; that was his original name and that’s why he stayed with it. He survived. So I bring him up—what, what?

CP: We are talking about after the end of the war.

AS: Oh, the—yeah, I brought him up because I asked him when they gave it back to me, you know, the house. And then suddenly, they’re sending me a bill from Slovakia. I don’t know how many thousands and thousands of dollars I have to pay for the house for the—

LS: You were still there, after you married Edith and you came to Texas.

AS: Yeah, yeah, but I wasn’t there. I was here in the United States when I got from the paper. I have papers—it’s still—

LS: The papers said that the house is yours, no?

AS: No.

LS: The house is yours if you go back and you live there.

AS: That’s exactly!



CP: Okay.

AS: They changed their—

LS: But he didn't want to go back.

AS: They changed the rules there. I can have the house back if I go there and I live there. But that—we leave Czechoslovakia, have a good time in the United States and—  
(inaudible).

CP: When did you come to the United States?

AS: In forty-six [1946]. Exactly—Lilly, when did I come, forty-six [1946] to the—?

LS: Who, here?

AS: Yeah, *Queen Mary* was the one—

LS: Is forty-nine [1949].

AS: I was on *Queen Mary* when they had the problem and they had to stop—

CP: Wow!

AS: —the boat. It's the first time that ever *Queen Mary* had to—

LS: The big storm. There was a big storm and they stuck in the middle of the Atlantic, which was—

CP: Wow!

**Carolyn Ellis:** And that was 1949?

LS: Forty-nine [1949], yeah.

CP: And then when you came here, you got a job as an engineer pretty quickly?

AS: Very quickly.

CP: And you stayed with that company forever, right?

AS: Well, I stayed—I just had two jobs in my life: one in Czechoslovakia and one here in the United States.

CP: Do you want to name the company that you worked for?

LS: AMF.

AS: AMF.

CP: AMF, that's—

AS: American Machine and Foundry.

LS: (inaudible) bowling alleys. Brunswick AMF. They—well, AMF was a huge company. They built tanks, they built—

AS: First I was in the—at AMF, I couldn't even enter the—only with—I had a badge, and someone enter with me, pick me up at home in the car and bring me and take me everywhere, because I didn't have any papers. And the white collared people there, the big guys, studied with me (inaudible), and we did the testing of the Navy loaders.

LS: Military.

AS: Navy loaders was the unit.

LS: For the Navy.

AS: We did the test of the first shot of a unit, you know, and gave them permission to (inaudible) if it's in perfect condition. So, then they finally found out that the wrong guy is handling it. It's a nice fellow, we like him very much, but he doesn't speak the language. He knows engineering, but that's all he knows. So they complain.

So the AMF sent me first to Canada, to (inaudible), to build the division, because we had problems with one division that they didn't accept our electrical—the electrical units had to be (inaudible). And they didn't accept it; they gave us troubles. But if we opened there a division by ourselves, then it was kosher, it was right. But just to come and have a unit there and not to pay for it, it's not—you know. So, I had to build there. I stayed there for about six weeks, hire people, helping to put up a new division, and very nice people, very, very great people. It was a great time. The factory was in Guelph, Canada. Guelph, Canada. It was nice to go there. They had a beautiful golf course. You know, it's nice to—

CP: So I just have a couple more easy questions for you. And we're going to talk with you and Lilly later, so I don't want to talk too much about that, but can you tell me when you met Lilly? Like, the year that you met Lilly?

AS: Oh, she was a riot. It's not easy to meet Lilly! I had a brother in New York, Alfred. As I said, the first time when I met him we didn't know his name, he didn't know who I am, but he survived and he became the head—

LS: He lived in New York.

AS: And he lived in New York, and he became the head of the airport—

LS: The airport in Prague.

AS: In Prague: Ruzyně, Ruzyně Airport. And he didn't want to give it up, because it was very helpful for the Israeli state that he was there. And—

LS: You came into New York to have a root canal done.

AS: Yeah, I came into New York because I had problem with the root canal. And he insisted, my brother. "I have such a good dentist here, you come. Stay with me." So you know, that's all that's left to me, a brother, so I will come.

LS: So you came to New York.

AS: So I came to New York and we had a dinner. My niece got married, Arnold's sister, the professor's sister that is eighty-three now. She got married, and they are sister and brother to him. So—

LS: She invited you—

AS: She invited me for dinner. Now she invited me for dinner, and again all this rains. I don't know. It was such a bad weather I remember you came in a wet leather coat.

LS: A raincoat. A yellow raincoat.

AS: She was so wet! (laughs) And here we are sitting at the table having good wine and good food, and someone comes in there. She was welcomed very well, because this was planned, you know. And little did I know that that's my wife.

LS: His niece—

AS: That's why they invite me. That's what my granddaughters tell me. I don't have a problem, but you had a problem. (laughs)

CP: Well, that's a perfect teaser for us later, so we can finish the story of how you met and how you ended up together. The last two questions I have to you are first is: What does being a survivor of the Holocaust and telling your story mean to you today? And the second question is: Do you have a message for future generations that may look at this as historical record? And what would you—what do you want for the future, what

would you share with the future? So the first was: What does it mean for you to be a survivor and to share your story today?

AS: Exactly what I put up on the pictures. They wanted for me a picture, and two years ago we went here to Tampa—

LS: (inaudible).

AS: That's what—you wait. (CP laughs) In Tampa, and they took us to a beautiful place. I didn't know where the place is. We even asked someone to take us, because we didn't know how to get there. And suddenly I walk in, and someone points out to me, "Hey Arthur, there is a picture on the wall, I think. So that's you; isn't it you?" And I look around. That's the picture, my picture from the Holocaust Museum. And I put on there how proud I am that my son I brought up to give life to people on that. That's my message.

CP: Well, thank you so much for sharing with us. It's an honor to listen to your story, and it's amazing to see how much love you have in your heart for your family and for your parents and everyone. So, thank you so much for sharing that with us.

AS: Thank you.

CP: Thank you.

AS: Thank you, you are a great fellow.

CP: Thank you.

***End of interview***