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**HOLOCAUST MUSEUM HOUSTON**

**INTERVIEW WITH**

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**JULY 7, 1997**

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Q: I'm Dr. P L of Rice University for Holocaust Museum Houston and we're here to take the testimony of Mr. A M of Houston, Texas. Welcome.

A: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Q: Would you begin by telling us some of your background in Hungary?

A: Yes. Well, if I may start, I would like to address the situation in Hungary before the war to fully understand how it got to the point where it finally ended up unfortunately.

Hungary was the very last of European countries which was run over by Hitler. Of course, there was a very heavy anti-Semitism, especially after 1940 and '41. Until then, until 1940, the life was relatively simple for Hungarian Jews. The Hungarian Jews were very nationalistic. They were Hungarian first and Jewish second. Although many of them were religious, yet they were Hungarians. A very large percentage, 90 percent, only spoke Hungarian. I myself could not speak a word of Yiddish until I was in the concentration camp, only Hungarian. And just to address the old saying that "All Jews are rich," surprisingly, I grew up in a very poor neighborhood. My father worked at the railroad and there were lots of very poor Hungarian Jews. I would not say we were very poor, but I would say we were below middle-class level. So I grew up going to school and, in the '40s, the Hungarian Nazi party, call Nyilas Arrow Cross, they got quite strong. At that time, there was already the influence. But just to demonstrate how very secretive the Germans were and what masters they were of deceit, there was no knowledge in Hungary by the average person that there were concentration camps. We never heard of Theresienstadt. We never heard of Auschwitz, which at that time was already in full force. We never heard of M . We never heard of any of those places. The only thing I remember as a child is that we got some refugees from



Upper Hungary, which was part of Czechoslovakia at that time and where Hitler had already come in. And we had lots of refugees who came to Budapest for refuge. These people only spoke Yiddish and I remember, as a child, I was trying to take out other kids and help them out so I was the benefactor as the Hungarian Jew to the others. So this is a little bit of background. Of course, Admiral Horthy, that is a very big question mark in history today. Horthy, as you know, took over Hungary in, I think, 1919. After World War I, there was communism in Hungary; Horthy moved in and Horthy was, I would say, middle of the road—probably a lot more to the right than middle and very close to Hitler. And yet now, history claims that maybe Horthy had a lot to do with saving Hungarian Jews for a long time because, let's face it, nothing happened to us until 1944. Now there is also another question. As you know, Budapest right now probably has one of the largest number of Jewish population. And people want to know how come there are so many Jews left in Hungary. Well, it's not in Hungary, but we must understand that Budapest and the rest of Hungary was almost like two countries. Budapest was under the Hungarian police. The rest of the country was under what we called chander. These were the sheriffs. So even I, who ended up living in the suburb only half an hour from Budapest, I was in the country and that was fatal for us. If I lived in Budapest, I'm not saying I would be here today, but I possibly would have had a 50-50 chance, because so many of the Budapest Jews were in ghettos and protective houses and then, later on, we had Wallenberg and all that which, these times, I don't know because I was already gone. So this is little bit of the, I think, of the background. I may mention that, when the Arrow Cross became so very strong in 1943-44, then came the time when we had to start to wear yellow stars. That was the time when a Hungarian Jew could not marry a non-Jew. Things got very, very bad, of course. Yet, considering that what happened to the rest of