**Janet:** This is Janet Levine for the National Park service and I'm here today at the home of Stephen baker in New York City. Today is August 18th, 1994 and Mr. Baker came through Ellis Island from Hungary in 1940 when he was 19 years of age.

I'm very happy to be here and I think we could start right at the beginning if you would say your birth date and where in Hungary you were born.

**Stephen:** Alright, I was born in April 1921 in Vienna and Left Vienna at age 3, went to Budapest with my 2 brothers and lived there for 19 years that is 16 years.

**Janet:** Now was your family- were your grandparents Austrians or Hungarians or?

**Stephen:** My mother was born in a town called Fiume, F-I-U-M-E and that was the best thing she ever did [laughter]. That is how that had a lot to do with our ability to leave Hungary and get on the Italian quarter which was open and relatively free in the late 30s or early 40s because Mussolini discouraged any immigrations.

So that was an open quarter while the Hungarian quarter was closed for 6 or 7 years plus the fact that the United States is known as it has been well publicized has begun to discourage immigration to the United States because of the problems in Europe. They were afraid that they would be overwhelmed by refuges.

So the Hungarian quarter was closed and for quite a while it seemed hopeless for us to be able to leave Hungary simply because we couldn't get permission to enter the United States. We had permission to leave Hungary but we had no place to go and we wanted to come to America.

So it seemed hopeless but then by some fluke what has happened is that this city Fiume which was on the border line between Hungary and Italy and switched loyalties which ever seemed more experient at the time in that typically Italian Hungarian fashion, that’s the way it works in Europe decided to join Italy to become an Italian city.

Mussolini had a lot to do with that and what has happened is that now my mother became Italian citizen legally.

**Janet:** Because she had been born there?

**Stephen:** Because she was born in Italy all of a sudden. She was actually born in Hungary but now she was an Italian citizen. We were born in Austria but we were under 21, so we became Italian citizens too on paper and that’s how we received our visa.

All this happened in the 1940s roughly about a month before Hungary entered a war and as a matter of fact the ocean liner- the ship that we crossed Atlantic was the last one that has left Italy because Italy also joined the war. It allied itself with Germany and it entered a war against France.

So while we were crossing the Atlantic as a matter of fact our captain has received instructions from Italy, from the Italian government to return instantly so that it could be converted into a troop ship and for about a day or so we were just floating in the ocean, the captain couldn't make up his mind but then in typically Italian fashion he decided to do what was best for his crew and for himself and for the passengers and he continued to come to New York and to the best of my knowledge he gave himself up as a prisoner of war of some sort.

In other words he was held in custody and the ship too during the war.

**Janet:** Were you aware of any of this at the time?

**Stephen:** I get some wind of it. Nobody knew exactly what was going on because the captain kept pretty much to himself for obvious reasons. He was traitor by Italian law.

**Janet:** Because?

**Stephen:** He received orders to return his ship back to Italy. It was war time and the fact that we had about 1000 passengers aboard didn't concern the Italians to the point where they would just let a ship go.

This was a big ocean liner, Italian line called Volcania, a luxury liner. Of course when we crossed the ocean it became less of a luxury liner but still as far we were concerned- the 3 kids this was sort of a vacation. Good food, swimming pool and we looked at it as a vacation.

**Janet:**  There was also something that you mentioned about having discovered that your grandfather had been Jewish or was Jewish. How did that come about?

**Stephen:** Now my father could not leave Hungary that has become obvious in the late 30s that he would have difficulties. In the first place he was an outspoken person, he had political leanings, he was wealthy, he was articulate, he joined movements that were not too friendly, he told Germany he did not approve of Hitler, he said so.

He had a textile factory, a number of factories, he refused to manufacture German uniforms, he thought that Hungary should never be subsavian to Germany and particularly not to Hitler. He didn't take this position as a Jew, he felt he was a Hungarian, he was quite a patriotic Hungarian, he served in world war 1, he got tones of medal, he was very proud of his service.

He thought he would be always safe in Hungary because he fought for Hungary, he just didn't like the idea that Hungary would be kind of a satellite to Germany which it has become more and more so. He was ahead of his time, he understood Hitler and he understood eventually Hungary will almost become part of Germany, which has happened at the end of the war.

Now Hungarians because they were basically part of the alliance- the German alliance was treated differently from let’s say from Poland or from other countries that would be occupied by the Germans.

Hungary was never- at least for a long time was never legally occupied by Germans. Germans used Budapest for headquarters, the royal palace was an important headquarters for the Germans but they felt that Hungarians and the Germans were fighting on the same side.

So the Jewish question become less pressing in Hungary than let’s say in Poland for a while but then as Hitler rose to power and he began to change the German legal system as far as the Jewish population was concerned that had reflected itself in Hungary too and he- Hitler tried to put pressure on Hungarian government to change the system to put pressure on the Jewish population and in some ways Hungary went through the same kind of changes that Germany did only not to their extent, that is it has become more and more difficult for a Jewish profession to become let’s say a doctor or a lawyer.

Education system has suffered, there were less Jewish people accepted in universities and anti-Semitism become a national policy up to a point but Hungarians were never 100% anti-Semitic and even if they were, they had a history of anti-Semitism but that was kind of balanced by their antagonism towards any occupation or any country that seemed to be more powerful and they have the sense of independence and they didn't like interference from Germany.

So, it kind of this thing went back and forth and what has happened basically is that the government which is the parliament, the ministry, the prime minister has changed a number of times 4 or 5 times before 1940, between 1937 and 1940 and every time it would change the laws would change and the laws were complex and our king sometimes they followed the German patterns sometimes they were kind of improvised.

So my father was Jewish and then he was non-Jewish and then he was Jewish again and my mother of course was Lutheran so she was okay for a while but there was a time even she has become Jewish and the system of the family roots.

The grandfather, the father it was possible to be 20% Jewish, 40%, 75%, 100% depending on your parentage going way back. My father, he himself didn't exactly know, he couldn't trace back his heritage that far. He had polish parentage, he has some Swiss parentage, he was a mixed breed. We never practiced the Jewish religion, I never thought of myself as Jewish. In school we were not considered Jewish, we didn't go through the rituals.

**Janet:** Did you practice Lutheran?

**Stephen:** We practiced Lutheran but there came a time just before the [unclear 00:16:16] when I found out that I was legally Jewish and the way I found this out and my brothers too was simply going to school one evening they had a meeting of sorts with the Germans or some Germans speakers and I was stopped at the door and not allowed to enter and I was told that the reason for that is because I was Jewish, I was a Jew.

**Janet:** So your papers had been searched out to discover that you [crosstalk 00:17:03]?

**Stephen:** The Germans went through all the documentation in school and of course documentation in Europe at that time and probably historically always has been much more extensive than in the United States that is privacy not hold as sacred.

In Europe it’s important where you came from, your religion appears on the passport and everywhere else even on the income tax returns. So you know it’s relatively easy to trace back somebody's roots.

**Janet:** Do you remember how you felt when you were told [crosstalk 00:17:48]?

**Stephen:** Well I remember exactly because it was an evening and I was with my younger brother and we were not exactly model boys that is because our family was falling apart obviously and my mother had her hands full trying to make it possible for us to come to the united states where you learnt little attention was paid to the family, we didn't have a family as such, we didn't even live with our parents, we lived all over the place including a catholic school for a little while just to get things straight.

**Janet:** Was this because of all the political things that were going on?

**Stephen:** It’s because my father knew [unclear 00:18:44] what was going to happen and they looked out for us, they wanted us to come to America as quickly as possible. My father knew that he was standing in the way so he disappeared and hid for quite a while until after the war more or less.

**Janet:** What was your father's name by the way?

**Stephen:** Oscar.

**Janet:** And your mother?

**Stephen:** Renee.

**Janet:** And her maiden name?

**Stephen:** Levinsky, it sounds very polish to me.

**Janet:** So your father went and hid?

**Stephen:** So he went into hiding and for 3 or 4 years it was the mother who took care of us. I have no idea if she received any money from our father or not. I'm not even sure if they kept in touch. We were told that he was [unclear 00:20:01] to the army which was not quite okay so he was hiding.

We knew that if he would be caught then we would take the brunt of it too, so he kind of pulled away from the whole situation and that as a decision that was made between my mother and my father for our sake but as a practical matter now my mother was left on her own, a very capable strong woman, she built up a little advertising agency kind of in the garage type of thing at home and she earned some money, enough to take care of us then she met someone only a year or two before we came.

A German refuge who was running away from Germany also hiding who was a publisher of one of the German magazines and has spoken against Hitler and they were chasing after him. He ended up in Budapest, he met my mother and he went into hiding at her apartment also as an advertising man and actually it became a functional advertising agency except he has never left home except in the evenings because if he would have been caught that would have been the end.

I remember little episodes where we would take a walk in the evening with him, one time the bicycle came by and almost accidentally hit him and he fell and the police appeared trying to help him because it was a traffic accident and even though he was badly hurt, he told the police, "Don't worry, I'm okay" and walked away as fast as he could. So he was kind of touch and go situation, we got to the point where we began to understand it.

**Janet:** You understood that he was hiding out?

**Stephen:** That we understood and we also understood that probably- in fact we suspected that my mother has divorced my father first for the sake of- to make it possible for us to leave and then she fell in love with this other man and actually he and my mother and 3 of us came over with the father left behind and that doesn't mean that we cut off our father or that we forgot about him.

We just didn't know what has happened to him and as far as we were concerned to have a step-father as intelligent and knowledgeable and speaking half a dozen languages and being a nice person as far as we were concerned, it was a good thing.

This is basically what happened. I think that when we left, we considered ourselves Jewish by law but almost without religion or without any loyalties to any religion or even at that point even nationality.

We were kind of people without religion and people without country which in retrospect maybe was a good thing because when we came to America it was relatively easy for us to put the past behind us. We didn't want anything to do with it.

It was also a blessing in disguise that we were kind of bounced about for 3 or 4 years on our own all 3 of us, I'm talking about 3 boys because we all have become relatively successful in our own profession.

My younger brother has become a multi-millionaire in the real estate in Seattle, my older brother has become an executive in a manufacturing plant, and I’ve had a reasonably successful career in advertising. I was able to write 22 books on the side, all these I think it was not [unclear 00:26:09], it certainly had no form or shape. We were people of our own.

**Janet:** What are your brothers’ names?

**Stephen:** Its Peter is the older one and Tom is the younger one and its very interesting to me to see what happens when even though you come from the same family, when that age in the early 20s you enter a new culture and how you react to it and then what happens to people in 20 or 30 years and it’s interesting to me how we all have become successful but how we went about it in such different ways for example my younger brother wouldn't dream of living in New York.

He's an outdoor man and he's an entrepreneur and he's very much aware of the value of money and that’s the way he developed and the point is this that he has discovered that in America it was possible to make money, that’s major trust in his life. I'm not saying it’s good or bad but that’s the way he thought.

I discovered that in America you could do creativity that was paid for which came to me as somewhat surprised so that is what I cultivated for the first time became an art director, then I became a writer then I had my own advertising agency and spend most of my life in the creative end of the business.

My older brother he discovered that he could do almost anything in America he wanted to and it didn't matter where he came from and he probably was the type that would- he went back to Hungary and Germany a number of times and he used that background to succeed in America.

In other words they used him as an expert on international business but each of us discovered something about America that kind of fell into our lap and we were able to use whatever talent we had and probably develop it the way we probably wouldn't have done it in Hungary because we wouldn't have had the opportunity. We probably would have ended up in some job and do what we were told.

**Janet:** Can you think of any experiences either you or your brothers had in Hungary that foreshadowed how you would live your life once you got here?

**Stephen:** That’s an interesting question and I thought about it. I have a feeling that there is such a thing as American psychic. There is a temperament that all people who are almost destined to succeed in America even though they haven't grown up here, just how that happens and why depends on the circumstances but I think with my mother making it on her own as a woman which is quite an accomplishment- was quite an accomplishment in that time and place.

Seeing my father overcoming, disappearing and do what was best. To see this kind of decision making, that kind of entrepreneurship, I think all 3 of us became very entrepreneurial and I don’t know high entrepreneurial degrees but we certainly weren't stuck in any mode.

We had no intention of becoming part of the Hungarian community, we never talked or had any feelings about going backwards or even looking back, we were all trying to look forward and we thought that this was a Pandora’s box, I mean that anything was possible even today.

I'm surprised of the opportunities that exist and the idea for example in my case where I could go from doing art to advertising and to writing and now I spend more and more time writing books successfully and having gone through building up my own business and seeing my younger brother buying and selling corps and homes and seeing others going on, this is to me even now I think of it as a land of opportunity.

I think it’s difficult to understand just how much that exists in America unless you come from somewhere else and I think the reason that some immigrants succeed in this country that they're able to forge ahead and surpass sometimes natives is because they realize the opportunities and they ledge on to them and make something out of it because some culture all of your life you may become disgruntled because your standards are different but when you come from very low standards this is quite a change and it is for the better no question about it.

**Janet:** Let’s talk about you actually leaving. Do you remember you were examined in Hungary before you left?

**Stephen:** We of course had to go through the American consulate which is basically getting a visa and getting permission to enter the country and getting some affidavits, getting some sponsorships so we wouldn't be a liability here which we got almost by [unclear 00:34:15], so my mother met someone who happened to be an American and she's said, "I’ll be your sponsor."

We never used her resources, we didn't have to but we had sponsor. Of course we had to go through documentation in Hungary then of course in Italy it became a little difficult at the time because Italy was about to enter the war but my feeling is that the Italian government and certainly the population, the government too welcomed the opportunity to let Jews go as opposed to put them in concentration camps and kill them.

My feeling and if you were going back into history that [unclear 00:35:29] that Italians deep down there not anti-Semitic. They had Mussolini but he wasn't anti- Semitic either, he was playing the game to appease Hitler a number of times but basically Italians were friendly. So, it was relatively possible to cross Italy. Yugoslavia was a little bit of a problem because it was enemy of Hungary.

In Europe you have friends and enemies of your nationality has a very strong position which goes back to history and its important but we had the papers, we had the passport and to the best of my re-collection when we arrived in the united states in the afternoon, the Americans came aboard first to examine the ship, see if there were any problems. Americans had become careful not to let enemy aliens or spies into the country, this was we weren't in the war but we were close to it.

Then the best of my recollection the ship went to New York Manhattan released the first class passengers and then the ship turned back and went to Ellis Island and we spent 3 or 4 hours there being examined.

**Janet:** Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty? Can you describe that?

**Stephen:** Well of course that’s a high point in everybody’s arrival and when we got near enough to American shore- I don't know how near you were about to get, about 20-30 miles everybody was on board in the open. The whole ship was loaded on one side [laughter], everybody was looking for the Statue of Liberty and I remember how it emerged from the horizon.

First of course we saw the torch then it became larger and larger and I think the reaction passengers, every time you saw more of the Statue of Liberty was predictably they were excited, there were shouts in the horizon, it was quite a thing.

Then of course we saw the whole statue, I was in impressed by its size, I didn't know it was that big. I have seen it on postcards but it never really gave the idea of that magnitude and it was in the afternoon, the torch was already lit on and we passed by. It was an overwhelming experience.

Of course we were in our 20s, young. It was a just a great deal of excitement, it wasn't any great, "Jeez, now we're in America and this and that is going to happen." We were just taking it one minute at a time. American shoreline for the first time, unfortunately for the first time, unfortunately it was a Jersey shoreline [laughter] which was kind of a letdown.

We didn't see any great monuments there but then the ship pulled in the New York harbor and we passed through Wall Street and the down town Manhattan and was lit up and it was absolutely fantastic, the impression. The tallest building that I remember seeing was 4 or 5 story high. So now we have seen 20, 30, 40 story high building and it was incredible.

The first thing that occurred to me which office I'm going to work at. There was millions of windows lit up, then the ship went to one of the piers midtown. I think it was 59 street someplace or 42nd street pier I think and to best of my recollection we were not allowed to leave the ship except first class passengers and then we went to Cony Island.

Now interestingly enough just in the side, about 15 years after that has become Italian line, was one of our clients in advertising. I was a creative director of an agency called Cunningham and Walsh which was a fairly major agency and the client decided that it would be a good idea to put me through the experience of travelling on one of his ships and it so happened it was the Volcania, so it was the same ship.

He didn't know that and I wouldn't tell him, I didn't say anything. We caught the ship in Halifax Canada- Volcania which at that point became a cruise ship, a luxury cruise ship. We caught it there. We were of course travelling first class.

We used that occasion to do some television commercials aboard, we had about 100 actors and models aboard to make our television commercials look good and I remember the moment when this same ship and I didn't say anything to anybody but I knew that now the ship was coming to New York from Canada getting into the New York harbor and taking basically the same route that we took when we came and it was at night and I remember leaving the bar where we spend most of our time after hours. The ship bar which was very luxurious, we travelled first class. Leaving all these wonderful people and you can imagine they were all models and I was young.

**Janet:** What year was it roughly?

**Stephen:** That was about 1960 somewhere.

**Janet:** So about 20 years after.

**Stephen:** 20 years after. No, it was 1955, someplace around there. I was still single and to me I had a good time but I decided to leave the festivities down stairs and go all by myself and I found the same spot on the deck but it was familiar to me and I stood there and I watched the Statue of Liberty and I watched the skyline again standing at the same spot and it was quite moving to me, thinking what has happened in such short time.

Now, I had money, I had a position, I had a job, I had a future, I even had a past in America and people I was associating with and the difference between and only at age 20 you know standing in the midst of Polish, Romanian, Hungarian and Czechoslovakian refuges in a somewhat desperate going 3rd class.

So that was kind of a moving experience, now coming back to Ellis island to the best of my recollection we stopped there. I think they examined a number of arrivals at Ellis Island in the foyers, kind of on a selective basis.

I'm not sure exactly why we stopped there but we were examined at Ellis Island, we passed. That was my recollection, we passed some officials upstairs and it was the same room that now is where the benches are--

**Janet:** The great--

**Stephen:** The great hall, we passed by there. There was a desk and I was very much impressed by the reception. I think I mentioned this to you on the telephone. We came from a background where people in uniform or anybody representing the government in any shape or form was anonymous pleasant and we were very scared because we had experienced many times where our documentation seemed to be in order and then something would happen and we will have to turn back or even go to jail or even go to concentration camps or being shot, we never knew.

These were uncertain times, this was the feeling, the experience that we had in Hungary going back 2-3 years in Hungary. I don't mean to say that we were living in fear but we certainly were very much aware of this possibility and we had enough experience as now Jewish people.

Incidentally I was thrown out of school and taken again and thrown out again depending on who sit on the ministry so we knew about the uncertainties. It was very surprising and gratifying to me, it was the first experience to meet Americans in uniforms because this I guess they were guards or some sort of officials, custom people sitting at desks and they spend only less than 2 or 3 minutes going through the documents and asking very few questions mostly looking at us and having coffees in paper cups and just sitting there very comfortable.

One had his jacket off, I mean these are the impressions you get as a kid you know sitting on these chair and they were laughing and they seemed to have a good time and they were very friendly to everybody and they spoke about 6-7 languages and they had translators and they spoke to my mother in German and my step-father was trying to show off his English so they spoke English to him and generally they looked at us- the three kids, we were all tall and looked in good shape and they said, "Good luck to you and we need more like you and go ahead good luck to you."

And it was the first time in my life that an official would smile and say good luck to you because that wasn't the way in a military culture, that made an impression on me, impression on us I think, all of us and then we passed and we get to New York in the evening and we were picked up by an organization called HIAAS Hebrews immigration something.

**Janet:** [inaudible 00:50:42].

**Stephen:** Something something which picked up passengers of any religion and we were given room on board for a couple of weeks, for about a month or so. My mother got a job and step-father faster so that they could leave. We were still there. We just stayed there until each of us got variety of jobs.

My first job was in World’s fair working in a Hungarian restaurant washing dishes then I got a promotion to be night watchmen in the same Hungarian pavilion. That was the first job. Believe it or not I was so inexperienced that I knew that the World’s fair was in Queens and having come from Budapest which is relatively compact city.

It’s possible to walk from one end to another I thought that I could walk to Queens. I gave up after I spend almost a day walking when I finally took the subway and get to World’s fair and just walked in and got a job immediately I asked.

Now this was a Hungarian pavilion, I didn't speak any English at all so at least I could communicate and then I didn't leave Queens for a month or so. I got an apartment right there, never came back to HIAAS. It was that kind of a life you know you kind of took one day at a time.

**Janet:** But HIAAS had referred you to the World’s fair? Was that part of [crosstalk 00:52:56].

**Stephen:** No, some people told me that maybe there were opportunities there, job opportunities and maybe I should apply to go to the Hungarian restaurant, a Hungarian pavilion which had a restaurant. The restaurateur was a Hungarian whose name was familiar to me so I could use. He was a famous restaurateur in Budapest, so I could approach him, I could talk to him and he said, "Okay, we'll put you up in the kitchen."

Now that wasn't the best job in the world in terms of learning American ways but when you're working in a restaurant you get time off between lunch hours and dinner hours and those 3 or 4 hours in the next 2 or 3 months became immensely valuable because I could walk around the World’s fair and look at the American movies and look at the general motors building and get a feel of this whole thing.

It was very exciting to me that was the first job I had. After that as I said we all dispersed, I tried to get a scholarship, I tried to get to college but I didn't finish high school because I didn't have an opportunity.

I find a small college in Missouri some place that was willing to take a chance, put me through quick high school course, of course on my test I was just below an idiot because my IQ was about 70 because I couldn't understand the questions but they kind of saw the light, they put me on the football team figuring that because I knew I played football except I didn't know that football in Europe meant soccer [laughter].

There was some confusion there but they put me as a kicker and I got a scholarship being on the football team I have done about two jobs in college to pay for the tuition and spent a lot of time in the summer time and after that out of sheer curiosity travelling in the united states in America to find out what kind of place that was.

Now, because of my background and interest in writing which goes way back, kind of a journalistic type of temperament.

**Janet:** You were interested in that [crosstalk 00:56:06].

**Stephen:** I was interested in where I was. I crisscrossed the United States a number of times and I've been in almost every state except two or three. I haven't been Alaska, there's certain states I skipped but I think I learnt and probably understood the united states as much as anybody.

I hitch hiked and once in a while I would join some hobos and travel on Freight trains and you know do the best and I've done dozens of jobs anything from working from an oil field to of course the restaurants and loading trucks and driving trucks and picking apples you name it. Whatever was available I would take it, no problem because I was in good health and learnt a lot about the United States.

Now that is the kind of knowledge that came in handy later on because in advertising- as a matter of fact I wrote a book on it and later on I taught advertising and one of the subjects that is very interesting to me is the regional differences in the United States that people think of the United States as one big happy family but it’s not quite so and then in marketing of course, the regional differences and it’s something that I actually taught which is kind of strikes me curious because the first 20 years I spent somewhere else and here I am teaching Americans about America but these things happen.

**Janet:** Why don't you give some of the highlights of your career?

**Stephen:** Of my career.

**Janet:** We'll have some information in a separate file that people can look at but what do you feel most proud of or grateful for having the opportunity to have done?

**Stephen:** Alright, I'll keep it very brief I was trying to weave that in. I think that I found my rootlessness an advantage because I never had any notions about belonging to any group or even belief systems. It was very easy for me to get a kind of overall look at the whole situation and that helped a lot.

I drifted into advertising but I think that because of the background in Europe and because my step father's experience as a publisher and my mother's talent as an artist it didn't quite come as a total surprise.

Luck had a lot to do with it although the first 6 or 7 or 8 years or maybe even 10 years were pretty difficult in a traditional way. That is I didn’t' have any money, I didn't know anybody, I had to learn the language which was important to me because you can't be in the communication business and not know the language.

You certainly cannot be in charge of promoting a product or influencing people and not speak their language. Understanding the culture, I went about it consciously. I wrote a number of books about it eventually. I worked in many- I don't want to even go through it because its so many different jobs and they were very different from one another.

They were anywhere from manual labor to you know working on constructions to doing illustrations for magazines and making a fairly decent living out of it. I got a job in small agencies, I always wanted to get into larger agencies, I was able to do that at age 29 or something like that I joined—

**Janet:** Okay, we're resuming now, this is tape 2 and I'm speaking with Stephen Baker and its August 18th, 1994. Okay, so you were saying that all the different kinds of jobs that you had.

**Stephen:** Right and ended up in a major agency and become reasonably successful in a short time. I was vice president in my early 30s and got substantial amount of publicity on some of my work probably the one that was most important was let your fingers do the walking for the Yellow Pages because of the support of the ATMT which is a large company.

If you get into something like that you receive a great deal of exposure but I think what helped me a lot in my career was the variety of experiences in my background, the understanding of America which sounds curious and it’s probably different from the average person because nothing came naturally.

I studied, I read and I think I must have read the New York times beginning at age 30 and I don't think I missed a day to still even at this age to me I'm a kid in the toy shop, I mean it’s all very exciting to me.

In a way you know life is very interesting to me and I feel lucky that I get so much joy out of discovering things that helped a lot because in a way it put me in the situation at the same time.

I was always able to because of the differences in cultures, I was always remained somewhat this looking from the outside in type of approach which you get if you're dropped into a totally new situation and you go through that experience once, you never forget it and it kind of becomes part of your personality. I mean when I crossed the United States on top of Freight cars I had my camera with me, I was put in jail I was taken north. I was put in jail because I wasn't supposed to travel as an enemy alien which I ignored and I kept a diary. I still have about 20 books of everything.

This kind of experience which has become part of personality you know helped a lot in advertising where you deal with so many different demographics and so many different people.

Also advertising is trying to keep ahead of trends and when you become conscious of this society which changes much faster than any other in the world, when you become conscious of it you develop curiosity and then the ability to predict trends as they come and see them coming and even now if you would ask me about music or fashion or the changes in our society I could probably write about it or talk about it.

To me it’s very interesting, I read a lot too and my friends come from all walks of life. This helped in advertising. I'm not sure if this has much to do- it has something to do with the background.

In Europe you find more renaissance people, that is things are not as quite specialized because it’s a smaller society, you can do a number of things at the same time and then it’s perfectly okay. I thought it was quite natural to be able to have artistic ability, to draw which I learnt in evening classes, be artistically inclined, work with pictures and at the same time work with words too.

In other words a combination of art and writing to me became a natural marriage, I didn't see the difference. Now of course when you're working in an advertising agency you are either an art director or a copywriter and I was an art director because I didn't master the language enough at least in the opinions of my superiors to be a copywriter so they put me in the art department.

So I became a kind of an art director, this was probably responsible for a fairly quick rise in the advertising business. As an art director I discovered quite soon that most art directors felt almost alienated from the word people, in other words there were two camps. One was dealing with pictures the other one was dealing with words and it was obvious to both camps that one had nothing to do with the other and they were at odds. To me it was the same thing- it was communications, so I became one of those art directors who could actually write.

Now in the agency this wasn't that simple because of the tendency to put things and pigeon hole people and say, "This is what you are," and you know put up a shadow.

**Janet:** [inaudible 01:09:36].

**Stephen:** But on the other hand there was this drive on my part to verbally express myself too, so what I began to do is to write articles for magazines and write about advertising to advertising people for advertising people.

Of course I would write for general magazines too but that’s something else but basically I spent a conceivable amount of time explaining advertising to advertising people and particularly art direction and this was at that time was quite a breakthrough because I was probably the first verbal art director that ever bust upon the scene and I did it and it happened in a very obvious way because when you're in print people know who you are.

I got my pictures there and so I was writing articles, I was writing columns first for a magazine called *Art Direction* and then quickly a magazine called *Advertising Age* which is the bible in the industry came about and asked me to do a monthly column, bi-monthly column for them first in art direction and then in advertising and I did that for many many years about 15 years, 16years but that kind of exposure became very helpful because many thousands of clients would read advertising age, so I became important for my own company as a spokesman and somebody who was known for his creativity.

Not because necessarily I was more creative but I was the only one who could put it on paper, so we get accounts as a result of it and I became an executive probably faster than most people and eventually I was writing copy and after my campaign for ATMT I decided to go into business on my own with the help of ATMT and I have an agency for over 20 years.

I have developed you know we had some large accounts, 70 people and that’s my advertising background.

**Janet:** Can you think of any attitudes that you brought with you? I mean you've so mentioned some of them, I mean the rootlessness was a helpful thing but any attitudes that came through your mother, father, step- father that you would say that you used in your life time or drew upon?

**Stephen:** Well, I think that this is pretty common, I think you develop certain attitudes when you change cultures and you accept the fact that you are going to live in a different culture and you mentioned before that some people get stuck in their own culture anyway, they're just going from one location to another.

China town is China town but if you have that kind of experience which is almost traumatic experience it’s a shock therapy, its culture shock then I think your mind becomes a little more open and flexible. It’s got to because you have to reject a whole lot of beliefs that you have before.

**Janet:** Can you think of something your rejected [inaudible 01:14:09]?

**Stephen:** Well, I rejected the kind of patriotism that I learned as a child in Hungary which was very militaristic and no nonsense and terribly important that it was the greatest thing that could ever happen to you was to be killed in war for your country.

I don't mean I rejected it to the point, all three of us served in the army but I certainly took on a more different approach to war and fighting because Americans are quite pragmatic about wars. There's relatively little emotionalism and a lot of practicality and by enlarge we are a very peaceful nation, we're not inviting war. As far as I can see most of our wars were defensive.

Some people will argue that but depending on the way you look at it. That’s one of the- this militaristic attitude, now that’s Hungarian you know whose house comes from and all kinds of nonsense that goes with a culture that is over 1000 years old and has been in wars after wars.

I also became conscious of the fact that military power was not necessarily on top of the list of success, it wasn't the only thing that would predict a nation’s success and a good example of this today of course is Japan and Germany which is practically no military power and are among the most successful nations in the world.

In the other words I became conscious of the fact that economy and intelligence has as much to do with success as number of tanks or the military, that’s one of the things. You asked what I rejected, is that what--?

**Janet:** What you rejected and on the other hand what did you embrace if you can think of it that way in this country as a cultural attitude [inaudible 01:17:10]?

**Stephen:** Well, talking about rejections, I thought it wasn't that important to be a Hungarian. When I came to America from day one I wanted to be an American to the point of obsolete, I mean as a young man I would go to movies, now at that time there were movies where you could walk in and stay as long as you want and I thought, "My God, for 10 cents I can stay there for 4 hours!" then I would stay for 4 hours and see the same movie over and over again to get my money's worth.

But basically I was very much intrigued by the movie heroes of those days that represented America, the Gary Coopers, the John Wayne’s, Jimmy Stewarts and that kind of thing. That made a profound impression on me to the point where I began to swagger and go to Texas and do all kind of things to be like them, I went through that phase.

I think American system what I embraced is the remarkable phenomenon in history, looking at it in the larger sense the way I see it and probably embraced it in small doses. The fact that it was possible- only a short time ago, less than 300 years ago for a group of people to sit down at the desk and write some sort of a platform for the way we want to function and then do it and they actually build a nation on a plan basis as opposed to peace mail which was happens in Europe, has happened in Europe, is to me absolutely incredible.

I can't believe it, I can't believe it now that our fore fathers in Philadelphia would sit down and write a constitution and say this is the way to go and then stick with that constitution for this long without any major problems I mean of course we've made amendments, we've changed the constitution, it was supposed to be flexible but to me it’s amazing that this was possible and I'm not sure that Americans or even the world realize this phenomenon, I mean this is fantastic.

Now of course everybody is imitating success which is America and everybody is trying to do the same thing. There are nations now that are trying to write constitutions, Russia for one you know following our footsteps but we were basically the first ones that did this in such a major way and I can't get over this.

I still admire this and I also admire the fact that we can accommodate so many different cultures and still live in relative peace. We have our problems but they're minimal compared to other nations in the world.

**Janet:** Are you talking about cultures of people from other countries or regional [crosstalk 01:21:50].

**Stephen:** Different nations, we don't have many regional differences, we have some you know the Southerners don't like the Yankees and so forth but that compared to other parts of Europe where you see parts of the country breaking off like in Yugoslavia. You know that or in other countries. That’s minimal that’s mostly the stuff that television is made of.

I think it’s remarkable looking as somebody with the immigration experience I'm somewhat taken aback by some of the people who come over are so adamant in keeping their ways and cultures at the expense of what I consider is an American culture. I do think that we have our own culture.

We don't always realize just how strong it is until we go to Europe some place and then listen to them talking about America. America does have at this point and this is only about 200 years, has developed its own ways and cultures which is imitated over the world.

We are probably made the most profound culture differences in the world than any nation ever made including Germany with all his musicians and poets or France with all its wonderful culture. I think it dwarfs, what we have is so much more powerful.

**Janet:** Now could you try to pin point what it is that makes American culture stand apart from other cultures, the European cultures in particular?

**Stephen:** It’s a very open mind to changes and you can see how fast our music changes, our heroes change. We have a very short attention span, that’s not necessarily a personality trait. The reason for that is because we have such powerful media and anything that happens gets an enormous amount of exposure, people get saturated by it and forget it.

I'm amazed how people quickly forget, how quickly something comes to people's attention. The OJ Simpson trial is an example, things that happen in Africa is an example. Right now it’s the Rwanda problem tomorrow it will be something else.

As a writer I'm very much aware of this because I watched the books come out on the Persian Gulf War and I spoke to publishers and I say, "How many did you print? I mean this war will be over within a few months and you better sell out." They say, "We know it and we just printed enough."

Some people got stuck some people didn’t, as soon as that war was over we forgot about it. As soon as the Ethiopian, the African starvation problems were over we forgot about it now we have new ones. Yugoslavia was very much in the foreground a few months back, we forget it. The Olympics, the ice skating problem we had on the cover of magazines and now it’s all over nobody knows Kerrigan, nobody remembers.

**Janet:** Whereas in Europe...

**Stephen:** In Europe these things stay that they become part of culture. Less and less so but still compared to the American speed and rapidity by which we change Europeans still doesn’t understand it. They don't understand how we can have two wood stacks only 25 years apart and one becomes a mass market affair and the other one becomes expression of a whole new set of idealism.

We can't understand how that is possible but its part of the American psyche. The language of course shows it too, the language changes so fast. I did an article on that one time about the English language which I'd be happy to give you, you know talking about the fact that in America you have new dictionaries coming out every year, in Europe its maybe every 20 years because things don't change that fast.

That’s part of this culture, I'm not sure if its good or bad but I know it is possible and I know it’s working because we are able to change more rapidly than anybody even Japan. So it’s amazing to me although I fore saw it and it’s a good thing I did because I invested my money having that in mind that we would be climbing out of our recession quite quickly. I could see that the American corporations would respond by cutting their overhead, becoming more efficient, that’s very American.

There isn't another country in the world, Japan or Germany are still struggling to get back on their feet and now I understand just the other day that we have become the number one automobile manufacturer in the world. Japan was all over us only 5 or 10 years ago and the way we did it is GM cut its force, made operations more efficient and just get their act together.

Other countries don't do that, there much more security conscious, personal security. In Japan up to the last few years when you got a job it was a life time job, in Germany too very socialistic. I don't know if it’s good or bad depending on your own [unclear 01:29:58] but its part of our culture.

I embrace that because I thrive on it, I live on it. Good example is when I do books, the last 4 books I did and I got 2 more to go, 2 more are going to be published are books on cats. People ask me why cats? They ask me if I have cat, no I don't have a cat, I borrowed one [laughter] and so they're amazed by it but I'm not because I see the market place and right now for the last 2 or 3 or 4 years cats are in. So you know we did books and sold 2 or 3 hundred thousand copies on cats. I also know that 2 or 3 years from now cats will not work.

We got to find something else. Used to be dogs and I did books on dogs too but I could see dogs going downhill and cats coming into the foreground. So this is of course you know a very superficial way of looking at things but it’s indicative of the way we think and understanding it and coming from another culture to be able to understand it more so, I think is important, I think it helped me a lot because---

**Janet:** You can stand outside [crosstalk 01:31:44].

**Stephen:** I can look from outside in and I see this and I have no great belief systems you know where I’ll think cats are the only pets to have. I'm amused by it, I enjoy it, I learn about the subject whichever way I can. It doesn't have to come from deep inside, it will come from deep inside once I absorb it, once I learn about it then I write about it. So, I think that kind of attitude I think goes back to going through different cultures.

**Janet:** By the way did you ever have contact with your father after you got here?

**Stephen:** Yes, after the war we found him and he lived another 10 years 15years.

**Janet:** In Europe?

**Stephen:** In Europe. We invited him to come to America, he didn't want to. He was in his 50s, 60s but we visited him in Budapest and we found out his story and it was pretty much the way he predicted it would be. Eventually he was classified as a Jew and the final solution in 1943 when it became obvious to Germany that they were losing the war and Hitler in his last furor decided to kill all the Jews.

He finally got to Hungary, at that time the relationship between Hungary and Germany has become somewhat difficult because Hungary was trying to end the war and of course Germany would fight on, Hitler would fight on as long as he could then the final solution which was methodology has come to Hungary.

At the end of the war, he only lasted for about a year but Hitler managed to do away with most of the Jews outside Budapest. He began to exterminate or export Jews first outside Budapest because he felt that this would be easier to deal with because people were less sophisticated, they were possibly more anti-Semitic, it was easier to spot Jews, to find them and to transport them and as long the Freight cars were moving it was happening.

He thought this was some sort of achievement. This was probably the only part of the war that he was winning, he was losing and the more he was losing in the real sense the more he depended on this kind of display of his power, that’s my opinion.

He finally got to Budapest and he began to take Jews to Auschwitz on Freight cars, there was no more shortage of freight cars, the military needed it for its own transport but Hitler wouldn't let them have it. It’s more important for him to take the Jews to concentration camps and my father who was at that point was [unclear 01:36:05].

He lived in apartment with the star of David on the door and certain parts of Budapest was caught, he was taken to the brick factory which was a place where they would gather up they Jews and take them to railway station and transport them out of Hungary.

He was taken there but he escaped, a number of people did. Taking a large groups of people at night, walking them on the streets is not an easy task plus the fact that not all the guards were Germany, many of them were Hungarians and they didn't quite approve of the whole thing to begin with. So he managed to and found him, at that point Hitler had pretty much stopped transporting Jews because the Russians were only 50 or 100 miles away.

There were other things to do but a Hungarian party the Arrow Shirts took over continuing his program and they lined up all the Jews including my father. I think I told you that and they lined up all the Jews at the bank of the dungeon that’s where my book comes in and they just shot them one by one but some people including my father managed to jump backwards into the river before the gun got to them and most of this people they drowned or froze or whatever but my father managed to- he was an excellent swimmer, that’s what my book is about you know he always teaches us to swim.

Swim or sink and then he himself saved his life by following his own model and that’s how he escaped and he did okay, remarried and went into business again and he somehow managed to survive.

**Janet:** So your book that you're writing [inaudible 01:38:59] what does that cover?

**Stephen:** Well, it just covers the Hungarian experience otherwise it would get too complicated. Basically the point is that it’s a book on survival and maybe it’s not such a bad experience to go through that for a young man. It’s something that comes in handy.

**Janet:** Well, it sounds like you’ve made the most of all the kinds of experiences you have encountered in your life. I was curious too. You said you had movie star heroes when you were learning in English you know first in this country. Did you have heroes after that, other heroes that you emulated in your life that you can think of?

**Stephen:** No, the most of the heroes I had were in advertising, professional heroes. People who succeeded in advertising and I admired their work, commercials. I mean that to me was the ultimate, I became very very much involved in my work.

**Janet:** Okay, I think we can close, this has been absolutely wonderful, is there anything else [crosstalk 01:40:29]?

**Stephen:** No, that’s about it.

**Janet:** Okay, I’ve been speaking with Stephen Baker. It’s August 18th 1994. This is Janet Levine for the National Park service and I'm signing out.