**Paul:** Good afternoon. This is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, December 15th, 1994. I’m in Manhattan at the apartment of Dr. Gustav Szabo and I’m going to spell this, Gustav, G-U-S-T-A-V and Szabo is S-Z-A-B-O.

Dr. Szabo came from Hungary arrived in the United States in 1949. He was 27 when he arrived in America and he was held at Ellis Island for a brief period. Also in the room is Kevin Daily who is running the digital recording machine, and Susan Bremna, B-R-E-M-N-A who is a journalist with New York Newsday Newspaper.

I will also say that a photographer Erica Burger, B-U-R-G-E-R also from New York Newsday had just taken our pictures and left. Dr Szabo, thank you for letting us come over. Can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

**Dr. Gustav:** April 4, 1921.

**Paul:** Where were you born in Hungary?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I was born in Budapest, the capital of Hungary.

**Paul:** Do you know any information or stories concerning your birth? When your mother was pregnant or when she gave birth to you?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No hair-raising stories that I can remember or that she would have told me. I was the second son. My brother was two and a half years older. Those were difficult years in Hungary after the war.

My brother was born in 1918 which was still the height of the war. By the time I came around in 1921, the situation improved considerably although thousands of Hungarian children were taken in by the Dutch government and spent years in Holland because there just wasn’t enough food in Hungary.

Those relationships lasted then for decades and the Hungarians still today are very grateful to the Dutch government that they extended their helping hands for thousands and thousands of Hungarian children.

**Paul:** Was that the first time that Holland had aided Hungary in some way? Was there an established relationship?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** First that I know of. We had been friendly with Holland for many years. As a child I went to Holland as a boy scout and participated in the jamboree, which is the international meeting of the Boy Scouts held every four years. This happened to be in 1937 in Holland. I must say that they couldn’t have been nicer.

**Paul:** Can you relate to me any stories or information about hardships your family may have suffered during World War One in Hungary?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I would not know too much about it since I was born afterwards. Both my father and my mother came from a middle class family. My father was a stock broker and my mother was a teacher. We lived in the heart of the city in fair- sized apartment; fair size meaning two or three bedrooms. We were typical middle class I would consider us.

**Paul:** What was your father’s name?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** His name was Dr. Charles Szabo.

**Paul:** In Hungarian?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** In Hungarian it would be Karoly.

**Paul:** Can you spell that please?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** K-A-R-O-L-Y.

**Paul:** Tell me what you know about your father’s family background.

**Dr. Gustav:** My father’s family were also teachers. My grandfather was a high school teacher in an unpronounceable Hungarian city called [unclear 00:04:12], which means the New City on the Foot of the Tent Mountain.

**Paul:** We’re not sure how to spell that, correct?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No, I wouldn’t even attempt it.

**Paul:** What about brothers and sisters?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** My father he had two sisters whom I adored. They were my aunts and they were present at every Christmas and birthdays and whenever my parents travelled, we were left with one or the other aunt who took excellent care of us.

**Paul:** Is there something that really sticks out in your mind about one of the two aunts when you were a child?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes, Aunt Sarah, who was my favorite. She played the piano. My father played the piano too and I remember many Christmas parties or birthday parties where the two of them played the piano with four hands and improvised a lot. I wish I had inherited my father’s perfect pitch but I didn’t, so my piano playing stopped after eight years of torture. Both were the teacher for me.

**Paul:** Your father was musical?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** He was very musical.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about your father’s personality and his temperament.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** He was very outgoing and maybe a couple of things would typify him. One of the things that sticks in my mind was if he could afford to live as well as we do, everything would be okay.

He never saved money; sometimes we were in debt. I remember the tax authorities coming putting labels on the furniture as a collateral for the unpaid taxes. But then somehow the Turkish changed and then they went to the French Riviera.

**Paul:** You said your father was musical, what else did he like to do when he wasn’t working? His hobbies perhaps?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** His hobbies were travel. They travelled a lot with my mother or with his best friend and I admired him. He had a talent for languages. He went to a Catholic high school called Piarist School which has a school either in Buffalo or in Pennsylvania because the Piarist fathers who founded that school about 150 years ago in Hungary after the Hungarian Revolution in 1957, escaped the entire faculty with many of the students, stayed in Austria for a couple of months and then found the two schools in America. One in Philadelphia, the other one in Buffalo.

I think one became a private school and slowly the Hungarian students who came when they were children in 1957, by now of course they are middle-aged if not advanced age people, and as you well know with immigrants they blend in and most of the children of the original immigrants do not speak Hungarian anymore.

**Paul:** Piarists?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** The immigrants or…?

**Paul:** No, the name of the order.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Piarist, P-I-A-R-I-S-T. Far as origin I think they came from Italy and founded an order in Hungary and they were may be the foremost teaching order and had several schools around Hungary. One in Budapest, one in the unpronounceable city of [unclear 00:08:12].

**Paul:** Let me ask you the same questions about your mother. First of all, what was her name?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Her name was Katrin Liptay, L-I-P-T-A-Y. They were impoverished nobility. Because of her upbringing, she spoke German, French, Hungarian, and some Latin because girls’ schools also taught Latin. Strangely enough the official language in Hungary in Parliament and in the Courts during the Austrian-Hungarian Empire was neither Hungarian nor German. It was still Latin.

Even I had eight years of Latin, six times a week in my high school which then of course helped me to learn any other language.

**Paul:** May I ask you for the sake of the tape, to define the term ‘impoverished royalty’? What exactly do you mean?

**Dr. Gustav:** Not royalty, nobility. Nobility we expect that they had the big estates with some castles. That was all gone by the time my mother was born or I came around. However her father, who was a manager of an agricultural machinery factory, was also a newspaper man. He visited America in 1876 for the Centennial and spent about a month in the United States, travelled around the States, and was even invited at the… if I’m correct, Grant was then the President, was invited to the White House.

He adored America and wanted to stay here but my grandmother said, “I will not go to a country where they are still killing Indians.” And [unclear 00:10:12] last stand if you remember was eight years later.

However he is buried in Budapest cemetery, my grandfather Liptay. In his will he asked that his head rest on that little bag of American soil he’s covered with an American flag, and there’s an English inscription on his gravestone which says, “Not lost but gone before. The rest is silence. From [unclear 00:10:47].”

**Paul:** In your growing up, did you know this grandfather?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No, unfortunately he died before I was born.

**Paul:** Do you know if he brought anything with him from America to Hungary that became the cherished possessions of the family?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. I remember at their family home there was an inlaid glass window over the entrance which said, “Home Sweet Home” which he brought from America. Somewhere I have a picture of him with several Indian chiefs and he too with feathered regalia. He was called Bull Liptay, there was bull this and bull that.

**Paul:** Your grandfather was quite a character.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** He was quite a character.

**Paul:** Getting back to your mother, describe her personality for me and her temperament.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** She was shy and quite a contrast with my father’s temperament. He was very outgoing and buoyant but she was a wonderful mother who really spent her life in raising her two sons.

**Paul:** Can you describe her for me in words, physically?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Physically she was petite, she was blonde, frail. However I had to leave her behind when I escaped in 1948 but I was able to bring her out in 1955 and about a year later… she had been to Paris where she had a brother- that’s another story, but she arrived into the States in 1956 and lived another 30 years here and died at the age of 96 in full command of her faculties thank God.

**Paul:** Tell me a little about talents that your mother might have had. You said your father was musical.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** She was an artist; she taught art as a teacher in art school so she drew, she painted and whatever I learned about drawing and painting I learnt it from her. I loved to draw as a child and loved to paint. I’m not very good at it but I had a lot of fun with it.

She travelled a lot too as a young girl. She was born in 1888, so around the turn of the century. She spent a year in France where she learnt French, and spent several months in Italy and Austria being the country right next to Hungary, she spent many summers in Austria so her German was good too because on her mother’s side, the grandparents were Germans.

**Paul:** She shared your father’s interest of travelling around.

**Dr. Gustav:** Absolutely.

**Paul:** Is there a story or an anecdote from your childhood about your mother? A story that you enjoy telling about maybe some interaction you had with your mother or something that you shared?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I remember a discussion which we had before I escaped. She encouraged me. This was 1948 now. By that time Hungary was occupied by the Russians. The Communists rigged the elections so I felt that it’s a hopeless case to stay in Hungary. I told her, “I have to leave you alone here.” My father died before the war. My brother was captured by the Russians on the front and we know that he and his regiment reached Kiev but then they were divided into the various Gulags and we never heard of him again.

So I had to leave my mother behind alone but she encouraged me and said, “Look, you will not be able to help me here however, if you leave now, I have enough faith in you you will establish yourself in America”, because I always wanted to come to America as a small child.

I left her knowing I was absolutely sure that I will be able to bring her out and I did. She never regretted it that I left her alone although she had difficult five, six years.

**Paul:** Do you know how your parents met?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** They met through my Aunt Sarah whom I mentioned, because Sarah and my mother were teaching at the same high school. That’s how they met and started to date and relatively fast, within a year, they got married.

**Paul:** You mentioned you had an older brother who was born in 1918. What was his name?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** His name was Dennis, or Denes in Hungarian.

**Paul:** He’s the gentleman that went to Kiev and then…

**Dr.** **Gustav:** That’s correct.

**Paul:** Were there any other children?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No, just the two of us.

**Paul:** Is there a story about your brother? Your interaction…

**Dr.** **Gustav:** He was the intellectual in the family and I was the black sheep. He also loved languages and was very good at languages. After high school, he spent a year in Vienna and studied at the Economic Academy in Vienna then he spent a year in Paris at the Sorbonne. He studied English meanwhile and Polish and Norwegian. He was really a linguist.

**Paul:** What’s your earliest memory in childhood?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** First time that I got lost. We went to a fair with my grandfather and somehow in the big crowd I got lost. Of course they found me but whenever I misbehaved my grandfather used to say, “That’s not my grandson, they must have found another child. My grandson was a very good kid, you are terrible”.

**Paul:** How old were you?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I was I think three.

**Paul:** Can you explain to me the house that you grew up in as a child in the apartment?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It was in the apartment house near the central park of Budapest. It was a middle-class apartment house. We had five rooms and it was ideal because it was within walking distance from the zoo where I grew up and it was within walking distance to the skating rink and later on it was in walking distance to my school.

**Paul:** Are there any pieces of furniture that stick out in your mind in your childhood?

**Dr. Gustav:** Yes. The dining room furniture which was very dark, oak probably, very heavy dining room table with about six chairs and a credenza with a mirror on top and innumerable drawers which were always locked.

I have the sugar bowl there on the table which as you will see, has even the key that even the sugar was locked so the maid will not steal the sugar. It’s behind the crumbles there.

**Paul:** Were there household domestics?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** We had a live in maid and we had two seamstresses. One repaired my mother’s clothes and the other one table clothes and bed sheets and the pillow cases. Once a week or once every 10 days came the washer woman who did the wash. That was in every household of the middle class. These are usually peasant girls came up to Budapest and stayed for several years usually until they got married.

**Paul:** Does one stick out in your mind specifically?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. One who made excellent desserts. Unfortunately I have a sweet tooth and I adore desserts which I shouldn’t eat. My wife is after me to lose 10 pounds but it’s very difficult with good Austrian restaurants and good Hungarian restaurants in New York. She made wonderful strudel, which is that very thin, leafy Austrian or Hungarian pastry.

**Paul:** You lit up when you mentioned the zoo. If you could explain to me, what was your attraction to the zoo and what you did when you went there as a child?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** We also had a German governess until I was about eight and my brother 10. She walked with us to the zoo. Usually they were Austrian or German girls, very nice and we adored them. There she let us loose because within the zoo you can’t get lost.

However, one day we noticed that the caretaker was feeding the polar bear and somehow left the door open a little bit while he went in to get some more fish. We opened the door completely and the polar bear walked out of the cage and was walking on the street. They caught him, they caught us and I never got as heavy a beating from the director of the zoo than that day. That sticks out in my memory.

**Paul:** Who was the disciplinarian in the house?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** My mother but if it was anything serious then it was my father.

**Paul:** What would be his method of punishment?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** As a child I remember he took his belt off and hit me, but nothing serious. Corporal punishment was accepted even at school too. Some of the teachers hit us not strongly but that was not a mistreatment of children as it is of course a no-no nowadays in America. It didn’t hurt us.

**Paul:** You brought up school, how old were you when you started school?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Six. I went to a private elementary school for four years and then to a Lutheran high school, which was a very strict boys’ school. By that time during- I’m talking now about the 30s, there were no co-educational high schools or very few. There were separate boys’ schools and separate girls’ schools. This was a very strict and difficult boys’ school close to us.

I’m showing off because to the best of my knowledge it’s the only high school in the world that has three and half Nobel Prize winners as its alumni. We just got two new ones this year. Two Hungarians got the Nobel Prize, one in Economics and the other one in Chemistry. One of them was above me by two years. I remember him, so we are very proud of that.

**Paul:** Was your family very much pro-education?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. They insisted that we continue after high school both my brother and I.

**Paul:** Who was more inclined to enjoy school, you or your brother?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** As I told you he was more serious about learning. He was an excellent student. Also my grades were good too but mainly because I sat in the same bench next to the brain of the class and I copied everything. He was the best student in class and I was second.

**Paul:** Tell me about the family’s religious life. What denomination were you?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Catholic. My father did not go to church but my mother did come with us to church. Although I went to a Lutheran school where… by the way that will interest you, the tuition depended on your religion. The Lutherans paid let’s say $10 per month, the Calvinists or the Presbyterians $20, the Catholics $40, and Jews $80. Nobody thought anything about it because the more well to do Jewish and Catholic families supported the poor Lutheran families whose school it was. That was absolutely accepted.

**Paul:** Was there a large Jewish population in Budapest?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. Hungary, which that time was about 8 million, had about 500,000 Jews out of which maybe half of them lived in Budapest.

**Paul:** Would you say that the government officials, the people who were making the rules in Budapest were all Lutherans or Catholics?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No, not necessarily because the business world, and I’m thinking of the banks, the stock exchange, the larger industrial complexes, were predominantly in Jewish hands, in the hands of Aristocrats, or the new middle class. We had a two camera parliament like here, the Senate and the House of Representatives, but into the Senate the members were appointed. Similar to the House of Lords in England.

There was a place reserved always for the Chief Rabbi for the Jews, a Bishop for the two Protestant churches, the Lutherans and the Calvinists, one for the Hungarian Archbishop. These four are reserved for them just as they were reserved seats still for members of the old Hapsburg family. Some of the Arch Dukes. There were no women at that time in the Upper House. There were Secretaries of Interior could have been a Jew. There was no discrimination until the late 30’s beginning of 40’s as Hungary became under the influence of Germany.

**Paul:** Getting back to the holidays, can you describe how your family celebrated Christmas for me?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** We always had a family dinner. First of all in Europe as you may know, Christmas Eve is celebrated on the 24th of December. We had a family dinner with a big Christmas tree. We were taken to our grandmother so could not see the decoration on the Christmas tree because while we were younger we believed that Santa Claus brings the Christmas tree, or the angel, and the presents they mysteriously appear in our apartment.

Then we were taken home around six in the afternoon, there was the opening of the presents and as children we usually had to recite a poem or play something on the piano, which we had to practice for weeks before. Then we were allowed to open our presents and then there was family supper.

**Paul:** What kinds of foods did you eat for the special celebrations?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Usually fish because according to Catholic tradition you’re not supposed to eat meat on Christmas Eve, so we usually we had fish, soup, fish and some dessert.

**Paul:** Were the food being prepared by the domestics or did your mother do it?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** My mother helped them.

**Paul:** Is there some specialty that your mother made that she was very proud of?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes, some of the desserts which I still adore that she prepared. One is a very simple one which is similar to the French crepes Suzettes, very thin crepes but in Austria and in Hungary they usually fill it with apricot jam and roll it up into long pieces. You can get it at any Hungarian-Austrian restaurant.

**Paul:** Were there other ways that you practised your religion at home?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Not much. Having gone to a Lutheran school, we had our religious education in the afternoon twice a week, where a Catholic priest came and we had our religious education there. Catholic children are confirmed, which is similar to the Jewish Bar Mitzvah the age of 13 and we also had to serve as altar boys at the age of 10, 11, 12, which was usually at early morning mass.

You had to go there before school, or Sundays at eight o’clock. In the winter it’s snowing night. We were not enthused about it I must say.

**Paul:** Were there prayers that you were taught as a child that you were required to recite?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** At the religious hour or during religious instructions too as a matter of fact we had to learn by heart all the Latin parts that the altar boys say during mass in Latin, which was not that difficult because as I told you we had Latin from fifth grade on for eight more years.

**Paul:** The language of the Catholic Church was Latin, so when you said a prayer you said it in Latin as opposed to Hungarian?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes.

**Paul:** I’d like to talk a little bit now about the approach of World War Two and what was going in Budapest as the 30’s progressed and what the political climate was like.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** After Hitler got in power in 1933 and Austria in 1938, the influence grew tremendously. However Hungary stayed out of the war and was neutral until 1941 when, again under German pressure, Hungary had to enter the war on the side of Germany and send troops to the Russian front where 200,000 Hungarians perished at the dawn offensive already 1941, 42, the winter of 42.

**Paul:** Was their growing repulsion of Nazis in Budapest beginning in the 30’s?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No, that came much later. Yes they were however National Socialists already in the late 30’s. The government however had some pro- German members and the German influence grew year after year from 1938 on through 1944 when the Germans occupied Hungary.

**Paul:** How did your parents feel about what was happening prior to the war? What was actually going on?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Until 1939 when my father died… he died early of cancer at the age of 50, we did not see or feel anything. However, since World War Two started on September 1st and we were that close to Germany, there was no doubt in our mind that if Hungary enters the war, it will have to enter it on the side of Germany because of the proximity.

Many well-to-do usually Jewish people send their children abroad already in 1939 to continue their studies abroad. I had several schoolmates who left Hungary in 1939 and we are still in contact. Two of them came to America, one to Canada, to Australia. They all survived of course.

**Paul:** But your own family was somewhat…

**Dr.** **Gustav:** We were not affected until 1944 when the German pressure increased so much that Hungary tried to establish a private Peace Treaty on their own, which they found out and Germany occupied Hungary.

**Paul:** Before we start talking about the war and death, I’m just curious when your father died you said it was ‘38?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** In 1939 he was 50 years old.

**Paul:** ’39 he was 50. How did that affect your family if at all? How did your everyday life change?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It changed. My brother was already working and studying meanwhile law. I just finished high school and was somewhat undecided what to do, to go to the university or not when my father died early days of October.

He was a member of the stock exchange. He was a stock broker. I took over his business and I was the youngest member of the Budapest Stock Exchange in the age 18 and I was very proud of that. I took over his business and I’m very grateful to several of his friends who taught me the ropes and helped me along because I had no idea about the stock exchange.

That helped but meanwhile in January I started to attend the University of Economics, where I got my doctorate then four years later. Stock exchange was a marvellous place to earn your living because it was open only for two hours, from 10 till 12, so I could go to university before I got to the university.

Afterwards and if you have to sign in, I sent my secretary she signed in for me, stayed there for the class… it was a big classroom of 100 people. Nobody knew who was really there. Thereby I could finish my studies even not being present at several of the classes as long as I passed the exams, which I did.

**Paul:** What about economic changes within your family for instance, when your father died were servants let go or did your mother…?

**Dr. Gustav:** Exactly. We had a live-in maid maybe through 1941-42 then we let her go because of the economic situation. It was hard to find domestic help. We all learnt to live in a more simpler way than we used to live before.

**Paul:** Was your father’s death difficult for your mother?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. She was the same age as my father and it came quite suddenly he had cancer which they did not diagnose until a couple of weeks before he went to hospital and never came back. By that time the cancer has metastasized and it was hopeless.

**Paul:** You jumped in the saddle and took his position…

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. That was a great challenge and I was very proud of myself. I think that was the best schooling I ever got, was at the stock exchange.

**Paul:** Why didn’t your brother end up being the one?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Because he was already gainfully employed at a bank and was studying already at the university, so it was logical that I should take over. I was probably more business- minded than he was. He was more the intellectual. I think he would have been an excellent lawyer or a university professor but not a businessman.

**Paul:** Why don’t you explain for me what you and your family experienced during World War Two after 1941? What was going on in Hungary and how it affected you specifically?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** As I told you Hungary was neutral till ‘41. We had barely noticed the war. There were shortages but nothing serious. From ‘41 on, when Hungary had to enter the war, I’m using intentional the word ‘had to enter the war’ and this is not the Hungarian chauvinism on my mind, finding an excuse that yes Hungary did enter the war on the side of Germany but a book was published maybe 5, 10 years ago by the then American Ambassador called Montgomery, who was the Ambassador to Hungary.

He wrote a book entitled *The Reluctant Ally* and wrote very well the very difficult situation in which the Hungarian government was. They did not want to enter the war. Hungary’s tragedy over the centuries was that they stopped where they stopped coming from behind the Euro mountains, it’s a Mongolian tribe. They came to the present site of Hungary in the ninth century and stayed there. It was an ideal place agriculturally, mining was there, everything was there. However, it was always between the German and the Russian Empire.

We were occupied by the Mongols, by Genghis Khan in 1241 through 43, then he died so they left. Then they were occupied by the Turks for 150 years, from 1526 through 1686. Then the Austrians occupied us for another 300 years. There were few years in between where Hungary for couple of years was a world power but then again after the second part of this 19th century, there was an Austrian-Hungarian monarchy where we were equal partners with Austria.

Having lost World War One also on the side of Austria and Germany, Hungary lost two sets of its territory and two sets of its population so suddenly it became a very small country. Life was difficult between the two World Wars but strangely enough they pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps.

The economic situation wasn’t that bad until 1942, 43 when more and more items are rationed and we had to get tickets. We got 2 eggs per months, X grams of butter and X grams of lard. We used to cook with lard that time in Hungary and I don’t know 20 cigarettes or what that was.

**Paul:** What things weren’t available to you at this time?

**Dr. Gustav:** You couldn’t travel for obvious reasons. Oranges, bananas, grape fruit, fresh fruit only if and when it grew in Hungary.

**Paul:** What about household items?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Textiles, Egyptian curtain was not available, not enough wool was available because most of it was imported from Scotland or New Zealand. Imported items, it could have been soaps, colognes, some desserts or luxury items, electrical appliances that were made in Germany or Austria or Italy. They were suddenly not available. Photographic equipment, tennis balls.

**Paul:** It covered a broad spectrum.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. I remember we re-pumped the tennis balls and re-fuzzed them with a little machine that brushed them up so they became more fuzzy again.

**Paul:** Did the Germans actually invade Budapest? Did they come in to the city?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes, they invaded the whole Hungary. They invited Governor [unclear 00:41:36] to Germany. Hitler invited him for discussions and while he was in Germany they occupied Hungary.

**Paul:** Tell me what life was like in Budapest when that happened.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** First we were shocked to look out on the windows and see the German tanks rattling in. The Germans Gestapo already had a list so that within the first 48 hours they arrested hundreds of people. Many Jews but many politicians who were not sympathetic to Germany.

Hungary was more sympathetic to France or England. The ideal thing would have been to stay out of the war like Switzerland or Spain but that was impossible because of the proximity. Germany needed the Hungarian agricultural grain, livestock. We had to supply it.

**Paul:** Were you called up in any kind of a draft to serve?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No, I was lucky. I was exempted from draft until I got my doctorate, which was June 1944. When I was drafted, by that time the Hungarian National Socialists took over as puppets for the German regime and then I got drafted but by that time old Hungarian draftees were sent immediately to Germany for training and I certainly did not want to be trained by the Nazi Army.

I had in my pocket a letter to one of the sergeants written by an uncle of mine who was a professor of the university [unclear 00:43:31] well-known person, without a date, that I have acute appendicitis and he must operate immediately. I instructed my mother should my draft come, send it out our summer house and I immediately went to the hospital, got my operation. that gave me another six weeks. War still was not over, the Russians were coming closer.

Posters appeared in Budapest that everybody has to signup up to age 38 and I was then -1944, I was 23, except doctors, the firemen and the members of the ambulance squad. Since I was not a medical doctor, I’m afraid of fires, I joined the ambulance squad, saw a house physician, and became an ambulance driver. That exempted your military service little did I know that I will go to the front to pick up the wounded because the front came closer and closer to Budapest.

**Paul:** Can you talk about that experience? About being an ambulance driver?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** That was a very sad and harrowing experience often because by that time the Nazi government took over. The Jews were put into the ghetto and kept there.

**Paul:** This is a ghetto in Budapest?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** This is the ghetto in Budapest where there were about 200,000 Jews. The Jews in the country were starting from summer on after the German occupation, were being deported to Germany but not the Budapest Jews. They were kept in the ghetto and as you probably know, Swede diplomat called Wallenberg came to Budapest, who was a member of the wealthiest Swedish family like the Rockefellers. The Wallenbergs are the equivalent of the Rockefellers in Sweden.

He was not a diplomat but he was sent to Budapest to save as many Jews as possible. Financed by America they claim the CIA, whether it was the CIA or not is not important, but indeed he set up shop at the Swedish Embassy and issued letters of safe conduct giving Swedish citizenship to many Jews, which the Germans respected.

Similar activities were done at the Swedish embassy issuing Swedish passports and by the Vatican, issuing Vatican passports to thousands of Jews who were thereby entitled to stay outside of the ghetto in specially protected houses either by the Swedish government, by the Swiss government or by the Vatican.

Otherwise we had a curfew from eight o’clock to nine o’clock at night. American bombers came usually at night when they were decent and they came in the weekend so the workers would not be killed in the factories or at the railroad yards. Life was tough.

**Paul:** Were you witness to any kind of destruction, bombing personally?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes because two thirds of the buildings in Budapest got destroyed during the war partly to bombing and the six-week long siege between the German garrison within the city and the Russians who were encircled at Budapest shooting at each other.

We spent about six weeks in the basement of our building, going up to our apartments only if there was no air raid.

**Paul:** When you say ‘we’ you’re talking about…?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** My mother and we were hiding a Jewish girl and her mother came too so we had two other people in our apartment.

**Paul:** Can you talk a little bit about the experience of hiding a Jewish?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It was a risk but we felt that it’s our obligation to help as much as we can.

**Paul:** How did you do that? What kind of help did you offer?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** We secured for them false identification papers of a girl of about a similar age that she’s a refugee from Romania as thousands of Hungarians came from Romania to Hungary during World War Two. That was accepted that they had scanned documents and once you had one identification document then you could get food tickets and you can get other documents of identification.

She was blonde and blue-eyed so that helped. She did not have any typical ‘traits’ so that the Nazis could recognize her.

**Paul:** The false documentation that was obtained, was it stating that she was a member of your family?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No. She was a distant relative, a refugee from Transylvania who lost her parents and is staying now with us.

**Paul:** Were lots of Hungarian Gentiles doing this sort of thing?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I would say yes. Among my friends I would say almost everybody was hiding somebody either at their summer house or at their basement. Thousands were hidden with false papers.

**Paul:** Is there once incident when you were an ambulance driver that sticks out in your mind?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. We were called into the ghetto to assist a seriously ill person and somebody asked us could we take him with us hiding him under the stretcher because he must get out. His family is hiding somewhere and they have problems. We did it and it succeeded and I’m glad we helped at least one person.

**Paul:** Tell me about when the end of the war came and if you remember when that officially ended.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** The end of the war came pretty fast. The Russians first encircled Budapest. There were about 50,000 Germans fighting but they broke through towards the western part of Budapest and the Russians came in the next day. We knew that because our department was requisitioned by the German command of that section of Budapest. They said, “We are leaving now and Russia should be here within 24 hours so stay down in the basement that’s the safest place”, which we did.

The first Russians came, they were all Mongolians. The first thing they wanted is your watches. [Unclear 00:51:25] means in Russian ‘Give me your watch’. That was the very first thing. The first troops they were sort of elite troops, they were not that bad. Later on, the second wave they were much worse. They raped many women, robbed us whatever little things we had. We hid of course everything of value that we could think of.

I was lucky because when I heard from the German side that the Russians would be here the next day, I did not go in to the ambulance squad but I went and stayed with my mother and this girl who we were hiding. I didn’t want to leave them alone. I stayed with them for four, five days and then I went into the headquarters of the ambulance squad. We wore a grey uniform with a cap with a red cross. The house was empty.

The Russians mistook them as some kind of a military group and deported them and nobody came back. It was sheer luck that I happened to stay at home those couple of days.

The next six months were tough because we had no electricity, no gas, and no running water in our apartment house. You had to go couple of blocks to a fountain where there was water available. There was practically no food for weeks. That was tough. Whenever a horse died, people run out with long knives and cut off the corpse of the horse and they eat horse meat.

**Paul:** Was your neighborhood relatively untouched by bombing?

**Dr. Gustav:** Relatively yes, practically every building got damaged. We lost two rooms in our apartment which was then just boarded up for months. In many houses smaller houses which suffered a direct hit, they were completely demolished. The worst that happened to an apartment house where the Germans were storing ammunition in the basement got a direct hit and the ammunition blew up and hundreds of people died in the neighboring houses and in that house. It was one of the worst things.

The other very bad accident was the Germans in their retreat they blew up all the bridges and one accidentally, it was a dynamited. Dynamite was set up while the traffic still moved on the bridge. There again dozens of cars, trams and buses fell into the water with people.

**Paul:** What was the prevailing atmosphere just after the war ended? Obviously things are bad but are people thankful?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Relief. Whoever stayed alive and whatever little belongings they could salvage they were happy to be there.

**Paul:** How long did this deprivation last until life got back to normal?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I would say a year, 1945 and then slowly they started to rebuild. We got back our electricity about six months later, the water maybe about four months later, gas maybe a year later, so normalization started.

**Paul:** You mentioned earlier that the Communists were coming into Hungary at this time? Is that the beginning of this period?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It was beginning very soon after the Russians came in, the Hungarians set up already while the Nazis were still in Budapest and on the Western part of Hungary they set up a so- called free government. Part of which was Communist because this was on the Russian- occupied side of Hungary.

We held the first free elections in Hungary in 1947 where the Communists got only 11% of the vote. However because Hungary was still occupied by the Russians, they forced the coalition government onto the Hungarians where the key positions had to be filled by Communists. The Secretary of State, the Secretary of Interior, Head of Police, Head of the Army. From then on every month the power of the non- communist members of the government was curtailed.

By 1948 they even started a trial against the Prime Minister who went to be in Switzerland and they warned him not to come back because he would be arrested and they retained his young son as a hostage until he resigns. He resigned on the Austrian-Hungarian border and on the car, his car that he got from Stalin, he resigned and he got back his son and car donated, given him by Stalin and then the Communists named a Communist as Prime Minister.

**Paul:** Were the Communists initially welcomed to Budapest or people knew this was bad from the beginning?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Hungary was not an extreme country, neither national socialistic or communist. They were always National Socialists and they were always Communists going back to the 30’s. Yes there was an element that expected them with open arms, especially the workers, the miners. They were promised that the proletariat will now take over and yours is the factory, you work for yourself.

Yes, they were Communists, yes they were National Socialists in Hungary but the first Prime Minister was a Communist from the 1930s who was jailed for years and then was exchanged for some Hungarians and spent the next 10 years in Russia. The Russians brought him back and forced him as Prime Minister on the government.

**Paul:** We’re going to pause for a moment and Kevin will put another tape in the machine and then we’ll get you to America.

This is Paul Seacrest and its Thursday December 15th 1994 and we’re beginning tape two with Dr. Gustav Szabo who arrived in America from Hungary in 1949 when he was 27 years old.

Dr. Szabo you were telling us about Communists taking over Hungary and the changes that were happening when that did occur. Can you tell me about the average ordinary citizen in Budapest and how his or her life was changed by the Communist takeover?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It depends on their profession. For the peasants, the farmers, their land was taken away either immediately or within the first couple of years and they were forced into cooperatives.

Slowly, slowly meaning within the next three to four years, most industrial establishments were also nationalized starting with the mines, then the banks, then the insurance companies, then the factories of a thousand workers, then 500 workers, then 100 workers, then even small establishments like restaurants, pharmacies, even grocery stores were nationalized. Therefore the owners, if they were lucky, were kept as a book keeper or as a manager.

The other thing that happened which of course affected the life of the middle class and the upper middle class, that the Communists deported the middle class to the country from the big cities, mostly from Budapest, by the thousands. I think about 20,000 middle class and upper middle class people were deported to various parts of the country where they had to live with the farmers. They were allotted a room or two rooms and they had to stay there and do menial work to support themselves.

They could not return to their apartments which by that time were occupied but had to stay with relatives until about three, four years later until after the so called Rakosi regime, it’s spelt R-A-K-O-S-I who was the Communist Prime Minister.

**Paul:** What about your own family, you or your mother. Can you talk about specific experiences at this time?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** My life was not that badly affected because from 1946, 47 a very rudimentary stock exchange was opened in Hungary which by the way, was the highest inflation in world history. The Hungarian currency lost its value to a figure with 19 zeroes.

**Paul:** How did that manifest itself in everyday life?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I had done a small banking course. I became again stock broker in established a small banking course. People came in with gold chains, with family jewellery. We snipped off maybe one inch, we weighed it, and that day in the morning it was worth two billion five hundred thousand pengos.

He went and bought the groceries, paid rent, taxes. Next day he came back with another inch or left the chain there sealed in an envelope and we cut off another inch from which he bought shoes that time for five billion Hungarian currency.

**Paul:** It gets to a point where it just doesn’t mean anything anymore.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. Then it was printed B Pengo was the Hungarian, P-E-N-G-O so they eliminated immediately nine zeroes. Even that started to inflate. Larger companies picked up at the Hungarian National Bank the currency without serial numbers, there was no time to put serial numbers on the currency anymore, in truck loads to take it to the workers and give it to them and sometimes in big bundles to pay their salaries.

In 1947, a new Hungarian currency was introduced from the Italian florin at the rate of 11.62 florins per dollar. Most of the trade was done on a barter basis or in hot currency, usually in dollars. Everything was one dollar. A kilogram of lard, a kilogram of sugar, a pair of nylon stockings, a pack of cigarettes, and a woman, it was all one dollar. That was the currency.

Lot of barter took place on street corners. People sold their household items. Could be coats, could be hats, could be smaller pieces of furniture, the family silverware, to augment their income whatever their income was. It took about three years until Hungary again started to get back on its feet.

**Paul:** You had said earlier on the interview that as a child growing up you were always interested in America. Of course you had your mother’s father particularly interested in America. Tell me a little bit about when you became serious about coming to America and why.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I saw Hungary becoming a glassed wall, number one. Two, we were an occupied country and occupied by the Russians. Three, we were under Communist government which is taking over every segment of the economy. My future was hopeless.

I already had my doctorate from the University of Economics in Budapest but I applied both at Harvard and Columbia for graduate studies. They both accepted me. I knew that I would escape so I left all my documentation with the American consul in Budapest saying, “I’m planning to escape, would you please send it over to the Vienna American Consulate”, which they did.

I had a distant aunt living in New Rochelle so that helped knowing that worst comes to worst they will not let me starve. When I escaped in October, 1948 after an adventurous couple of days I arrived in Vienna and indeed I went to the Austrian consul where my documents were deposited and they said, “I see yes you’re accepted. I’d be happy to give you a student visa but I need a valid passport.” My passport which I also sent over through diplomatic channels has expired meanwhile. He said, “I can’t use this unless you have a valid passport I can’t give you a student visa”.

I heard that Catholic charities in Vienna had a very kind Father, Monsignor Adam. I went to him. “Can he help me? I’m a recent Hungarian refugee, this is the problem. I have an expired passport. Could you have it somehow renewed or extended?” Knowing that they stole somewhere the rubber stamp and they are falsifying the signature he said, “We are not doing that here in Vienna” because that time Vienna was occupied by Russians, French, British and American. Four power occupations, “I’ll send it over to Salzburg, which was on the British sector but coming week we’ll have it extended”.

I did beautiful rubber stamp extended for two years. It was marvellous, I was very proud. I went to the American consul, “I succeeded to extend my passport. Could I have now my visa?” He looks at it, smiles, and says, “Father Adam is getting better every day.” And threw me out and so it took me another six months of hurdling with the Austrians who finally stamped a return visa into my stateless so-called nanson passport, that yes I can return to Austria after I finish my studies. I promise them don’t worry I’ll never come back. I arrived with this passport and the student visa to America where as I told you on the phone, they took me to Ellis Island.

**Paul:** We need to back you off to when you left Budapest. You said you had three adventurous days before you got to Vienna. Tell me exactly what you packed to take with you.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I took a back pack, a coat, a back pack in which I had couple of shirts, underwear, socks, warm pullover and toilet articles, maybe couple of books, and addresses of people I knew abroad and I think…

**Paul:** Was there one object that you brought with you for sentimental reasons?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. A St. Christopher medal on a gold chain that my mother gave me, which I had for many years then I gave it to one of my sons.

**Paul:** Was there some kind of family gathering or gathering with friends in honor of your leaving?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No. I didn’t tell anybody because I was afraid that somebody might not be discreet enough and might mention it to somebody who should not know about it. My mother and my then girlfriend were the only ones who knew it.

**Paul:** How did your mother feel about that?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I told you about we had a long discussion about it. Of course she was frightened that she would be left alone since by that time my brother did not come back, my father was dead so I would have to leave her alone. But she realized that she will be better off in the long run if I’m safely in the West because eventually I would send for her, which I was able to.

**Paul:** Now tell us a about the three adventurous days.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I went by train to a town called Sopron, S-O-P-R-O-N, which is only about 15 miles or closer from the Austrian border. I had a Red Cross identification with me that prove that I was doing some recent help [inaudible 01:11:21] Austrian help just in case they ask me there prior to crossing the border.

We had made arrangements prior with a smuggler who did this professionally. We had to meet at his house around nine o’clock in the evening. We waited there for about an hour, a group of about four of us, unknown of each other.

By foot we started walking towards the mountains towards the Austrian border. I noticed that he carried a sack. I wasn’t quite sure what that sack was for but I didn’t dare to ask any questions and we walked for about two hours until about midnight. There he said, “Now lie down in the grass and be quiet in within 15 minutes the border guard will pass by then we will cross the border”.

In about 15 minutes the border guard came with big dogs, we saw them in the distance passing, we waited another 15 minutes quietly until they are at a certain distance and then to my utter amazement he opens his sack and out jumps a big pussy cat. He dragged it with him for hours on his back in case the dogs had picked up our scent he would have let the cat loose, the dogs would run after the cat and not seen us.

We then walked another mile, he said goodbye to us, “You are in Austria now." Go in this direction, you’ll see a church steeple about a couple of miles, go there at the first...” No I’m sorry, he came with us to the first house in that little community and gave us to the local farmer there who set us up in the hayloft which is just fine.

**Paul:** There’s more than just you?

**Dr. Gustav:** There were four other people. We were five in the group.

**Paul:** Did you know each other before the start?

**Dr. Gustav:** No, I didn’t know them. Next morning at five o’clock there was a workers’ train going from that community towards Vienna. He said, “Take that train that will take you to Vienna. There might be some Russian or Austrian inspections try not to get caught”.

I never got to the train because while we were waiting on the train, the Austrian gendarme or policeman saw this group’s attire with the back pack and asked for identification. It was obvious that we were recent Hungarian refugees and that time that part of Austria was under Russian occupation. So he took us to the local jail and kept us there for two days until he made several phone calls what to do with us.

By the way it was very good company; there was a murderer, there was a Nazi colonel, there were two thieves, a smuggler, and I can’t remember but they were all very nice. When they heard my story that all I want is to get to Vienna, they drew me a map where to go by foot, get out of this community, go by foot, take there a truck, they gave me the name of the trucking company, tell them that Joe sent you, and then he will take you to a small train station that’s beyond the Russian checkpoint. But I was still in jail.

Two days later the gendarme said unfortunately the Russians insist that we take you back to Hungary. We walked and walked towards the Hungarian border. I had a golden cigarette case sewed in to the lining of my court and some gold pieces, French 20 Francs. I told him, “Look, nobody will know whether you actually give me back the Hungarians or not. I happen to have a golden cigarette case which I certainly will not need in Hungary. I’d like to offer it to you but let me go”, which he did.

The one condition I had to go parallel to the border about two miles to the next community. In case an Austrian policeman would catch me at least it does not happen in his community but I escaped somehow again.

With the map supplied by my [inaudible 01:16:23] in jail, I got safely to Vienna where I had an old school friend of my brother while he was studying in Vienna. They took me in, unfortunately that they lived in the Russian section. They said, “You have to get out of here. You can’t stay here because the Russians come and do check who’s staying in the apartments.” So next day I went to a Catholic charities and they were very nice and put me up somewhere.

**Paul:** When you left your mother, did you promise to contact her along the way? Were you able to do that?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. I was able to call her from Vienna. About the second telephone call she says, “Gustav the guest whom you expected did come and they were very disappointed they couldn’t find you at home anymore.” That was the police. The timing, in retrospect, happened to be ideal.

**Paul:** We’ve now picked up the story where you begin all the passport business.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Exactly.

**Paul:** What ship did you take to America?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I came on the Queen Mary.

**Paul:** Where did you pick up the Queen Mary?

**Dr. Gustav:** I picked the Queen Mary up in Cherbourg and that was like stepping from a post-war Hungary with the hunger and the lack of water and electricity into a ‘never never land’; the luxury of a big ocean liner. That was my first encounter really with the Western world.

**Paul:** Where along the way did you procure your passage tickets for the ship?

**Dr. Gustav:** Two ways, number one I met a young lady in Austria. She was very adventurous. Being an Austrian citizen she went to Budapest and contacted my mother, to whom I wrote a note, to give her whatever pieces of jewellery I had. Give it to her she’s absolutely trustworthy she’ll bring it to me. She went by train and came back by train.

She gave the pieces of jewellery in a plastic bag to her friend who was a chef at the dining car. The chef immersed the plastic bag in a jar which had a screw top in the dish washing water. When the inspection came, they certainly didn’t go into the dish washing water to see what’s there and that’s how the certain jewellery pieces came out to Vienna, which he gave me.

Those I sold and had enough money then to pay for my stay… by the way the Catholic charities, the International Refugee Organization helped me and gave some pocket money and fed me once a day. That way I could stay and a secretary friend of mine leased her apartment to me at a nominal rent so I could stay there for six months and wait until I finally get my exit permit.

**Paul:** Do you know how much the ship cost at that time?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It was $265, I remember that.

**Paul:** Where did you travel on the ship? What class?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Strangely enough I was able through again some friends, to pay for the ticket in Austrian shillings instead of English pounds. Thereby the only ticket available was in cabin class, which is the middle class between first class, cabin class and steerage. That was a tremendous luxury.

**Paul:** Can you describe where you slept on the ship for me?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. It was an inside cabin. I had no window. I remember it was the usual cabin size which cannot be more than 10 feet by 20 feet most but it had a bed, a little sink in the corner, I don’t think it had a shower probably toilet and shower were outside but the desk and a chair was perfect. For me it was a luxury.

**Paul:** What time of year is this?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** That was February ’49. It arrived the first days of February.

**Paul:** Tell me what sticks out in your mind about the voyage itself; the actual cross over.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It was rough. Thank God my stomach is pretty strong. There were days when maybe only a dozen people were in the dining room out of hundreds but I was so hungry and all these luxury meant so much to me I couldn’t resist eating it. We could play ping pong, we could listen to music, we could go dancing. It was like a dream.

**Paul:** To the best of your knowledge were there any similar kinds of people to yourself? People who were getting out of Europe because they really had to get out of Europe?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** There were several Hungarians but mostly French because the ship came from Cherbourg, came from England, stopped in Cherbourg and came back many English of course, some Americans, some Italians. I got befriended with several American people which I enjoyed because at least I get used to the American accent which I was not used to before.

**Paul:** Had you learnt some English in Budapest?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. I learned English in high school last four years. I learned English at home, and as a graduation present in June 1939, I received a trip from my father and I spent 10 days on the Isle of Man with the Boy Scout leader of the Northern Irish Boy Scout group whom I met two years before in Holland.

He invited me to his residence in Belfast. He was a linen manufacturer. A beautiful house in the outskirts of Belfast. A fascinating man. This was 1939 when I spent the summer there then I lost contact with him, of course World War Two came.

However, when I arrived to New York in 1949, now 10 years later, I remember he mentioned to me that he has an office in New York. I looked up William Liddell & Company and lo and behold! Down on Wall Street on lower Broadway there was a William Liddell & Company.

I called up and said I used to be a friend of Mr. Liddell, I lost contact. Would you know where he is, what happened to him. He mentioned that he was in Royal [inaudible 01:24:08] he’s on the Queen Mary arriving tomorrow. Ten years later I called him up, he was very kind, and we met every year he came to the hotel show, because he made the linen napkins, table clothes and towels for the Sheraton chain, for the Hilton chain and so on.

**Paul:** You mentioned that you heard Americans speak English on the Queen Mary for the first time. What were the differences between how the Americans spoke English and how you learned to speak English?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Americans don’t move their lips, which makes it very difficult for people whose English is limited to understand them and speak very fast. That was my first impression of American English. They speak clipped English and don’t open their mouths.

**Paul:** How long did the Queen Mary take to get here from Cherbourg?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** About a week.

**Paul:** Tell me a little about what you remember about the ship actually approaching New York.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** That was unforgettable site because they woke us up early in the morning before we got into the harbor and see the Statue of Liberty indeed. There she was with the light in her hand and I saw of course, Ellis Island.

**Paul:** Tell me how you ended up at Ellis Island. You’ve gone by the Statue of Liberty and…

**Dr.** **Gustav:** We docked and my aunt, and her father, who was the brother of my grandfather, they were waiting for me at the pier. Everybody left but I was nowhere so they checked the list and yes, he’s here. He should be here. Finally they allow them to board the ship and they retained me because coming with a student visa they asked her then that my uncle deposit a $500 bond that after I finish my studies indeed I will leave the country.

Of course they promised but it took them two days to get to the Treasury to get the bonds so at least it should bring some interests, bring the bond to immigration service notifying Ellis Island to let me out. Two days later I was able to leave Ellis Island.

**Paul:** You spent two nights at Ellis Island?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Two nights.

**Paul:** How did you get to Ellis Island from [inaudible 01:26:57]?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** On a little ferry. Sorry, I had to spend the first night on the completely empty Queen Mary, didn’t let me out so I spent the first night there then they took me to Ellis Island on that little ferry. I don’t know how I got to the ferry, probably in a police car or immigration service car. The ferry took me over to Ellis Island and I spent a day there, a night there and another day until in the afternoon they let me go.

**Paul:** Tell me what if felt like to be all alone on the Queen Mary for a night. What were you thinking?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It was eerie because all the waiters they shed the uniforms. They didn’t give a damn about me but they’re friendly so it was very nice. It was very eerie like being in a hotel all by yourself.

**Paul:** Did you understand exactly what was going on? Were they very clear with you about why they were taking you to Ellis Island?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** They were decent about it. They said, “Look, it’s a formality probably you’ll be there for a day or so but this is a pre-requisite so we have to wait until your uncle will deposit the bond”.

**Paul:** Did you know what Ellis Island was?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No, never heard of it.

**Paul:** Tell me what happened when the ferry…

**Dr.** **Gustav:** The ferry arrived. It was a big hall and you had to stand in a line here, then you had to stand in a line to register, then you had to stand in a line for a medical examination. They checked your eyes, I think they gave you an x-ray, and then that was it. You stand in line to get your dinner. There were reading materials there and there were big dormitories, double tiered beds. I think they were decent. They were not harsh, they were not cruel, they were not shouting.

**Paul:** Were there other people there?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** There were lots of other detainees. All sorts of nationalities and all sorts of languages.

**Paul:** What are some of your strongest impressions about those two days spent at Ellis Island?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It was a very frustrating two days because you think that finally you’re in the land of your dreams and you’re still not there, you’re still detained and way down in your mind you fear, “My God they want to deport me back to Europe and God knows back to Hungary now that I’m so close to my goal”.

**Paul:** What sticks out in your mind about meal time at Ellis Island?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It was like the army or a Boys Scout camp. You stand in line with a tray but the food was good. I didn’t go hungry. It was not the cuisine of the Queen Mary I must say but I did not expect that. It was not quite as bad as later on I have read about it. People were detained there for months and were shipped back, threaten them will all sorts of things for deportation. Thank God.

**Paul:** Did you inform your mother when this was all happening?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No. I was not in touch with her for maybe a week until I finally arrived at my uncle’s house and I was able call from there or send a telegram.

**Paul:** Where was your luggage during all this?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** They must have come with me. It’s funny I never thought of that, but there was one suitcase not too bad. I’m sure it came with me from the ship to the ferry, from the ferry to Ellis Island and from Ellis Island back to the ferry and then they were waiting for me at the ferry.

**Paul:** When the Queen Mary docked- and of course your intention was to get off and meet your aunt and go off to America. Do you remember what you were wearing? What you had on to get off the Queen Mary and set foot in America.

**Dr. Gustav:** I know I had a brown coat which I had for years still afterwards. I had maybe a badge, some sport jacket and some trousers, sporty attire which I thought was appropriate for entering your new country.

**Paul:** Did you see anything either on the Queen Mary or at Ellis Island that was completely new to you?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** The luxury of the Queen Mary was beyond my wildest dreams, coming from a small country Hungary I’ve never seen such an ocean liner before. To me that was way beyond my expectations, the size of it.

**Paul:** When you were at Ellis Island did you have to undergo any kind of interrogation about why you were coming to America?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes. They checked my documents and that’s how they determined that I’m coming on a student visa, also I am admitted to two universities but apparently all people coming on student visas had to have some kind of a guarantee that they will leave the United States after the completion of their studies.

**Paul:** I wonder how your aunt felt when they were asked that they put up a large bond.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** She was very disappointed. She hasn’t seen me for the last 25 years. I was four the last time she visited Hungary but they were very nice. They were very helpful, they were wonderful people.

**Paul:** Were they in a financial position to be able to do this easily?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** They were, my uncle and my aunt they came to the States in the early 20’s. He was an architect and worked for many years during the Depression he worked for the TBA and was the designer for a town called Norris in Tennessee near the big dams that the TBA was building then.

Later on he left the TBA and worked for a private firm which did a lot of work for the police at Rikers Island, the police academy was designed by his firm Wilhelm & Wagner. He worked for them as a chief designer then later became a partner and stayed with that firm until he died about 15 years ago.

**Paul:** So when they were informed they would have to present this bond…

**Dr.** **Gustav:** They were able to. They lived in a nice house in New Rochelle where I spent my first months.

**Paul:** So you’re released from Ellis Island, you spent one night there. Did your aunt and uncle come to Ellis Island?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I can’t remember whether they came to Ellis Island or only to the ferry that took me back to Manhattan but I know both my aunt and my granduncle came with me and I remember passing by the then under construction building of the UN, which was just about going up of which I already read a lot and there it was.

**Paul:** Did you spend the first night then in New Rochelle?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I spent the first months here in New Rochelle but I came in after the second or the third day because I had to register at… there was a big discussion, which one to choose Harvard or Columbia. I told my uncle that I would like to be in advertising. He said, “If you want to be in advertising I would recommend you stay in New York because New York is the center of advertising”. I chose Columbia so I had to go to Columbia to register and orientation and choose classes.

**Paul:** Tell me about your first night when you went up to your aunt’s house in New Rochelle, what happened the first night you were in America?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** First there was family supper of course.

**Paul:** Who was present?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** My aunt and uncle, their two sons, then teenagers, and the parents of my aunt who were in their late 70s who came to America after the war but about a year earlier, in1946. Being the parents of an American citizen they could come [unclear 01:35:46].

**Paul:** What language was spoken around that dinner table?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** English because the children didn’t speak any other language. My uncle still spoke Hungarian pretty well and of course my granduncle and grandaunt they never really learned English, at least my grandaunt never really learned English although she lived here for another 10 years.

**Paul:** Where in the house did you sleep that night?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** There was a guest room. One of the boys gave up his room and slept in the room with his brother.

**Paul:** Tell me about that first month and what you were finding in America and what was new to you, what you liked about what you saw for the first month that you were here.

**Dr. Gustav:** I was tremendously impressed with New York skyscrapers. I had never seen skyscrapers. I was tremendously impressed by the Columbia, the size, the layout of the campus, the people. How kind and helpful they were, almost everybody. This is true until today. I get the same feedback from my Hungarian guests to whom I interpret and are here for the first time. I usually ask them after a couple of weeks or after a month, they usually are here for a month. What is it that struck you most? Almost invariable they say the helpfulness and the kindness of the American people. That didn’t change.

**Paul:** How soon was it that you started school?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I started school about a week later because I was a little late. The semester started end of January and I was already about a week late so I had to start about a week later.

**Paul:** Tell me about the experience about beginning school in Columbia and your adjustment and adaptation.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It was tough. I thought I spoke English. I remember the first test they gave and I just wrote on the bottom, “I’m sorry I don’t have the answers because I don’t even understand the questions” but that improved very fast.

**Paul:** How did it improve? How did your English get better?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I think you retain a lot of your vocabulary. It’s in you, you don’t use it but if you hear the words then it comes back. I left New Rochelle about three weeks later and got a room at an institution called International House, which is up on Riverside Drive near Columbia, which is a dormitory for foreign students in a lovely building donated by John D. Rockefeller where only graduate students can live.

That time 250 girls, 250 boys strictly separated. Separate elevators with separate elevator men but we were there from about 60 countries. Very wisely one third of the students were American so we know, or hear, or learn about America as much as possible. The rest were from the various countries. We were there six Hungarians and we still maintain our relationship after 45 years with all six.

**Paul:** Were they all from the Budapest area or from all over the place?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Most of them were from Budapest, four from Budapest, two were from the country and they all made a career. One of them is the brother of George Sors, that Hungarian billionaire but that’s the brother.

**Paul:** How do you spell his last name?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** S-O-R-S.

**Paul:** Would you say that the six Hungarian students travelled together?

**Dr. Gustav:** Absolutely. They became friends because we still could talk Hungarian, we had the same problems. Monetary problems, adjustment problems, language problems, study problems.

**Paul:** Do you think this was an advantage to your adaptation of America or a throw back?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I think it was an adaptation. People start to feel at home in their particular ghettos. The Hungarian ghetto happened to be on Second Avenue at least that time and go back to 1948, 49 from 75th Street to 86th Street, then the German enclave started. South of it was the Czech enclave, next to it Slovakian enclave and so you felt at home. There were Hungarian butchers, Hungarian grocers, Hungarian travel agents, Hungarian doctors, which was a great help.

**Paul:** Did you experience in those days at Columbia any kind of prejudice against you because you were a foreigner or spoke in an accent?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** One. Columbia thank God has at least 15 to 20% foreign students from all around the world so having an accent was not such a rarity at Columbia. What hurt me however was that as a foreign student, being here with a special immigration card as a foreign student, we had to ask special permission of the foreign student advisor to be permitted to work during the summer.

I went for the interview with the foreign student advisor and he asked me, “What are your plans?” I said, “After I finish school if it’s possible I would love to stay in America.” “How do you try to achieve that since you have only a student visa?” I said, “I might volunteer to the army.” He said the following, “What do you think, we’re going to take you? We don’t want to be shot in the back”. That hurt me, that I never forgot. Why he would say that? A man in his position to a foreign student. Sure he came from a Communist country that’s true, but that sunk it.

The other thing happened couple years later when I was looking for a job. I met a very nice guy at Coca-Cola here in New York. He interviewed me, he was impressed he said, “Gustav I’ll be honest with you, you have all the qualifications. However don’t forget we’re a Southern company, Atlanta, Georgia. Your future, with an accent and being a foreigner, would be very limited. Look somewhere else.” I appreciate it at least he was honest. These were the only two incidences I could recall.

**Paul:** Nothing among students at all?

**Dr. Gustav:** No because especially living at International House, two out of three was a foreign student.

**Paul:** Tell me about what your relationship with your mother is at this point. How frequently are you in contact with her?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** About weekly we write each other and whenever I could afford I called her. Luckily one of my first jobs I got after I finished Columbia was with the Voice of America as a Hungarian announcer. I was able to notify her using my middle name that Uncle Oliver… Oliver happens to be my middle name got a job with a radio station and you might be interested in hearing him. On the end of course she caught on so from then on she could listen to me every night. That was marvellous.

That time we gave live newscast at two in the afternoon and two in the morning. Because that was six hours later, that was eight in the morning and eight in the afternoon. That way she could listen to me. She wrote to me letters, “Oliver seems to have a cold. Would you tell him to take care of himself?” That was one of my first jobs.

**Paul:** Did you ever send your mother something from America as a gift?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Yes, small things. Toiletries, perfume, or soap, or reading material because people started to travel more often and the mail became now normalized so you could send small packages. There was a service whereby you could pay in X number of dollars in American money to an outfit within New York and they paid out either chocolates or coffee or flour, or sugar, or coal, or firewood or whatever. Through that I could help her.

**Paul:** I gather that the Hungarian community in America was very much conscious of the Hungarian community in Hungary and wanted to help them.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Absolutely.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about what your mother’s ideas of America were. I can only imagine that your mother’s ideas of America were formed by her father. What did she think is going on in America? How does she think about America when you’re here?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** It was a brand new world. She saw it through my letters and through my eyes, my impressions of Columbia, of my fellow students, of the family here, and generally the tremendous freedom. I always characterized America here you can do anything you wish as long as you pay your taxes. Nobody bothers you, which I still maintain. That’s what my basic impression of America is. This country was very good to me.

**Paul:** Was there any time in the first couple of years you were here that you wanted to go back or wished you could go somewhere else other than here in America?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** No. As a child I wanted to come to America, mostly what I heard through my grandfather and I think America fulfilled those dreams and expectations. If you work hard and have some patience I have found it takes about three years for an immigrant to reach the same level of economic prosperity that he leaves behind. From then on it’s limitless. You need luck.

**Paul:** We’ve got 10 minutes left. Why don’t you fill us in on what happened the rest of your life, 1950 to now.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** After Voice of America I was a Hungarian announcer for Radio for Europe for a while, then I was a photographer’s representative which is a delightful job surrounded by beautiful models and all our clients were in the perfume or in the fashion field but there was not enough money in it so I became a partner first and then an owner of an export- import business specializing in building materials. I had that company for 35 years.

We had very good years in the early 80’s when most of our business was export to the Middle East and Far East. Heavy construction, nuclear power plants, missile sites, tunnels, [unclear 01:49:28] plants, dams, wherever water is in or out, sewage treatment plants, water treatment plants.

I sold my company four years ago and then I started my new career by sheer accident. I read an article that the State Department is looking for Hungarian interpreters. I applied, went down passed exam. They had three grades. There’s the escort interpreter, there’s the simultaneous interpreter, and there’s the conference interpreter for big shots like the White House. This is what I’m doing now. Going back more than 37 years ago I got married. My first wife was half Swedish half Canadian but born in America already. I have two grown up sons.

**Paul:** What was your first wife’s name?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Jeanne.

**Paul:** Maiden name?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Jeanne Nelson.

**Paul:** You have two children by her?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I have two sons by her. One was born in ’55 so he is 39 the other ’57. Paul and Thomas. Paul works for Chrysler of Westchester as an expeditor in charge of the computer there. Everything is computerized as you know. Thomas worked for my company for 10 years and stayed with the company when I sold the company but he resigned a year ago. He works for an outfit in the Brooklyn Navy Yard called New York Modular. They make prefabricated housing units, complete rooms with…

**Paul:** And then you re-married.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** I re-married four years ago an Austrian lady who works for the Austrian Foreign Service.

**Paul:** Her name is?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Her name is Maria.

**Paul:** Maiden name:

**Dr. Gustav:** Maria Guessler, G-U-E-S-S-L-E-R. To my great delight she started to learn Hungarian. This is a tough language.

**Paul:** I was hoping that you could say something for us in Hungarian, perhaps some poem, or a prayer or some self-contained text in Hungarian.

**Dr.** **Gustav:** Alright, the Lord’s Prayer for instance sounds like this [unclear 01:52:04].

**Paul:** Thank you. If you had a young 27- year old Hungarian in front of you right now who wanted to come to the United States, what advice would you give him or her because of your own experience?

**Dr.** **Gustav:** By all means do everything you can to come here. I will help you or there are many Hungarian churches, clubs, foundations, the government, the Peace Corps, AID, United States Information Agency who would invite you, the Soros Foundation where you could get financial help to finish your studies or spend a certain amount of time here as a doctor, as an engineer, as an architect if he’s already an established professional. The opportunities are limitless, I still feel so.

**Paul:** Dr. Szabo thank you very much for letting us come out here. It was a terrific interview. This is Paul Secrest signing off with Dr. Gustav Szabo on Thursday, December 15th 1994, here in Manhattan.