AN INTERVIEW WITH JULIUS FÁBOS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

NICHOLAS MOLNAR

and

LAURA RICE

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Nicholas Molnar: This begins an interview with Dr. Julius Fábos on October 24, 2011 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Nicholas Molnar and Laura Rice. Dr. Fábos thank you for coming in today.

Julius Fábos: With pleasure.

NM: We usually begin with talking about the interviewee's family history. Could you tell us for the record when and where you were born?

JF: I was born in Marcali, a small town near Lake Balaton. It was 200 kilometers southwest from Budapest, … a town with about 6000 population--mostly farmers. … My father was one of the prominent farmers in the town at that time, 1932. He was the first who bought a tractor for instance, and my grandfather was still alive in those days, and so we had a very nice, quiet rural life growing everything, what we needed. His farm was very diversified and we just had a very pleasant time growing up.

NM: Did your father come from a long line of farmers?

JF: Yes, oh, everybody was a farmer in those days. My great grandfather came from a neighboring town and the neighboring town was mostly wetlands, so they wanted to get a better place and they moved to Marcali which was better situated. In fact, the wetlands were so bad there that when the war came, the Russian Army stalled there in the wetlands for the winter, and my story will be quite interesting as we come to that.

NM: Could you tell us what your father's name was?

JF: István--Stefan in English. … His father was also István--Stefan the Senior. My father was a Junior. … My second name is also István. … My name is not Julius, really it is Gyula and I cannot use it because the G-Y is so difficult for English speaking people. They cannot pronounce it. … You don't have that sound, so.

NM: Were your father or any of his family members affected by World War I?

JF: World War I, I wasn't born yet, but my grandfather was in World War I and he was in the Army for years, and he was in Italy--Italian front--and he got, … what you call when the soldiers are coming home and shocked, what is the term you use in English? You know, when the people are not together anymore?

Laura Rice: Post-traumatic stress?

JF: Yes, post-traumatic stress, they had that. My grandfather had that. … When I grew up he was a very gentle man, but he was not together anymore. My father took over the farm at a young age and my grandfather was helping with feeding the pigs and taking me around, walking me with my hand and explaining to me. He was my first teacher--lovely gentleman, lovely man.

NM: Could you tell us about your mother?

JF: Oh, my mother came from about thirty kilometers from Marcali, in a town called Felsőpáhok … on the lake [Lake Balaton] and six kilometers from there was my mother's birthplace, Felsőpáhok. … My parents' marriage was arranged, interestingly, in those days. Because my father was a well-to-do farmer and they wanted to get a well-to-do farmer's daughter, who was not around, you know, so in those days they looked around. It was an arranged marriage with like people of temperament. … They knew the temperament, they knew the people and this matchmaker was excellent because they found the right match.

NM: Your mother's family--were they well-to-do farmers as well?

JF: Yes, they had land, and my mother lost her mother at the age of nine, she lost her father at the age of three, and her father died by making schnapps, *palinka*. … The fume came out and he slept, and he never got up. That was his end, and my grandmother died of tuberculosis, at that time they didn't know what it was, and she died quite early, and my mother was nine as I said.

NM: Tell us about growing up in your community. Was it tightly-knit together?

JF: Yes. The people were very tight, yes, and we also grew up in an environment, my father had five full-time workers in the farms, it was not a big operation comparatively, and he had also threshing machines. That was a business, we went from farmer to farmer to thresh their grains and we got ten percent of the grain for chopping it out. It was a very viable business. My father was well-known, well-liked, had a great personality. … He was very helpful for people. … I loved the environment I grew up in.

NM: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

JF: One sister, she's still alive, she's a year older than I am, and she's living in Budapest half-time and half-time in Keszthely on Lake Balaton. … She's doing very well. She has one son. … Her husband died a couple of years ago. … He was a chess player, he was one of the ten best in Hungary, he was a remarkable man, and my sister had that life, and we grew up together happily. Then came the war.

NM: Before we go into the war, what did you do for recreation on the farm?

JF: Working. [laughter] Actually, we were lucky, Lake Balaton was only ten kilometers, so summer time on Sundays we biked to the lake, took about thirty minutes, twenty-five minutes on an old macadam road with some bumps with the bicycle, and we swam. We had a beer after that at the local place somewhere and went home, so that was great recreation. Also recreation on Sundays, we walked up to a vineyard, Marcali had hills, we went up to the hills to the wineries, wine vineyards, and then we came back, that was an outing too. So, we had plenty of joyful times there.

NM: You would have been at an age where you can remember World War II and how that affected Hungary.

JF: Oh, I remember a lot, sure. Oh, very vividly.

NM: What was the first thing that happened that made you realize that Hungary was involved in a war?

JF: It was 1941, I believe, nine years old, yes, and there were German cars going down to Yugoslavia. Hitler moved into Yugoslavia first, and his enormous Army came down and my aunt was only seven years older than I was, so we grew up with my aunt. It is one of those unique strange things, and she counted the vehicles. I think she counted over 900 vehicles on our farm road, a small macadam road which had probably seen daily, three-four cars in those days, a few motorcycles, mostly bicycles and walkers, and a lot of horses, and … going back and forth, primitive living. That road where the Germans came shocked us. I remember they sent me to bed early because I was nine, I had to go to bed, but the whole night, something unique happened which nobody could sense, a tremendous change. That was the first thing where I learned about, a different world, a very different world, a strange world, a foreign world--scary world.

NM: Did your family talk about what this might mean for them?

JF: Of course, you know, I remember very well my mother, … when the propaganda came that Hitler is coming and the propaganda built him up as a great hero, the Fuhrer, the great superman, and the Fuhrer said that one of the translations came from German, where I take up my uniform and I will take off my coat, after my victory, that was his motto, I will go fast, run over the world, and I will be a superhero in the world. My mother said, "I hope you rot in there." That was the sentiment, she expressed the sentiment what Hungary felt about Germany at that time, and we were controlled by them. We were the satellite, just like we became a later satellite of Stalin, you know.

NM: What forms did this propaganda come in?

JF: Radio and newspaper.

NM: It was all in Hungarian?

JF: Oh, yes, yes. We knew it. The common people said that, "Dictators are dictators, you cannot hide it." They are not shy to tell, … "I am Fuhrer."

NM: Because Hungary was a satellite of Germany, the Hungarian Army served on the Eastern Front against the Soviet Union during the Second World War.

JF: Oh, yes, they have to. They had to go to fight, I guess Leningrad, Stalingrad or whatever. In every place they had to fight, and die, and suffer and become refugees, and killed, you know--tremendous problems.

NM: Were people in your community forced to serve in the Hungarian Army?

JF: Of course, of course. They were forced to serve and they died at the refugee camps. They were refugees in Russia. Some of them survived, came home, … no meat on them anyway, you know, just bones and some of them survived--but many died, of course.

NM: Was there anyone in your local community that had to go to the front lines?

JF: Oh, sure. We knew people. We know a lot of people. There were a lot of people. Luckily my father didn't have to go because they needed farmers to produce their food and he got exemptions to do that, but before that we also had a war. … Hungary was truncated during the First World War--we lost two-thirds of our country. They were given to Romania, Russia, given a part to Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic--even Austria got a part of Hungary. … The powerful central Europe was destroyed by the Western Powers, actually. … The politics are very simple. The First World War was started in our lower areas, Central Europe, and it was a tremendous war, the first worst thing that happened in Europe that ever happened in that scale. So the Western Powers decided to chop us up in order to fragment us. Fragmentation was the goal and they achieved it and of course the fragmentation if you are looking back, it was a sad thing because a major power was destroyed because of the war. The effects of Yugoslavia, Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, it is still going on and the hatreds and the problems will not be solved, … a big power vacuum there. … We are feeling that. We had to go back to patch up the problems because the major power was destroyed. So, that's history, very simplistically, that's our history as I see it.

NM: You mentioned that Hungary was involved in another war?

JF: The First World War.

NM: I thought you were referring to another war prior to World War II.

JF: Before the Second World War started, … under Hitler's umbrella, or under the shadow of Hitler, we went back to regain some of the country which was taken away from us, and that was Transylvania--we call it Erdély. It's a beautiful region, lovely beautiful region, and my father was in that war in 1939. Under Hitler, we got muscles, and wanted to gain back some of the things which were taken away from us. So, I remember that history. [Editor's Note: In 1939 and 1940, Hungary was awarded territory from Czechoslovakia and Romania which was lost during World War I in what is known as the Vienna Awards.]

NM: Your father, at one point, was in the Hungarian Army.

JF: Yes, but he was driving officers with a motorcycle, a side car. … That's all the high ranking officers. … My father was a good mechanic and he knew how to handle that motorcycle so he was carrying back and forth people, and they released him because they needed farmers more to produce food. … That was a short history.

LR: While your father was in the Hungarian Army, who was handling the farm while he was away?

JF: Nobody really--my grandfather some, and some workers were there and they handled it, but it was just a few months, so he was not away too long, just a few months.

NM: You mentioned that the government saw that your father was more important to them as a farmer rather than a soldier.

JF: Because they needed food.

NM: How did the government's needs for food affect your farm personally? Was it requisitioned?

JF: Every war affects it because, armies typically, regardless of what side you are, you come for the food, and they force people to give their food, so that typically in that situation, the farmers have to be very clever to hide things, to hide and hide, and we are very clever how to hide, unbelievably clever. … We knew how to protect ourselves from those abuses.

NM: When the Hungarian Army needed supplies, was there any compensation given to the farmers?

JF: Not that much. They usually take it for a pittance. That's typically every army all throughout history. … Their initial interest is to get food for … their objectives, and they take whatever they can.

NM: When did your community start to experience this conflict first hand?

JF: When the German Army moved to Yugoslavia, everybody was shocked, incredibly shocking, … tremendously shocking. That was a threshold, you know. You step through, the army went down, everybody scared, everybody scared, tremendously fearful of what happens. The uncertainty is the greatest problem of wars, tremendous uncertainty for people.

NM: When did the Western Allies start to bombard locations in Hungary from the air?

JF: Oh, the bombers actually, the Army started to, the American Army or the Army Air Force came in I believe in 1942, '43, there was a major bombardment that came, and I think the American Army had air bases in Sicily and Italy and that part of the Mediterranean world, and that's where the major Army came. … They had Liberators, the B-24s, and I experienced those incredible bombing area. … At that time I was schooling, I was in school in Keszthely. The gymnasium system in Hungary, was the start at the 5th grade to the 12th, for eight years of gymnasium, and I was in the first four years of gymnasium in Keszthely at that time and we lived in a dormitory just a kilometer away from the school. … My father wanted to take me to a better school then I had at my hometown, so he put me into the Internatus they call it in Hungarian, and that was a dormitory paid. … An old couple took care of us and they cooked for us and we walked to school, the gymnasium to the center of the town, a kilometer away, marching together, a hundred students, and so that was our life in those years and as the war came, we had to spend a lot of time in the bunkers, basements, so that we have some protection. … When the sirens came, we went down to the basement, and we felt more or less protected and,

of course, we heard that the planes were coming in, and some of us sneaked out from time to time to the fields, and looked up to see the hundreds of planes going up to bomb Budapest, that was a major target. Most of the industry was in the Budapest region, so that was the American Army target, so that was a fascinating scary time for me, just like for everybody else.

NM: When did you start to hear that Hitler's fortunes had turned on the Eastern Front against the Soviet Union?

JF: In 1943, around when they reached close to Moscow, and then, we heard that it turned around. …

NM: How did the people in your community and your school view the Soviet Union?

JF: Oh, we were scared of the Soviets, you know. The history of the Soviet Army was that they come in brutally and raped women, and that was a very scary time for our women, and there was a lot of truth in that. Every Army does that, there's nothing new about that. They're vulnerable, when men are gone, you can force people to do things which you otherwise could not. … We were preparing for the Army well and my father was very smart to hide everything before the war. We had to hide from the Hungarian Army, we had to hide from the German Army, we had to hide from the Russian Army. In that environment, the uncertainty is such, my father was my best planning instructor when I became a planner, because he was forced to deal with all these complex issues, and what he did, I just watched him, remarkable story, how he was hiding everything everywhere, unbelievable, and so that's how we prepared ourselves, and that's how we survived.

LR: Did you view it as a good thing that the Soviets had turned the Germans back?

JF: We were happy. [laughter]

LR: Even though it meant that Soviets would invade Hungary?

JF: At that time we didn't know, we didn't sense it, we were just happy. My mother was so happy. … One dictator is gone, we were of course hoping that America will help. It happened eventually, but it took a long time.

NM: I understand that at some point the Germans physically took over Hungary.

JF: That's correct. They deposed Horthy. Horthy was a dictator, a regent, Miklos Horthy, and he was also trained in Austria, his Hungarian wasn't that good. … He came on a white horse to take back the country, that's the famous story of Horthy in 1920, and he basically cleaned out the communists because the communists were taking over Hungary, by a coup, in 1919-1920. Prior to Horthy there was a communist takeover of the country for a short time, then Horthy came in, it was the fight between the rightist and the leftists and knocked out the Austrian-helped Germans and took over the country. For about twenty-five years we were under Horthy. I grew up under Horthy so I heard all the propaganda of the Horthy regime. … Under him, we had a relatively safe life, he allowed the farmers to be farmers. He was anti-communist, of course, and I

remember my family had a teacher who was communist according to them, and he couldn't get a job, so my father helped him. It was really a complex world. My father helped the family and he was tutoring my aunt, she was not too good in mathematics, and she needed a tutor. It was quite an interesting period and it was relatively calm during that era. We were allowed to be farmers, we didn't like the government, we were scared of the police, but we had a relatively calm life under Horthy for twenty-five years.

NM: When the actual land battles between the Soviets and Germans occurred in Hungary, could you tell us what you experienced?

JF: Oh, it was both fascinating and scary. Marcali, in my memoir I can show you my book, entitled Son of a Kulák.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JF: Easy to find. So, this is truncated Hungary. London is about 1400 kilometers, Moscow is 1500 kilometers. So, we are the central center of Europe, and you were learning that we are Eastern Europeans because we were under Russia and we hated it. We hated to be Eastern Europe, we are obviously the center, and we are a different culture than the Soviets. … Russia was a strange place, very strange place for us. … This is why I try to change the image of Hungary to tell the truth and not the false reputation. We don't want to be satellite of Russia, not a satellite of anybody for that matter. … I'm coming from, this is Lake Balaton here and I'm coming, it was ten kilometers from the lake and 200 kilometers to Budapest, and about 220 kilometers to Vienna. … The Austrian Empire was always Western. That's where we wanted to belong to, historically. … The Soviet Union came here. It was winter time, our roof in December 4th, in Marcali. … We had a tremendous war there, back and forth, back and forth, to stabilize the line for the winter, and that was a scary time. I remember the Russians put us together into groups of about twenty-five; we were put in the one bedroom farmhouse for the war, about four days, tremendous war in Marcali. The Germans came to take back the front there, push back the Russians, and you heard about the Stuka planes. … The dive bombers, they had a siren, and scary, and they came down "wooooooo" and you wanted to get in the wall to protect yourself. I remember as a little boy, nine year old, I was so scared. … So we had this tremendous war there for four days bombardment, barely ate anything during that time. I was scared. … We saw some Russian soldiers here and there, and then, they pushed them back and the Germans were very smart. …

NM: Just for the record we are looking at Dr. Fábos' book, *Son of a Kulak*.

JF: In my book I describe how the war stopped at Marcali during the winter months, just ahead at Marcali. … The Germans forced the Russians to come here and they ended up in the wetland to spend the winter there.

LR: Right outside of where you lived?

JF: One kilometer from the front. We were located one kilometer from the wetlands, and half kilometer from the vineyards. So, we had a tremendously rich environment. The wetlands of

course we used for hay and getting peat like material used for heating; it was around 1 inch thick under a thin layer of soil. We were in a very marvelous place in that respect.

NM: Under these circumstances, was your family considering abandoning the farm?

JF: … Wartime there is no farming, wintertime there's no farming. … Everything was anyway cold and the German objective was to stabilize the front, and the Russian Army very cleverly used the winter to rebuild the supply lines and restart industry when it was appropriate to give the final push to push Hitler out. Hitler already knew that he's gone, you know, he knew that he doesn't have too much longer to live. Just like Gaddafi, the leader of Libya, Gaddafi knew well that his time is up, you know, he moved to his last stronghold and he died there. History repeats itself over and over again. So, that was Hitler's time then, today it's Gaddafi's time. [Editor's Note: Muammar Gaddafi (1942-2011) was the Libyan dictator who was deposed and killed around the time of Mr. Fábos interview.]

NM: Did your family stay in the farmhouse structures?

JF: No. My father and my grandmother stayed back there, and my parents, my father was very smart to take the family away from the fighting, and we moved to Felsőpáhok which is a little town thirty kilometers from Marcali. Our house was only one kilometer from the front. My father's goal was to save as many animals as possible. During the war many were killed. My father found only a few cows and horses. He and my grandmother stayed in Marcali to feed animals, and then my father came to re-supply us every week with a carload of food. Our relatives could not feed us, so we were lucky that my father hid enough food for us. That's how we survived between December 4th of 1944 and April 15th, when finally the second push came from Russia.

JF: During the war, stealing is common, and the army's simply take over. If you have the power, you take over. So, to survive there, you have to hide everything. … That's how we survived.

NM: Just one more question about your father's farm and the farmhouse and where you lived. Did it suffer any physical damage from the war?

JF: Of course. Our house was bombed, I have a picture in my book see page sixty-nine, but our house was not ruined, but the roof was gone. As you can see the roof was gone. The story is I heard from neighbors that two Russian soldiers died in my room during the bombardment. So, luckily I wasn't there. As I remember we were coming from the vineyards, where we were hiding, the Russians collected us and took us down to a farming house where we were four days during this bombardment, and then eventually the Russians took over and pushed out the Germans, but it took between December to April--we were under the Germans--and then the final push took the Russians to Vienna.

NM: The Russians were relocating the civilians?

JF: Of course, everything was moving. During war, there's no free place for anybody. As the Army goes, we have to adjust.

NM: The Russian Army would physically send the civilian population elsewhere.

JF: Oh, yes. When they needed a place, they pushed you out.

NM: Did they make provisions for them or they just moved them?

JF: Just moved--no provisions.

NM: I was not sure.

JF: No provision. … The Army, they took provisions for themselves, they look out for themselves, and what happened to us is not their business. During wars fittest person survives, the less fit dies, you know. I mean that's the nature of war, it's a brutal and scary--sad it is for everybody.

LR: During the four days of bombardment, you were not in your house?

JF: We were taken to a little farmhouse, a one bedroom house. Over twenty people were pushed into this small house by the Soviet Army. The Germans start to take over, after bombarding us for four days probably that was the most scary thing in my life.

LR: After the bombardment is when you moved with your mother and your sister?

JF: With my mother and sister, we moved into Felsőpáhok for three months.

LR: After the bombing?

JF: During the four months we were in relative safety, we were thirty kilometers away from the farm, and we felt safe as much as you can feel safe. You know, at that age, I'd rather play than worry about the war. At the age of nine, ten, you don't worry that much about those problems, but it was interesting, you know.

NM: When World War II ends in Europe, did the Soviet Army occupy all of Hungary?

JF: Yes, oh, yes. … Half of Austria was also under Russian occupation, the other half was under the Western occupation. So the line was a strange one, how it ended up. It was decided between America, and Russia. … That line through Austria, and we happened to be--unfortunately--on the Russian side.

NM: Was there a sense that the Soviet Army, after the war was concluded, would go back to Russia?

JF: The Russian Army, if you look from their point of view, they needed to suck as much out. … When you lose the battle, the opposition Army will benefit from that. So, we were pressured to produce, and most of our goods went to Russia because they're in power, and we knew that we were losing. …

NM: How did that work? Did Russian officials confiscate things or did the Hungarian government do this?

JF: It was more subtle. They used the Hungarian government, you see. The history is that … Hungarian communists were protected by the Russian communists. So, when they took over, they brought back, and they did their thing in Hungary. For instance, [Matyas] Rakosi was the communist leader who took over the country in 1945, but it was not taken over all at once. Stalin, he was an incredible planner, had a major vision, and he knew incrementally how to achieve his goal. He was a super planner. What do I mean planner? His goal was to take over the country, and make it communist … and perpetuate his dogma, and his dogma was that eventually we take away the farms, and we deal with that for, central government, and we produce everything, and we control the whole group of people, we gave them what they need and the rest we use for ourselves, and it worked. … Super planner, but a mean planner. He didn't see the negative effect of his dictatorship, but Hitler was another kind of dictator, "The Fuhrer," you know, very two different people. I remember when in 1953 Stalin died, I was in the slave labor camp, and when he died, we thought that it will be the end of communism because the major leader died, and I learned at Rutgers University by a political science professor why Stalin didn't die the way as Hitler did. My professor explained the major difference between the Fuhrer and Stalin was that the Fuhrer built everything in one person, the Fuhrer. But Stalin built on the party. When Stalin died, there were few changes, and eventually a few years later Khrushchev emerged as the accepted dictator of the Soviet Union.

NM: What policies did the Hungarian government enact that affected you, your father and your farm, personally?

JF: Initially, when the communists took over they played democracy, they played it well. They even had a democratic election, elected Tildy as our new democratic president in Hungary, Zolan Tildy, a very famous man. He was a preacher, he had a party--Kisgazda party--or the small farmers' party, he created in 1945 to '47, somewhere there, and under him we felt a little democracy, tiny bit, and the communists had at that time only 17% of the vote, Tildy had over 70% of the vote. So they played democracy, they gave help for us, I even went out to the election, we were very proud, we were happy that things will turn around, but in reality the power was always in the hands of the communists, they kept it, and then they had a plan, how it would be taken over incrementally and by 1949 everything was in their hands solidly. That's the good plan, you have a goal, and incrementally achieved their objectives, that they did it superbly. But it was a cruel way to do it because what happened to us was wrong. The communist politics in Hungary meant that Stalin decided to target first the wealthiest people in the country, the big industrialists, the big landowners, and even the Catholic church because they were the owners of thousands of acres of the land. Roughly one-third of the land in Hungary, somewhere there I guess, were church-owned, by Catholics, and the very wealthy people, and only one-third of that land was owned by small farmers. My father was a small farmer who had couple hundred acres.

The politics were at first that the Russians took over the big landowners, the big industries, then a year later they took over the middle level farms and industries, and in 1948 they started to target us as kulaks, the well-to-do farmers. The goal was to collectivize all the farms. Okay, so how they did it? In 1948 on, they targeted us, the kulaks, my father and the rest of the people were labeled as enemies of the society. They targeted us, there were cartoons that we were a big fat ugly people who cannot be trusted, and then, in the next year, they came to our house. They had a search, they arrested my father and at gunpoint they took him to the police station, they tortured him, they took me to a police station as a young man at the age of seventeen, they tortured me, they tried to play son against father, father against son, squeeze out as much as they could. That was the end of us, okay, that period, and so my father was taken over to jail. They left a few acres of land for us to survive, and then, the rest was taken over by them. So that was the next phase of my life--it was shocking.

NM: We did an interview with another Hungarian refugee for the Rutgers Oral History Archives. He spoke of the kinds of tactics the government would use to intimidate Hungarian farmers to sign away their lands.

JF: Oh, yes. You sign up, I remember my father was taken to the police station, they put the gun to his head, they said, "Sign the paper that you give freely your land to the government." So, what you can do, when you have the gun at your head? So, he signed the paper, so officially it was taken away. That's how it was with my family. Of course, every kulak family has other stories, but they are similar. The simple fact is that they eliminated us to achieve their objective to scare the farmers so that they give in to collective farming. They wanted to impose their own rules on the farmers, the kolkhoz, the collective farm, that was their goal and they achieved it.

NM: How did this change life on your farm?

JF: The farm was gone, you know, we were gone, and in order to survive with this kulak propaganda against us, it was such that my father decided to move away, abandon our farm, abandon everything, and move away to the area where people don't know that we were kulaks. The word kulak meant a scar you see, you are not a person, you are the enemy. So, what my father did, he moved from Balaton's southerly, to the northerly side of the lake. Balaton is beautiful, wine region, and my father had good friends there who helped us to cover up our background. I was probably the only person that sympathized with Nixon when he was covering up his government. We were covering up our history, so we went to the other side of the lake, nobody knew that we are kulaks, so we got jobs. We were good workers.

LR: Before you moved, did the propaganda result in your neighbors treating you differently?

JF: No, the neighbors loved us.

LR: It was mostly the Soviets that treated you differently.

JF: Oh, yes, they were scared. They knew what will happen. Under that pressure, they knew, they have to create a collective farm and not free farmers. … When my father was arrested, with handcuffs, marching in front of me three kilometers to the police station. Can you imagine?

Two soldiers behind him. I had to carry a cart full of junk, what they collected as evidence against my father, and on the way there, the farmers came out crying.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JF: Symbiotic relationship. Farmers help farmers, and my father was respected by them and they knew. … It's one thing to work on your own farm and the other thing is to work in a collective farm when you're forced to. You lose your freedom, you lose the land, and you are told what to do. … Stalin was power hungry, and he wanted to experiment with people's lives. Being the son of kulak in Hungary, it was much easier than Russia. I just read a fascinating book about a kulak's daughter, Russian book, where Stalin killed around two million kulaks in Russia, killed, eliminated, destroyed about two million people. That was his objective, you know, and he achieved that, achieved in Hungary too, with a stupid dogma, you know, Hitler had stupid dogma, he had a stupid dogma, and the people have to die, millions of them, because of the dogma, cruel, stupid, cruel and sad. So that's my story about Stalin. Yet you know if I'm looking at America, you did the right decision to get together with Stalin and destroy Hitler, and then, deal with the rest as well as you could do. I understand the politics, I'm not born today, so I saw enough, and that's the reason why you don't know too much about our story. That was your partner in arms against Hitler. So, my objective in my book and my memoir is to tell the other side of the story so that history is understood better and more clearly than it is understood by biases.

NM: You moved away from the farm.

JF: Yes, had to.

NM: You are working.

JF: For the communists.

NM: Was service in the Hungarian Army mandatory for every male of military age?

JF: Yes. It was mandatory, and if you were the average person you went to the Army, if you're a son of a kulak or some other population which was from wealthy or even literary people, their children went into a slave labor camp. We wear army uniform, and we were put into camps and instead of having guns we get shovels and we worked in construction. My unit went to build a military school in Mátyásföld, north of Budapest, about fifty kilometers north of Budapest, a big camp of a thousand slave laborers and we were building military campus, not with love, because we didn't like what we had to do. We were sabotaging everything when we could.

NM: What other groups were sent to the labor camps besides the kulaks?

JF: Any people coming from wealthy families, from intellectuals, anybody whom they didn't feel comfortable with, their children were put into a slave labor camp.

NM: Was anyone targeted because of their religion?

JF: That too. Yes, yes. You know, I became a brigadier, responsible for the work of a dozen of fellow slave laborers. The officers identified some of us out who had to be responsible, for ten, fifteen, people. In my group there were two slave laborers who were members of Seventh Day Adventists. … They were hardworking people in my team, and they supported each other.

NM: The others were wealthy sons?

JF: It was coming from business groups. Anybody who was not trusted by the communists, their children came into slave labor camps. … There were a lot of us.

NM: Just for the record, what year was this when you were drafted into the labor camp?

JF: 1953 to '55. I was twenty-one when I was drafted to twenty-three, two more years. Twenty-one to twenty-three years age was my military years.

NM: Had you completed gymnasium?

JF: No. No, I did not. From four years gymnasium in 1943, to '42 to '46, I was in the gymnasium. … We had shorter school years during the war and then, in '46 I shifted over to the school of agronomy because my interest was to be a farmer and agronomy could teach modern agriculture, it was my goal and interest. So, I went to a school of agronomy, there was a new school in Keszthely they created after the war and we actually were housed in one of the famous castles in Keszthely which was taken over by the communists, we were located in a wing of that castle, with 365 rooms, one wing, the end wing, was given to us as a school and dormitory. So, we had about 150 to 200 students there at the school and we studied agronomy. I loved the teachers, it was a great few years of my life, but then in 1949, when I finished my third year of school of agronomy, the summertime after my third year I got a letter stating that they do not have a place for me anymore. So I was dismissed from the school. Everybody knew that the reason was because I was a son of a kulak.

NM: How was your older sister affected by her father being a kulak?

JF: My sister was not affected, and the reason is she got a job in Budapest as a graphic artist and she did her job well and she was not a target. They never discovered, or the officials were never interested in her. She was lucky.

NM: You are drafted into this forced labor camp, how did the Hungarian communists explain this to the community?

JF: They did not have to explain. When you are in power, you don't have to explain anything. Everybody knew that they have their objectives and they're cruel and that's how the communists work. They don't excuse, it's not like democracy. I mean, here you can debate, the Republicans debate against the Democrats. … We target each other and play with each other--there's no play there. No play--dogma is dogma.

NM: Did the community ever discover that you and your family were kulaks?

JF: When we moved away from Marcali, I was able to get a job on the State Farm. There, I became an agronomist. I call myself an undercover agronomist, that's what I call myself. You know, there nobody knew, only one person knew in the farm that I was son of a kulak, who helped me, a lovely man, I have his picture in my book, whom I called Jozsi Bácsi. Prior to the communist take over he was the highest official of the county and he changed his name because he was afraid that he will be discriminated or persecuted, so I was hiding him. I was hiding him. He was a great help for me because he was very knowledgeable and careful man. He became a valuable advisor to me and told me what I do wrong and right because he talked to the workers, so I got a fantastic feedback from him and learned how to handle people, how to be more fair, and get the work done also. Jozsi Bácsi was one of the highlights of my life there. I had a great relationship with him for several years.

NM: I wanted to ask about your time as a government laborer. Could you tell us what a typical day was like?

JF: Oh, sure. Six o'clock, everybody got up, every building we had two hundred people in, a two story building, fifty people in each room, and then, we washed ourselves in cold water. The sergeants came running around while we were dressing up and marched to work site. We had to sing some military songs, and forced us to sing up and down, and then, we got breakfast and lined up in breakfast, and then, we lined up again ten minutes later, and taken to workplace. By eight o'clock, we were working. Our work site was around a kilometer and we started to work. We were the helpers of masons who were hired by the government. Of course, this civilian group was a good contact for us. We were the slaves who did the heavy work. We wheel-barrowed the mix, to the mason, to mix the mortar, then they could build the walls you know, and do that type of job. As a slave laborer of course, we didn't do it with joy. Slave laborers are slave laborers, so we sabotaged everything where we could, everything. We went next to a cement bag, we kicked into that, and broke it, we even peed into that, you know, whatever we could do to hurt our oppressors. We did as much damage as possible. So, I was a saboteur indeed. I was forced to work, I didn't like it, and I did as much harm as I could.

NM: Who did you feel was responsible for this--the Soviet Union or the Hungarian communists?

JF: The Hungarian communists were the agents of the communists, just like the Nazis were agents of Hitler. In Hungary, Szállasi was the brutal dictator who came after Horthy. After came Stalin, the Soviets' dictator. They were all the same--dictators are dictators.

NM: Did you have any contact with your family during your time in the slave labor camp?

JF: Oh, yes. As a slave laborer, I was able to get out from time to time to see my sister. If you did more than 100% work, you could get a weekend, a trip to see my family, and they could come to see me too. So, that was a relatively acceptable life, you know, it was manageable.

LR: When you were in the camp, what were provisions like? Was there plenty of food?

JF: It was sufficient, because they wanted us to work. They gave us enough calories, but enough calories to do your life better. Of course, civilian kitchen for the professional workers was far better than ours, and in my story I befriended those people, I was quite clever, I think I was quite clever to make friends. That came from my father. Wherever he was, he always made friends. I remember my father was in jail and worked on a farm, they took him as a prisoner to work the farm, and he befriended the guards, and I was able to visit him. I even was able to take wine with me for my father because he said, "You bring two big bottles of wine," each of them are about five liters a gallon or so, "two bottles, one for the Army boss or the military people who run the place, and one for himself." So, we made deals in those situations, and everybody can be corrupted, and we knew how to do that. We corrupted them, you know, and benefited from that. Life is interesting, can be in this situation, isn't it?

NM: When you were in contact with your family, are they keeping you abreast of what is going on politically in Hungary?

JF: Of course, of course.

NM: Could you tell us about it?

JF: I didn't know everything. We had access to newspapers, too. We had access to radio. The story we knew it, and when you are under a dictatorship, you know exactly what is the lie, and which is the truth, it's not hard to discern, you know, that's easy to find.

NM: In the camp you would have access to the news.

JF: Oh, yes, not everything but enough.

NM: Before the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 occurred, what were your first inklings that things were changing in the country while you were in the camp?

JF: I remember one interesting event. There was Imre Nagy, a person who was a great communist politician, and he was a liberal communist. They let the liberal faction of the communists to emerge as a power base. Imre Nagy became a liberal prime minister and he was a communist, but an intelligent one who knew that oppression is not useful, instead he moved towards democracy, that was his goal, and he spoke about that. I remember one newspaper I read to my groups, a famous speech he gave in 1954 and it came out in the newspaper about his willingness to move toward democracy, just like Czechoslovakia did later in 1968. In Hungary it was a dozen years earlier, the same kind of system, opening up towards democracy. I got hold of the article about the speech of Imre Nagy so I read that article to my friends in the slave labor camp. It was a time when it was so shocking that Russia got nervous of us Hungarians. There were uprisings in Germany, in Poland also, but in Hungary ours was the bloodiest, unfortunately. There were signs earlier that something important would happen. So, that was the pre-revolution area. I was an outspoken person in the camp I talked more than I should have, so they targeted me in 1953, two weeks before I should have been let out from the slave labor camp. They arrested me. They arrested me on sabotage charges, and I was a saboteur, of course. They

sentenced me for two years. My trial was in Budapest where I spent three months. After my sentence they took me to the coal mine to the north of Hungary, to Tolápa. I spent fifteen months and after fifteen months they let me out. So, that's another interesting part of my life.

NM: I just want to backtrack. You said you were outspoken, and it got you arrested.

JF: I spoke my mind, silly me. You know I should not have done it.

NM: You are arrested and convicted of charges of sabotage.

JF: Yes.

NM: Was it a summary trial, where they just arrested you and found you guilty?

JF: Of course. You know what they did, there's a liberal communist movement that goes to the right, the conservatives want to fight back. So I was caught between the forces there, very simple, and then we learned fast who has the power and so that's how I ended up in jail.

NM: How many months again were you sentenced to at the coal mine?

JF: I was sentenced for two years, but they let me out after fifteen months because the power shifted to the right and they decided that they don't want me any more.

NM: Was your time in the coal mines similar to the lifestyle that you had at the slave labor camp?

JF: Worse, much worse, much more scary. Just imagine spending three months in a military jail in Budapest while they decided my sins, and decided my penalty was to spend two years in jail, and then, they carried me by wagon up to the coal mines [to Tólápa] near the border of Czechoslovakia. So, they put us in the wagon, about twenty of us who were in that day taken to work camps. We didn't know where we would go, nothing was told to us, they just kept us lying on the bed of the truck, and then open it up, and it was a slave labor work camp, fenced in with towers all around, huge fences--foolproof, nobody could escape, nobody ever escaped from there. … I had two friends who wanted to escape and I talked them out of it because no chance to climb a twelve-foot fence and guns pointing everywhere, how can you [escape], and lights are going the whole day around, you know, no escape there. So I talked them out of it, I said, "It's too dangerous." … That was the camp, and then, of course, the coal mine, I was scared, I had to shovel coal in a four, five foot high area of the coal mine. That was back breaking, it was awful. So, I was playing dumb, I played incompetent. My eyeglasses had fogged up, you are down, the temperature, you are two hundred meters underground. It was always raining from the rocks, it was a miserable place to work because … you're always wet, and they're taking us down to the coal mine, you walk up to the coal mine to the lift, and you wait for that, and you go down, you get all wet, wintertime, you got miserable cold, freezing and, you know, I was worried about my health. So, I played incompetence, and I tumbled and I acted dumb, and so they took me to a place where I helped eventually the people who were building the large entrance tunnel to the mine where the trains came in, small trains, and hauled away the coal. I was hauling these huge

concrete blocks to build the tunnel where they can take out the coal; it was very hard work. Then, I befriended the leader of the ground service team, another prisoner. I finally ended up working on the ground service. You know, just like my father, I knew how to make connections, how to befriend people, and there was an architect who was jailed for some kind of corruption, what he did in Budapest, supposedly he got fifteen years, and he became the manager of the work force of the ground. So, I befriended him to take me out from the mine. This is how the politics were part of life of life of prisoners, all the politics, and thanks to my father I learned how to do that. … I was well-trained as the son of a kulak, whatever I could do. So, eventually I ended up working on the surface, which was far better than work in the mine. So, I did as good as anybody could do under the circumstances, and I made my own luck as much as I could. So, eventually I worked on ground maintenance and that was far better. So, it took me months to do that, but I achieved my objectives.

NM: Was there any communication between you and your family at this point?

JF: Some. … My sister visited occasionally in the mine, probably twice in that year I saw her. Three months I was in the military jail in Budapest and I spent about a year in the mine--a total of fifteen months.

NM: Was there any fear from your sister that she might be associated with you?

JF: No. We know who is targeted and who is not. Who is vulnerable, who is not vulnerable. Women were not as vulnerable as men.

NM: Under those working conditions, were there a lot of casualties in the coal mines?

JF: Accidents were enormously high, some of them small, some of them big, and you never knew exactly what happened because it's just hearsay, you know, we hear about it from each other, someone is injured. Interestingly, there was homosexuality in jail, you know. That was the first time I've seen what happens with homosexuals in jail.

NM: After fifteen months, you are released early.

JF: Yes. I was released, and it was quite interesting. It was also a political decision. At that time, the government moved to the right from the far left and one day I was called into the office, "Fabos come in," … and I was told that, "You are free, … clean up and go." That was it. So, I walked out and I was a free man. But I felt an uncertainty in my mind. What happens now? I was surprised, I wanted to go to my sister first, in Budapest, but I learned from her young roommate that she was visiting our parents in Keszthely. So I stayed there for the night in her apartment, and took a train ride the next day. The office of my jail in Tolápa got me a ticket to go home. I had a free ride with the train and surprised my parents that I had come out earlier. I spent only fifteen months of my two years of sentence. Of course we were overjoyed and the next thing I had to get was a military certificate. Everybody of my age had to get a certificate from the military, every person in Hungary had to get that certificate, when you're stopped in the street, and police ask you, then you have to show your papers, you had to show. But then I was worried, I had to go to the police station to get my certificate. So I had to show them the paper

that I was released from the jail. I didn't know what they would write into my book of certificate, whether there would be any sign that I was in jail as a slave worker or not, and when I got my papers I was very nervous, I rushed out from the police station where nobody could see me, and looked at my certificate for any evidence that showed my jail and my other history. None was there. I said, "My God, am I forgiven?" It was very emotional for me, incredible. So, I was free, sort of. Hungary was still a police state. I did not know but, can I get my job back, could I go to school again? So, when I recovered emotionally, I searched that out. Yes, I can finish my school.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JF: That school, I was able to get a tutor, a lovely man, and four of us, three of them flunked out of school earlier and they wanted to come back to finish up so I was one of the group. I was the only one who didn't flunk ever, and then, this lovely teacher worked with me the whole summer, we worked, a crash course we got, how to get ready for the Matura, it was a big thing in Hungary. To get the final degree like high school, but it was an agriculture high school. Our tutor with three other people, he helped us to prepare for my matura and I was able to, after three months, to finish the last year of my program and prepare for the Matura. We had a separate examination which we had to go to another town near the Yugoslavian border at [Nyiregyhaza] where I got my examination. Imagine, came home somewhere in June from the jail, and by September I was able to finish my final year and defend my four years of studies. That summer, I worked like a dog, unbelievable. Imagine, the morning I got up at five o'clock and worked through the day into the night, and I got a math tutor who would help me, a lovely young woman who helped me, she was a medical student. I got the right help and a lot of hard work, I was able to finish the last year and review all the four years work to get my degree, and went there for three days of examination. We had both oral and written examinations. So I finished my last year and defended my four years, and I ended up excellent, everything I got all "A's," it was very satisfying. So, in 1956 it was, just three months before the Hungarian revolution, when I got my degree, official degree, and I was able to go back to work as an agronomist. That again is a long story because there are people helping you along the way, we had all the network from my father, incredible network, and my agronomist boss knew that I still was not safe to be known to everybody [if they] open up my history. He assigned me to a very far place. Here is the famous [Lake Balaton]. From my jail experiences I was already north of the lake. This time he assigned me to a farm at the other end of the lake where nobody knew about the kulak history. So my boss was helping me in the cover up. We helped each other, when you have problems, your friends help you, and there are more friends than enemies. Again, I was helped there to get a job, and got my job back at the right place, the safest place they could get me, and so I was there in that state farm at the north end of Balaton. I had also two other people working for me. I was assigned to manage two hundred workers. All together we were four agronomists who lived together in one room. There were two who were members of the communist party and two of us were not. We didn't tell each other who we are, but sort of we knew about each other that we are not politicians, we are just professionals and we tolerated each other. So, I was working there again as an official agronomist. I got my degree, you know, no cover up was needed and I was a good manager, I learned from my father, all the experience, I even managed people in the slave labor camp. I rebound, so I was happy, and I thought, I was dreaming about to enroll into the university, which I always wanted. I was hoping to get into the Horticulture University in

Budapest. I was set on that to get a degree there in horticulture, because my work got more and more managing vineyards and orchards, and I thought that that would be my future if things stabilized in the country. So, I worked towards that goal, studying again every night to be ready for the entrance examination to go get into the university. The University of Horticulture required a big entrance examination, and I wanted to be ready for that. So, everything looked fine until the revolution came, and the sign was the revolution was evident. Usually we read the papers and listened to the radio. Between the lines you can read that some major changes were coming. We were enthusiastic about that, but we didn't know that it will blow up in our face. We heard about demonstrations in Germany. East Germany communists were losing power. In Poland there was a movement, the Czechs were unhappy, the Hungarians got more and more unhappy. That was a new climate there, which was both exciting and scary because our lives filled with uncertainty, you know. I am a planner, so my major goal is managing uncertainty. In Hungary I lived through many uncertainties. Those uprisings were the prelude to the revolution and to my escape to America. So, which direction do you want me to go? [laughter]

NM: You mentioned that you are reading between the lines and it seemed that there were a lot of uncertainties in what was going to happen. When did you start to become aware that there were things happening in Budapest?

JF: Oh, we knew everything from the Radio Free Europe. What happened in Hungary, there were on and off demonstrations. The government didn't know what to do with student rebels, didn't know what to do. So, government debated should they allow demonstrations or not, back and forth. So there was uncertainty in the government, you could feel it easily. It was a very uncertain period. So, they promised permits for demonstration in one moment and then they took it off another moment, because they didn't know how to handle the situation. So we knew that the government does not know what to do. The government itself was uncertain of what to do, so the students wanted to demonstrate and to make a statement. So, they marched up, there were big demonstrations before the start of the revolution. The students wanted to get to the radio station, you know, to tell radio, to take over the radio, and they were very brave young men, incredibly brave. … They pushed towards the radio station hoping that they can announce the fifteen, or twelve demands in the radio. Mostly they wanted to get the country to move toward democracy, and in the attempt, it got out of hand. The police started to shoot the demonstrators at the radio station. That's when it all started, and then, of course, that was I believe on the 23rd of October in 1956 the revolution started, and that was the day before. In the farm where I worked, the four of us agronomists in one room, and we always woke with radio. The radio went on at six o'clock so that we had to get up and in that morning, six o'clock on the radio, we heard shooting, "whoa." That was the start.

NM: What was the reaction of you and your fellow agronomists?

JF: Our reactions were--we immediately knew that there were two communists in our room, and we turned over their beds, awakened them, when we heard the shooting on the radio. … We just threw them out, turned them over, and we knew that you have to watch out. We are now changing the world so we did that, prematurely. It was our emotional response you know, I'm as emotional a person now as I was then. We did that, and then, of course, we had a meeting at the farm, and we wanted to be on the side of the revolution, most of us, and there was a big get

together on the farm, and we talked about how, what we can do as people in [Aliga]. So we created a group, one of my colleagues, whom I befriended, Zoltan Honéczy, became our spokesperson whom we elected, the whole workers, and who were there, elected this person to represent us in the future days and even I was appointed to be the freedom fighter of the group. I got even a pistol. I never had a pistol in my life, I never shoot anything, I didn't like guns, but they gave it to me, so I took it, and so nobody knew that I was a slave laborer because it was covered up, so they thought I came from military. So, I was a less military person, you will head a group and you have a pistol, and I got even a raincoat coming with that, that was my uniform, a heavy raincoat. It was a rainy time, you know, I'm sorry, October, late October. … Not unexpectedly, if I would have been smart, I would have known that Russia doesn't give up Hungary that easily, and the revolution was already four days old, we took over the country in four days, and then, we even went up to Budapest to see what happened under the revolution. The destruction was enormous and then, within four days, five days, the communists took back everything. They rolled in all the tanks, there were plenty of tanks, shot at everything in Budapest, the devastation was enormous, and then it was over, as fast as we freed the country, it was taken away, everything, then what? We saw what the communists can do, we saw their power, then I went with a motorcycle with a friend, and visited my parents, and we debated what next, you know, and the choices were very clear. I mean, I came out from jail, after spending those fifteen months, we knew how the new government would look at me, just think about it, I talked to my parents, and their advice was, "Get out as fast as you can." So, we planned our escape, coolly, calmly. [Editor's Note: Beginning on October 23, 1956, Hungarians revolted against the Communist government installed by the Soviet Union after World War II. Following an invasion and brutal occupation by Soviet forces, most resistance ceased by November 10th. Approximately 200,000 Hungarians fled the country after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, many of whom settled in the United States.] … Four of us came together, one of them I did not know, but was a friend of Zoli Honiczy, who was our leader, he knew already that he has no future anymore. If anyone who is a leader of a group, your future is jail for sure. … He had to go, and he had a girlfriend there whom he wanted to marry, and was very close to her, her name was Panni, a lovely woman. Panni typed up some false papers to claim that we are officially sent to the border to recruit people to work at the farm, which we used to do that yearly so it was not illegal to do that. That was the pretense we thought we had, that you can go across the border, and so we got this letter from her friend, typed us this certificate that we are officially sent to the border, stamps all over the letter. It was a naïve idea, but that's the only thing we could think of, and luckily Bandi, one of the four of us, now we are four people together planning this trip. This person was a good friend of Zoli, he was a bookkeeper there, and he wanted to come with us. Finally Bandi was the other guy who had a brother living on the border at Ják near the Austrian border. So the plan was that four of us will go there, semi-official way, and wiggle out ourselves at the border and get out. That was the plan. So, we stopped at my parents' place with two motorcycles, my mother cooked a *gulyas* for us--that's the meaty soup that Hungarians eat often with a lot of paprika, and it was delicious, one of the best meals there, and said, "Goodbye," and went. By the evening we reached the border, and by that time the Russians started to move into the border because they wanted to close the border. There were thousands of people who had escaped, so Russia came to close down the border. How can we go around that restriction, that was the next question and so we went to Bandi's house which was in Ják, just ten kilometers from the border, and he was a veterinarian, he had good connections, and tried to get some help for us to get closer to the border. So, we had a last meal there in Hungary and Bandi's brother

arranged for us two Hungarian soldiers who will take us closer to the border. Hungarians help Hungarians, you know. We went with a horse cart, we are going towards the border, and at one point the two soldiers stopped, and showed us some lights, they said, "those lights are coming from an Austrian town. We just need to walk through there." We hugged the soldiers. … We walked and we walked for about an hour. The Hungarians wanted to create a friendship with the Austrians and in between the two barbed wires, were twelve feet tall, there were about fifteen, twenty feet of space between them, the kind of mines, where you step on it, and you blow up.

NM: Land mines?

JF: Land mines, yes. They were taken out luckily, so we were free to walk through and we found our way into Austria, and I had the same raincoat which I got with my pistol. Then we walked towards the town, and I had a flashlight in my pocket too, a big one, which also I got from during the revolution. Then we saw a sign, a town sign, at the edge of the town, and I wanted to be sure that we are in the right country; it's Austria, not Hungary. So I flash out the light, and it says Eberau. It is a German name and it shows that indeed we are in Austria. We are free.

NM: Thank you for sharing your experiences.

JF: Can you imagine the excitement, unbelievable, unbelievable, totally unbelievable. So, we were free, and the Austrians welcomed us--lovely people, lovely. An Austrian farmer welcomed us, took us into his house, gave us a hot cider to drink--it was not that good--but we drank it anyway. They collected us, and they took us from there with horse carriages, about twenty kilometers or so, and then they housed us in a school. There were hundreds of people there, some straw on the floor, we could sleep there for a night. So that was our first freedom in one school room, probably about a hundred people lying down there and the next day they took us to Salzburg, and that's interesting, you know, Salzburg we ended up in there in a huge military camp which the Americans kept in Salzburg, because they had a lot of uncertainties there, so the American planners were very smart. Who knows, we may need that camp for something in the future? And how perfect it was, a big military camp in Salzburg which was set up for American soldiers to come to help the war effort, that was the goal, and they succeeded. They were wise enough to keep that camp because of the uncertainty with the communists. They kept it and it ended up as a refugee camp, a huge refugee camp, in beautiful Salzburg. So, we were there for a few weeks, and we were able to eat from the American military trays, military food. They helped us refugees. I came out with half of a briefcase. I came out with half of a briefcase. I took home just a pajama and an underwear, one more change, that's all I came with, you cannot take on a motorcycle that much, you know. We don't know what's happening there. Tremendous uncertainty, but in the camp suddenly we were free, and then, of course, the question, what next, what's our future? Our future is good, we are free, we can make it. Where to go, what to do, who will take us? … The whole camp, there was tremendous uncertainty in the planning, and we speak a foreign language, you know. One of our colleagues talked in German. … I learned some Latin in the first four years, but then French, … English languages, and German we didn't have any of that because they wanted to teach Russian to us, and luckily there were no Russian teachers, I never had to learn the language, I wouldn't like it anyway with my background. I was without language you know, and came to a new country, so tremendous

uncertainty to what next. When it came to debating, what next, and we used what we call it an eliminating process, we eliminated where we don't want to go. … We didn't know where we wanted to go yet. … We eliminated Southern Europe because we didn't trust Southern Europeans, we perceived them as they like too much joy, too much singing, too much drinking, too much whatever. … That was our view at that time, and we eliminated the north, Sweden, and that north part is too cold, there's no horticulture there. We eliminated England for similar reasons, in the end we eliminated Europe, it was to close and we didn't feel good enough in France or Germany. We perceived Australia as too far, Africa is no choice, South America is no choice, so we looked more and more to North America. Canada is over the 50th Parallel, so it's too cold for the type of things we wanted to do. The Great Lakes region also was thought to be interesting. We didn't feel good about South America, so we eliminated it. The United States emerged as the place to come and we had a consensus on that, no question about that. The next concern of ours was will they take us? So, we debated that a lot and we even started to learn English a bit, we got some English information, some simple books and also Imre, one of the four of us had a relative in the Los Angeles area, so that's why he wanted to go there and he influenced us to try to get into the U.S. All four of us decided, "Yes, that's the future for us," and so we put our first choice as United States, there were second choices but luckily we were all young, we were promising, and America tried to take the most promising people naturally. Nobody wanted the sick, the old, nobody wanted them--in fact many of them ended up staying in Austria for years. So, we were a prime choice for anybody. So, that was our tremendous luck, and the quota for America, there were about a quarter million of us that escaped, America took 40,000 of us. So, the question was how I got into the 40,000, we put an application in, and we were accepted, all four of us. We were the prime people for this country at that time under the circumstances. An accountant, not a loser, one good agronomist, a proven professional, Zoltan and I was the other guy, the son of a kulak. So, four of us put applications in for the U.S. and we were accepted. Then, how did we get to America? The place which took people to America were first flights, airplane flights, some early people went with planes, one of my friends was in that category, whom I became friendly with in New Brunswick, he was Lajos Balics. The four of us were able to come here, with the first refugee ship, and that's a military ship, which used to take the American soldiers to the front during the Second World War. This ship took us to the U.S. From Salzburg, we had to go up to Bremerhaven on the North Shore, the Rhine River goes up there, and near Bremerhaven and that landscape, so they took us over there with a special train, we got escorts, and took a bunch of us to the ship, to load the ship for a few days. People were coming from several places, about a thousand people would come to the ship, the first military ship. We were taken with this military ship and there were fascinating ceremonies. I remember the American military, Army, welcomed us with military songs, Hungarian military songs. … Hungarians are very emotional, you know, as you can see we are. The Hungarian military song of "Isten aldja a magyart," beautiful song, they played it, but American band finished fast. We were emotional; we wanted to sing on our own time. Military band, boom, boom, boom and our emotional people sang it very slow, it was fascinating. So, we got to the ship, they took us, and we had thirteen days of winter ride over the ocean with our ship to reach New York City. So, we left there two weeks before the end of the year, and we went through the North Shore between England and Europe--and then hit the hard sea in winter, which did not agree with the son of a farmer's stomach. For the two weeks I was on the ship, I barely could eat, because I couldn't keep down anything. We went up from time to time from the ship and threw up and the ship, you know, the side of that, dozens threw up on it, but some people took it

much better than I did. … I survived, I lost a lot of weight, but I had enough reserves. When I was in jail I was very thin, but within two weeks I regained my weight. It was not that bad, but it was quite a trip. So, it was worth it, you know, because what the heck, two weeks you are suffering, and then you are free, it was fantastic. It was a hard ride, and then, of course, we had all arrived in New York City on the evening before New Year's, imagine, and then, we anchored outside of the city. We anchored in the bay, they put some anchors down, and imagine that evening we arrive and see Manhattan, the son of a farmer. We saw the Empire State Building on New Year's Eve, before New Year's, around the island, and imagine, cars, and lights, on the boats, hitting the Empire State Building. Some people knew, "That's the Empire State Building, look at that," yes, when we heard it, it was fantastic. … We were on the boat that night, totally uncertain what would happen now, everything new, everything exciting and fascinating, and what next. … The next morning, we embarked and the busses were waiting for us, dozens of busses, and I'm going somewhere, the south, we didn't know exactly where. We ended up in New Jersey, Camp Kilmer, fascinating. Camp Kilmer, as I later learned through a friend, it was laid out by a landscape architect, James Rose. Dean Cardasis who is my great colleague who was stolen from us by Rutgers--best design teacher we had--stolen by Rutgers, and he is now here, I will meet him tomorrow when I see the Rose Garden. That was our introduction to America. So, we ended up in Camp Kilmer. I got a great picture in my book of Camp Kilmer, and we came in bus and we got into one of the buildings, and a lot of food, they fed us with enormous food--to regain my lost weight from the ship. I rebound very fast, just like that. … My sickness was gone; I forgot everything, no more worry about throwing up and having all those problems. It was fascinating, and then, at Camp Kilmer, of course, what to do next. Imre our friend with relatives in Los Angeles, he got the first off, because the relatives sponsored him to go to Los Angeles, so he was the first gone, then three of us left, both of them had university degrees. I did not. I said, "I have to study." I almost made it in Hungary before the Revolution, I was studying for the entrance exam. Probably I have more of a chance here to go to the university. That was the other interesting thing, where to go. In Camp Kilmer they took me, everybody needed a sponsor, you needed a sponsor for getting out, and so I needed a sponsor. Imre had a sponsor because of his family relatives. The three of us didn't have any sponsors, and there was a religious group, we were not interested in the religious group to be sponsored, we are not that dogmatic in our group. We found a group called the Tolstoy Foundation, the Russian foundation, the famous writer Tolstoy, created a fund in America from his tremendous wealth from writing and he created a fund for helping Russian escapees in America. The Tolstoy Foundation, that was its major role. For this occasion, Tolstoy Foundation gave a grant to sponsor 500 Hungarian refugees and three of us became part of that 500. I was taken from the camp by the Tolstoy Foundation to New York City, and they put us up at YMCA on 32nd Street.

NM: The Empire State Building?

JF: Empire State Building--on that street we were. Imagine this farmer boy getting to New York City at the age of twenty-five and the Tolstoy Foundation sponsors, and we had to wait around until we get to a school where I can learn English, that was the goal. So the Tolstoy Foundation was near Central Park, 32nd Street we were staying at the YMCA, and that was the most fascinating few weeks I had in my life to learn about the greatest city in the world, and to see how things are going, and to dream about language and the life and, you know, it's just incredible that few weeks in NYC were unbelievable! We got tickets for food, and we got more tickets

than we needed, so I became the first business experience to sell some of my tickets, and see movies because we wanted to see as much as we can, go to theater as much as we can, so we went to the movies at least once a day in those days, and we had to get money for that. We received only little cash that didn't help enough, so I used my business sense to barter, you know, to sell some tickets and get to more movies, you know. We also learned that the Hungarian [coin] … was perfect to getting a Coca-Cola and other drinks, and we got back ten cents or whatever it was. So we made money on that way too. We were very entrepreneurial. There were three of us from the refugee group in that situation. We also met a fascinating guy, a Hungarian longshoreman discovered us. Hungarian longshoreman, and he wanted to help us. … He was at time on strike, they did their job. … He probably did something for me which I couldn't imagine, he probably stimulated me to become a landscape architect, I wouldn't be surprised, but I don't know for sure. … He was out of a job and he wanted to show something beautiful, he said, "I will take you to Central Park." So, he took us to Central Park and showed us the park, the greatest park, Hungarian longshoreman and when I became a landscape architect, Olmsted, who designed Central Park, became my hero, so that was the first introduction to me into my new field of landscape architecture. Fascinating how life is evolving, totally fascinating, so that was it then. We were there for about three weeks, and then, I wanted to study, and I was looking for some way to get into language school before hopefully I started college and I was able to get a scholarship to study language. The Rockefeller Foundation provided one hundred students for getting into a crash course in English and that was in Vermont. Saint Michael's College had a special program and they were teaching foreigners, the whole school geared to teaching foreigners for many purposes in English and so we ended up at Saint Michael's College, the first of U.S. colleges I attended. It was a Catholic college and we were under the wing of some Jesuits who were the strictest and the brightest teachers of the Catholics, and they were the leaders at Saint Michael's. A hundred refugees were there learning English for a whole semester during the spring of 1957. I was late by two weeks because of the paperwork, but I caught up. It didn't make too much difference, you work harder, and you catch up. So, there we were in the lovely Vermont. I was taken out by a special student taking me to Saint Michael's because I was later, so I got a special ride on the train to see Vermont, you know our trip from N.Y.C. to Burlington was beautiful. So, I ended up at Saint Michael's College. I worked my tail end off, worked very, very hard, and I had to work. I got used to it. I had a new goal, a new opportunity, you do your very best. So, I went through that, and obviously Saint Michael's gave me a good start, but I wasn't ready yet to go to enter a university, so I knew that I had to get a job for the summer, and every minute I have to study and study and study, besides my work. So, I did. I worked my tail end off and got a job. I worked for the whole summer for a German gardener who had a landscape business, and then I studied every evening, every weekend, as much as I could.

LR: Was this in Vermont?

JF: No, from Vermont, I was taken back to New Jersey, I'm sorry, I missed that. I failed to tell you that when we got through the school, the Tolstoy Foundation helped us to get a summer job and get a place to be ready. They knew that I wanted to go to school, and then they introduced me to some Hungarian Americans who were well-off, and would help me to find a school, and I met with a lady whose husband was a pilot, I didn't live with them, but she acted as a sponsor, to help me. She was one of the greatest ladies I ever met in my life. I met her by accident, in

Bernardsville, that was during the summer. Bernardsville you may know about that town. It is in the high quality wealthy area of Far Hills. I settled there for a summer job working for a German-born gardener, Mr. Gropler and walked to his place, sometimes hitchhiked for the summer job, and then each evening I learned English. I'm not good in languages. I do not have language skills. Some people have, my wife is fantastic, she speaks three, four languages and she learned additional after that. She's a language expert. I'm the worst you can have, but I work hard. I say one can overcome limitations. I worked and worked, so I am now in New Brunswick working for Mr. Gropler. I ended up to live with a family who had four rooms rented. She was Mrs. Wolf. She was one of the loveliest, she became my "American mommy" and she was for me to go to school. She even told me that in America if you go to college you have to get a blue suit so I saved from my summer salary for a blue suit. She took me to a cheap store to buy my first blue suit, and preparing me like a real mommy. She really helped me a great deal, so did Mrs. Nieberg, the Hungarian lady. Everybody advised me and they thought, they see a Hungarian boy, farm boy, they thought that I should go to a small school, probably in Delaware. In Delaware there's a night school for agronomy, and other people thought I should go to Puerto Rico because I would get a scholarship there to Puerto Rico. There, they speak Spanish, I said, "No, I'm not ready yet." I barely knew English. All these conflicts came, good advisers, and then I learned about Rutgers, and they told me that Rutgers is too hard for me, you know, it's too difficult a school, you're a farmer boy. But I said that I can do it. So, that was my attitude, you know, I can do it, if there's any will, there's a way, somehow. So, against the advice what they gave me I said, "I'll try Rutgers," and by that time I met with my future wife, Edith, she became my girlfriend while I was in Bernardsville, she was working as a governess for a family with four children, an old family not too wealthy anymore, but she got a job there. She came to work in America for a year to learn English. She knew much of Western Europe already from her school fieldtrips. She was a very curious person to learn about this country, and then, you know, she became my girlfriend, my god, very fast. I'm a fast moving person, you know. That's how it started, our love affair, and we are still together after fifty-two years of marriage and we have now three children and four grandchildren. So, that's my story in short.

NM: We want to backtrack a little bit.

JF: Sure, anything, for you.

NM: I wanted to follow up with a few things especially back during your Camp Kilmer days. How long were you in Camp Kilmer?

JF: About two, three weeks.

NM: Could you tell us about what it was like living there?

JF: Oh, that was also similar thing as was in Salzburg, you know, just a different variety of that. A big camp, we got plenty of food, from the military. It was okay, but you know, far, far better then I received in jail or in the slave labor camp. So I had a good life in Camp Kilmer, and I also learned later that Camp Kilmer was designed by James Rose the famous landscape architect, landscape designer actually and now Rutgers has a relationship in fact, I am going out to see James Rose Garden again. Dean Cardasis was stolen from us to come to this place. Dean is a

great designer, best design teacher we had. You stole him from us for Rutgers. I'm the least concerned because he came to teach at my favorite school, Rutgers. Camp Kilmer was designed by James Rose in a week--the whole camp--and the camp was designed to take American military personnel rotating back and forth to Europe. There were around 30,000 people, I think, something like that who at any one time could live there and shipping in and out from the camps, they supplied the American Army with new people in Europe. More specifically, it was the City of Salzburg, a military camp there, military camp here, both parts I learned about the history during my tenure of these camps.

NM: What would happen to the Hungarian refugees if they could not obtain sponsorship?

JF: They stayed in Austria. Some of them stayed for years in Austria. So, the people who nobody wanted, you know, because old, decrepit, not too hopeful, and refugees are a liability so many of them lived for years in Austria, and then, eventually they found sponsors for them.

LR: In Camp Kilmer, you needed a sponsor to leave as well.

JF: Camp Kilmer, the majority of the 40,000 Hungarians who were accepted by the U.S. government most of them were taken to Camp Kilmer, you know, as a gift of the American military to house us there, you know. American politics was fascinating, you know. Imagine the Cold War, that was during the Cold War between American and the communist world, so it was a tremendous political advantage for America to help us. The first group of refugees ever, so we were treated incredibly well. We were the wanted people here, we were wanted by America because it was a dig for the communists. "You were screwed up there, we will take care of them, don't worry, we will take care of them." That was the thinking in the U.S.A. during that part of the history of America and Russia, or Soviet Union.

NM: During the three weeks you are at Camp Kilmer, was it hard to get around with a limited knowledge of English?

JF: Yes, but, you know, we learned to read, we never stopped to learn, that was in our brain already to study all you can. If you have a goal to go to school, imagine a farmer boy wanted to go. It was my dream and finally I have a chance. I did everything to succeed, and I achieved it. That's a very simple thing, but that's what we did.

NM: We are just following up because we covered a lot of ground. I also have a question about your family that remained in Hungary. Was there a concern among the refugee population that there might be repercussions for their family members who were left behind?

JF: Yes, of course, and it was. My father was jailed in Hungary after I came out. He served another six months and he knew that the reason was because I escaped. It happened as we expected, the reprisal was there, and it was very sad for me when I learned from my mother that what we expected, it happened. My father wanted to come too, and the person who didn't want to come was my mother. She was scared--too scared. My father is an entrepreneur, very open, very outgoing. My mother is introverted, and pulled back, and scary cat, you know what I mean. One of the metaphors my mother she talked, "My duna," the comforter, a duna, you know, the

nice feather bedding … we use in Hungary. "How could I be without that?" That was the metaphor of hers, expressing the real scare, you know. So, my father would not go. He knew that he would suffer extra, but, you know, if your wife doesn't go, you know, he accepted it.

NM: Was you sister still in Budapest?

JF: Yes, she's still there. My sister had a very interesting life. Her husband was a chess master. He didn't have to work, he just had to play chess, and he was a star. The Hungarians like chess, they put him on a pedestal, and my sister benefited from that through him, and they did alright, not fabulous, but they even could travel from the seventies on, they were able to visit some neighboring countries, first communist countries, and they eventually ended up in Austria too. I also sponsored my parents to visit us the first time. They visited me in America in 1968, they visited me, and I helped my father as much as I could. Anything he wanted, my father, I would send him. In the vineyards he needed modern spray equipment to spray the vineyards, you know, and I sent him everything what he wanted, including the cultivating machines. My family was always the first to help, and I did that. So you know, it worked out alright.

NM: Did your sister ever entertain the idea of coming to the United States?

JF: No, because she settled.

NM: She was married by that time?

JF: No, she married later. She married I think in 1959 I believe, she married. She never was affected the way as I was. In Budapest, she was isolated, in that great city, Budapest is a fantastic city, one of the greatest cities I know in Europe, I love the city, we have a great history, tremendous history, beautiful buildings. The communists screwed up some parts, but, you know, that can be changed, eliminated, at least.

NM: I understand that you were a group of four, and one of your colleagues was sponsored by his relative in Los Angeles. What happened to the other two people who were with you?

JF: Very good question--no. The other two people, you see, they were interested to make money, and Bandi disappeared. I heard that he married a big fat woman supposedly with money, he was an opportunist and his wife was a Hungarian woman, and Zoli said, "I want to make money." Zoli was very good in surveying, and he ended up becoming a surveyor, working for engineers as a surveyor to draw up the maps. He was also very good in drawing. He was very satisfied with that. He settled in Washington, D.C. area. I have a beautiful story about him. He left his girlfriend, his love in Hungary, and a few years later she was able to sneak out. She was able to come to Vienna and he picked her up there. A beautiful story, and they have two lovely children. He has a very nice family and he settled down. They achieved what they wanted to do. I had different goals, I separated myself from them, because, I needed to earn a university degree. We separated. We are still friends you know, I have contact with him. I like long term relationship with everybody including my wife and my children, hopefully. That's my nature, and it works out alright.

NM: At Saint Michael's College, how many Hungarian refugees were taking this intensive language course with you?

JF: There were around a hundred of us. We have a great photograph in my book showing the two pictures, the two Jesuits priests. At St. Michael's college we felt like stars coming from Central Europe. We felt very lucky and the climate was right for me. Look today, the refugees in the world, what a long suffering going on with these refugees, and interestingly, too, my story affected my older daughter, in fact, my older daughter, Anita was inspiring me towards writing my memoir. She was in the Ph.D. program at BU, Boston University, and she wanted to write a story about my life and she wrote a lovely thirteen page paper on me, on the life of Julius Fábos. I have copies of the paper. It is an excellent paper. It gave me impetus to do more, so that there's a lot of interest in my family to know about my story. It turned out that my story was unique, very few people went through what I went through in life, and it interested my daughter. My other daughter, Bettina, also interested in my work, she's now working on a film project. She is in Communication at Northern Iowa University. She's very good, very creative, and she's working on a film project to ensure that our story is told better, and she will probably put up everything on the internet. She has a lot of beautiful pictures she collected, and scanned. So my family's legacy is coming from my kids as well as from my memoir. I'm elated to share that with you.

NM: Well, it is a story that should be told and you are right, there is not much awareness of it.

JF: No, no. The reason we know, during World War II, America was a willing partner with Stalin. You probably have seen images of Stalin sitting with Roosevelt and Churchill. The three strong men from the opposite world you see them, they were buddies, you know, and so obviously our story is unique here. I came from other point of view. The story I wanted to tell, I had to tell, because the farmers' story is not known. As you know, farmers are not writers. Holocaust was a tremendous atrocity, but it is so well documented in the USA. The Jewish people are incredible, bright, highly educated and have tremendous connections around the world, everywhere. They were able to present their awful Hitler story as well and as clear as they had to be. I'm admiring them, but who is speaking for the Hungarian farmers, or the Russian farmers. Who cares? I read the book recently, a book about the kulak's daughter. This Russian book, describes the life of kulaks during the 1930's, which were far worse than mine. Two million Russian kulaks were killed or eliminated by Stalin. She told their most dramatic story. Luckily, I was much more fortunate than Russian kulaks, most of them died. That woman who wrote the book, she survived only because her aunt was a wife of a very strong communist who was able to take her out from the Russian camp where she would have died, you know, and bring to America. Her story is unbelievable. Hers is much more painful than mine. So, I was lucky, I was very lucky that Stalin was an old decrepit man when I was taken to a slave labor camp on March 2, 1953. On the 5th of March, Stalin died. So I was lucky that the worst dictator died while I was in a slave labor camp, so that helped my survival. Stalin couldn't be as bad in Central Europe as in his own country. Our history, during the 20th Century was Europe-wide. In Hungary we were surviving and handling two bloody dictators, Hitler and Stalin. On the other side of Asia, it was China whose strong communist leader killed as much as Stalin and Hitler together, you know. Finally, China is now changing. Their situation is more evolutionary than revolutionary. China is changing now, no question about that. They are communist now, but not

real communists, it's a whole different communist era than ours was. We hope that during the next fifty to a hundred years, all the big dictators will be gone. That's the evolution, I can forecast, and I can see that because I studied much history, I was fascinated by history throughout my life. I had probably forty credits of history at Rutgers altogether during my undergraduate studies. History helped me to understand the world around us.

NM: I wanted to ask some questions about your time at Rutgers. Were there other Hungarian refugees who attended the university?

JF: Yes.

NM: Was there much interaction between you?

JF: Oh, yes, we were all buddies. In my book I show some of them, Károly Nagy was one of my close friends. He just died recently. He was a very prominent person, and he was a sociologist, and he sacrificed his whole life to make the Hungarian connections in America as good as they can be. He did a fantastic job, he's dead now, but, you know, that's life. His wife Katalin is continuing his work. I'll probably meet her today, during my lecture. I am attached to this part of the world, interestingly at one point I had too much from the Hungarians here. During the 1957-61 period I felt that I had become a part of a Hungarian ghetto, not really, but a part of our Hungarian community. We had three generations of Hungarians in New Brunswick and the three generations had more and more conflicts. The first wave of Hungarians who came at the turn of the century in the early 1900's; they came to Johnson & Johnson to work. In Hungary they were farm workers. The automation of the farm, took away a lot of the work from the farmers, the tractors came in, and other inventions came, so much that the majority of farmers of Europe had to migrate to the New World, that was the first wave of Hungarians. The second wave of us came after the Second World War, the DPs or Displaced Persons. They were the high ranking military people that people were afraid to return to Hungary and the rich people, a whole bunch of other people came at that time. The third group of Hungarian refugees, that is my group who came after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. The U.S. let in 40,000 who came here and several thousand ended up in New Brunswick area. So imagine New Brunswick has these three generations, and I know many of them. With years, there was more and more in-fighting among the three groups because the three groups are so different. They had different history, different backgrounds, that's no surprise that there were some conflicts within the three groups. But sociologically, it's very fascinating to me to see the three groups. At one point I said, "I want to get away from it," it was too much, you know. I wanted to be myself, I don't want to hear the gossip and back fighting and backstabbing, I don't want to deal with that. So, I escaped, I say, "I cannot be, I have to be free myself from that." So that was one period of my life when I was able to get into Harvard and establish myself there. But I always loved them, I'm not badmouthing anybody, I'm just telling my history the way as I see it.

NM: I know that Laura has a few questions about your time at Rutgers.

LR: While you were at Rutgers you were very involved with the Hungarian community.

JF: Yes, I had to be.

LR: You were involved in the Hungarian Student Organization at Rutgers?

JF: Yes, we started it.

LR: Oh, you started it.

JF: Not personally me, Károly Nagy had more reason than I did because I disappeared from here too, you know, but I was involved, yes. We organized exhibitions. We did a great exhibition for the great artist Joseph Domjan. Domjan is one of the greatest Hungarian artists with woodcuts, beautiful art, and I was part of the people who organized the exhibition for him between the big dormitories, along the Raritan River. We had a great exhibition and my good friend Roy DeBoer whom I had dinner with last night, gave us all the flowers and beautiful plans, indoor plans to make the exhibition better. So, I got all the help, and worked with that. So, I was part of the community. When Domjan came I picked him up with my car, old car, and I remember my muffler fell off when I was bringing this distinguished artist to Rutgers. I had to go under the car and tie it up with a string, my muffler. So, I was in this type of activity. I went to the President, promoting Hungary, in fact in my book there's a picture of the Rutgers President Mason Gross with two other colleagues, we invite him to be part of the exhibition. I was promoting that kind of thing here.

LR: So you were trying to raise awareness in the Rutgers community about the Hungarian refugees.

JF: Oh, of course, and we did, I think we did a good job. What's the expression in English between university and the community, we made the link at that time, very successful I thought, most Hungarians were coming there, and the university was helping. So that was a very lovely get together.

LR: Were there a lot of other Hungarian refugees that were your fellow students at Rutgers?

JF: Six of us got similar scholarships. The first year, the Hungarian community paid our bills. We got help for one year, after that we were on our own. By that time we learned about loans and scholarships and we were able to make it.

NM: What was the interaction between students such as yourself who are a little bit older and had much more life experience with those who were younger?

JF: Oh, I think we were liked because we have some maturity and some wisdom, whatever it means. We were very well-accepted and later on, you know, we helped whoever needed to be pulled ahead, we helped other Hungarian refugees. I helped people every way I could. There were no barriers between us, none.

NM: Tell us about attending school at Rutgers. Who was your favorite professor?

JF: Oh, Roy DeBoer a giant and Professor Clark was my great professor. Professor Clark died at the age of ninety-two. He was a lovely friend of mine, I visited him up in New Hampshire. He studied at UMass and came to teach at Rutgers. He was a great professor and I had a professor whose name I don't know, an economics professor who changed my life too. He was a very dashing, elegant professor, and inspired me to learn in groups. He said, "You people, for examinations, you can learn from each other a lot and share ideas," and through that advice, I organized study groups. I am a good manager, and I worked with a lot of the people who were less capable, I found that most of the people who had difficulty at Rutgers, which is a very tough school, one of the toughest schools I ever attended. They had problems because they didn't know how to study, and I as a manager and organizer I'm very good at that. That's the problem, that's how I deal with that. I organized study groups. That's how I became a teacher, because I sensed I can offer something to students and two study groups I organized and it was fascinating. People who would flunk, I pulled them up to a "C" at least. "C" average, which was difficult in those days. I sought out professor's advice, I took the advice, I knew my skills, I sensed it, and I helped my fellow students. It was a very rewarding experience. So, that was one of my great professors and of course the other two, Roy DeBoer and Professor Clark. Another professor who was very important was August Molnar. You've heard of August Molnar?

NM: No, the name sounds familiar though.

JF: I thought so. [laughter] August Molnar is a giant. August Molnar was born in America and he's the president of the American Hungarian Foundation, and they have a building on Somerset Street and hopefully he is coming to my talk today. He expressed interest, he's eighty-three now, so he's quite an old man, but a giant for what he did for the Hungarian community, a fantastic man and he was my professor too. He was helping me to graduate on time. I was missing six credits. I couldn't graduate because I was missing six credits, so he examined me in Hungarian, and gave me six credits. So, God bless him. He is a lovely person, you know, and university doesn't suffer, and I never suffered, and I finished on time in four years. How did I do it? I received all the help I needed from everybody, you know, incredible.

NM: During your time at Rutgers, you were working as well?

JF: Oh, yes. I had to work a lot, but you know I worked during the summer and summers I had two jobs, three jobs sometimes. You do what you had to do.

LR: What did you do in your spare time?

JF: I had no spare time. Perhaps I had some spare time, I even fell in love, you know. I met an angel. Edith was a teenager in Switzerland when the Hungarian Revolution broke out so she knew about that.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: Could you tell us just for the record when you graduated and what you majored in?

JF: I majored in horticulture with some focus on design, and that evolved from my love of nature, gravitated to horticulture somehow, and then, discovered design in the meantime, and so my degree is in plant science officially, but it is just a specialization of plant science towards some field which at that time wasn't existing in this university. So, Roy DeBoer came here from Cornell University, he studied design there and became the first teacher at the horticulture department here, and later on, he learned more and more landscape architecture and eventually developed the first program at Rutgers in landscape architecture. He is a giant here by the way, really a giant, he's 250, 350 pounds, his weight is going up and down, it's a yoyo, a lovely man, he's one of the greatest teachers I ever had. Everybody loves Roy DeBoer, everybody who knows landscape architecture knows Roy DeBoer. The whole state is designed by his students. He's my buddy here; I had a great dinner with him last night. He will come to the presentation too; he's just an amazing guy.

NM: What was your major?

JF: I was a double major.

LR: When did you graduate?

JF: 1961, fifty years ago, amazing.

NM: Just a very quick anecdotal question. Did you ever follow the Rutgers football team?

JF: No. I grew up in a European environment and I never learned enough about football, just different mindset. I admire people, I admire, I see sometimes. My son, of course, he's a football fan.

NM: I only asked because we recently did some oral histories with the 1961 team. They were very popular because they were undefeated.

JF: Of course they were.

NM: After you received your B.A. from Rutgers, what did you think you would do?

JF: Not much. At that time you see it was a landscape design program, just a few design courses, you couldn't get a job really, you could work in a nursery to do some gardens, you know, that type of thing, and I thought I should do better. I always think to myself what I should do. I was aiming for a landscape architecture program. I discovered by accident that Rutgers at that time was not accredited as a landscape architecture program. I didn't know what accreditation means, but I discovered that I was still a second class citizen so my degree at that time was not at the same level as it is today. Today's program is fantastic. Roy DeBoer is number one, but at that time he was just a young kid. Roy DeBoer, my first teacher was younger than I am, he's a year younger than I am, that was interesting to have a younger teacher first time in your life and that was Roy DeBoer and he became a giant over the years. At that time he was just a beginner, he barely knew anything, you know, in fact I used to laugh about him, but I don't laugh anymore, you know. It was a lovely relationship in many ways. We respect each other

and he's also one of the best several landscape architects of New Jersey ever, no doubt. He is a lovely person. So, that's my story there, but at that time I realized that I need to do more. I have to go to a school which is accredited and which has a name and prestige. So, that's how I selected my graduate school among four schools, I got interviews in Syracuse, I was interviewed in California, I was interviewed in Michigan, and at Harvard. So, I was a pretty good planner then, so I sensed what the best for me would be and Harvard emerged as the one that I wanted to go to. The question--can I get into it--and I sold myself. Life is a game the way I see it, so I'm a good game player so you want to get into Harvard, you try to do your best, so I did, and I got in too. It turned out to be that my professional life changed and I shifted more and more towards environmental issues and planning, a change I made later. I received my Harvard degree in 1964, three years later. I had to go to a three year program because I didn't have enough background for landscape architecture so they needed to give me an extra year to study. Harvard is an excellent school, but also a lot of fluff, you know, Harvard is, you know what I mean, as expressed by one of my professors, Dober, A professor who spoke at my graduation. He talked about Harvard graduation, 1964, talking about "the Harvard men." "A Harvard man who like a bird flies over the landscape and sees the future for the society," something like that, obnoxious, almost ridiculous, but at Harvard I learned the game of inflating yourself, you know, because nobody can be as good as Professor Dober describes because that person doesn't exist, so there's a lot of fluff there, you see what I mean, great school, but a lot of fluff. They know how to market themselves. I think at Harvard I learned who I am and how I can sell myself, again, how I can inflate myself, like a salesman you puff up things when you sell something, any product, you try to make it the best, overstating it, inflating those things, that was Harvard to me. So, I learned it, and not only I learned inflation, but I was teaching it to my students, I know how to inflate them, you know, life is a game. I learned that there, but it was great learning. I like Harvard because of that, and I did well there, because I also discovered Olmsted by accident. Olmsted was the person who named the profession, a brilliant man born in 1822 and died in 1903--my hero--and he designed Central Park. He created the National Park movement in America, not single handed, but was part of the gang. So, he was my idol. Actually I wrote about Olmsted and created an exhibition with my fellow students at Harvard which was quite influential. So I was able to have the profession to understand who we are, and through the Harvard connection to market it and sell it. That was my major contribution. I organized my class of about fifteen, twenty people to do this exhibition, which was about thirty-four huge panels, four foot wide, nine foot tall, we built the furniture to hold the panels and it traveled to all major cities of the US and even in Canada. I think that this was not only important for Harvard, but for the whole profession, because through Olmsted we learned what our profession achieved. We felt like that Olmsted was a giant, you get on the coattail of him and it helped everybody. Olmsted was my giant, my great star. So, that was my Harvard years, and then, I got a job at University of Massachusetts. It was my first job and major job, so I moved into lovely Amherst, it's a beautiful town in Massachusetts. I am one-and-a-half miles from the school, bike there, I walk there, never to use cars. I have a beautiful environment. So that really made my life. So, my life turned out to be outstanding at UMass and you know I was involved in a lot. I traveled a lot. I traveled the whole world more than once over, except South America, not yet, I still have to go there for seeing the wine-making region in Argentina and Chile, that's my last dream if I ever make it, but I traveled all over the world. I was able to go on lecture tours, that took me all around the world from Japan, China, India to Singapore, Asia, and then, all over Europe I lectured and I gave talks throughout the US. I visited many conferences and did well, and also

created a fund for my American Hungarian connections. I established this fund at my university. We have exchanges, every three years we have a conference either in Budapest or at UMass in America. I'm not overly active, I am slowing down, you know, I will be eighty next April, in six months so I am enjoying life.

NM: I want to follow up because you have a unique perspective of Hungary. Reading your book, I understand that you visited Hungary.

JF: Oh, many times. I was even thrown out from Hungary in 1976, they threw me out. I went there for a visit and they arrested me at the airport, the next day I was out. Why? It was the year when Jimmy Carter became president, accusing communists.

NM: How many times did you visit Hungary?

JF: Oh, 1980s on, probably every year, and I went back for the first time in 1970. It was scary and exciting to return after sixteen years, to Hungary, but before that I was able to bring my parents, and my sister; I took my sister to Europe and the USA. My parents liked to come to America too; they first came here in 1968. I had good connections with Hungary all along. I made it my business to do that. I'm a networker, you know, I like networking and interactions, so I developed good professional connections with my homeland.

NM: How had Hungary changed from when you left in 1956?

JF: Oh, my God. Oh, my God. You know, after the Revolution they had a government--Imre Nagy was executed and his deputy was also executed, his other deputy moved towards the communist side and became a strong man. His name was Janos Kadar, of Hungary. He was dictator for about thirty years. He was the communist leader, but he was a very smart leader. He knew the balancing game, he played as much as he could politically, to the West and the East, so he was a very moderate dictator. Hungary was freed from communism only in 1989 really from the communists. '89 was the year of change. '89 is when we got back the freedom, when things happened in a very positive way. So, it took from 1956 to 1989 to get where we hoped to be. Hungary is now being more and more democratic. It's had some bumps, you know, when you go into democracy it's not easy. From '56 to '89, and finally, Hungary was accepted by the West. Now we have a relatively stable government. So, I'm very optimistic that the country is on the right track.

NM: Had the country changed physically?

JF: Oh, yes. It became more and more westernized in terms of you know they look on the West as countries which are leading now and they benefit as much as they can. They are not yet fully part yet of the European Union as Germany is for instance or France, but they are coming up there, probably the next ten years. They will be closer tied to the rest of Europe, I suspect.

NM: Do you have any follow up questions?

LR: No.

JF: I am exhausted. You exhausted me, I exhausted you. They're picking me up in five minutes.

NM: I think that is a great way to end, and thank you, Dr. Fábos for having us today.

JF: Oh, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it tremendously.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 9/18/2012
Reviewed by Julius Fabos 12/12/2012